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‘Another World is Possible’: The Prefigurative Micropolitics of Extinction Rebellion Nederland

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‘Another World is Possible’

The Prefigurative Micropolitics of Extinction Rebellion Nederland



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Glossary

Affinity Group AG

A small group, created for an action, with a minimum of 4 and ideally between 8 and 12 rebels who are willing to take the same kinds of actions. Everyone within one affinity group agrees on the level of action they are interested in. Affinity groups are self-contained, with their own wellbeing rebels, support rebels, media rebels etc.

Arrestee Support

Arrestee Support and other structures catering to welfare of arrestees aim to help the XR community support its rebels before, during, and after arrest. They “aim to foster a sustainable and regenerative approach to the consequences of nonviolent direct action and the sacrifice involved.”

Citizen’s Assembly CA

Citizens’ Assemblies are “innovative processes that can empower people, communities and entire countries to make important decisions in a way that is fair and deeply democratic”(Extinction Rebellion UK, 2021). XR’s 3rd Demand is that Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens’ Assembly on climate and ecological justice.

Community Group

Groups of people within XR that have shared interests and self-identity. The following groups are active in the Netherlands: XR NL Families; Scientist Rebellion NL; XR NL Fashion Action; XR Landbouw (Dutch-speaking campaign for local soil regeneration); XR NL Youth; University Rebellion NL, XR News Media, and XR Health Care Professionals.

Coordination Group CG

A group of the coordinators from the different **Working Groups** which meet to decide key local issues and how the working groups will be strategically focused.

Decentralization

The process by which the activities of an organization, particularly those regarding planning and decision making, are distributed or delegated away from a central authoritative location or group. **More on this will follow on the relationship between decentralization and whole systems approaches**

Demands

XR has three demands – The three demands put forth by XR NL are adapted from XR UK's. On the English Homepage of the XR NL website, the demands are listed in Dutch¹, translated as follows:

(1) BE HONEST about the climate crisis and ecological disaster that threaten our very existence. Make people aware of the need for large-scale change.

(2) DO WHAT IT TAKES to stop biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025. Do so fairly.

(3) LET CITIZENS DECIDE on a just transition by establishing a Citizens ' Council that plays a leading role in decision-making.

Demand 0

At the time of its birth and throughout the April Rebellion of 2019, XR NL had **four** demands which incorporated matters of climate justice. However, in July 2019 the demands were re-formulated and the fourth demand was absorbed into the current second and third demands.

CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR ALL

We demand a just transition that centers the needs and voices of those on the environmental frontline and holds to account those most responsible for ecological breakdown.

¹ XR NL, 'Our Demands', <https://extinctionrebellion.nl/en/about-us/> - translated using Google Translate web extension.

Holacracy

Holacracy is a system of self-management whereby leadership roles are not subject to traditional hierarchy of command. Instead of static roles, individuals assume multiple roles each associated with a purpose, domain, and accountabilities.²

Local Group

A local group of people that gather to create an XR community presence in a local area by building support and taking action towards XR's three demands. In this way, they are similar to traditional forms of community organizing. A crucial difference is that XR local groups decentralize into different **Working Groups** as much as possible.

Non-Violent Direct Action

NVDA

Direct action originated as a political activist term for economic and political acts in which the actors use their power – economic or physical – to directly reach certain goals of interest, in contrast to those actions that appeal to others such as the authority (i.e. by revealing an existing problem, using physical violence, highlighting an alternative, or demonstrating a possible solution)

Principles and Values

XR has 10 Principles and Values (see *Figure 1* on the following page). The the movement organizes in small, autonomous groups around the world that are connected in a structure through set principles, values, and mission.

Rebel

Anyone who joins the movement can self-subscribe to being a 'rebel'. The term is used amiably throughout this paper to refer to current XR members encountered.

Regenerative Culture

Regen or RC

The principles of care, mutual respect and listening XR "[tries] to abide by". Conveniently the subject of this research. XR UK defines it as the way in which people "look after [themselves], each other, the movement and the wider world"

² Hargrave, Marshall. (2022). Holacracy. Retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/holacracy.asp>

Self-Organizing System (SOS) SoS

System of organizing: how they make decisions, define roles, structure themselves. The SOS is dynamic and evolving as they “learn what works and what doesn’t”

Sociocracy

Sociocracy is a method of democratic organizational governance that forms the basis of Extinction Rebellion’s 7th Principle of actively mitigating for power by breaking down hierarchies for more equitable participation. Sociocracy enables any group to carry out compassionate and inclusive governance by providing equal voice, feedback and respect for everybody’s needs and emotional requirements.

Working Group WG or Circle

A working group focuses on a specific area of work and is allowed to decide how that work gets done. For example, if the *Regenerative Culture* team wants to start outreaching to the Muslim community, they can decide it in their group without asking permission from the rest of the local group.

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1 Introduction

A Call to Action

Although I had been following global and national news on Extinction Rebellion for a few years, it was not until the summer of 2021 that I had developed a keen interest into the ways activists engage in and enact politics: in their actions and rebellions but also in their perspectives and everyday practices. While I had been well aware of the overwhelming impacts of the climate crisis and felt a growing urge to ‘put my money where my mouth is’, I had some doubts about my capabilities and worried about my insufficient grasp on the politics of it all.

Nonetheless, it had become increasingly self-evident that for me to be able to hold some of the strong views that I held, it was time I take more of an active role in the climate movement. In this spirit, I decided to dedicate my Master’s research to theoretically exploring and physically participating in the political practices of Extinction Rebellion Nederland.

At this point in time (January and February 2022) my research focus had been on one of XR’s most prominent concepts and second core value: Regenerative Culture. While I delve into this concept in Chapter 5, I briefly touch on it as the emic term for XR’s desired movement-wide culture of care and justice seeking to create healthy, resilient, and democratic local communities connected through a thread of intersectionality and non-violence. Regenerative Culture is how XR seeks to enact the future in the present through explicitly macro-political as well as more intimately micro-political practices enacted by individuals, groups, and communities alike.

Given that the bulk of planning and execution of my fieldwork took place during the uncertain times of COVID-19 restrictions, I engaged in extensive online research on the movement from a wide variety of news articles, opinion pieces, and documentaries to national group websites and movement-created open-source ‘encyclopedias’ which cover everything from outreach and movement building to art and the future of democracy. Nonetheless, the in-person time I was granted by the individuals involved in this research resulted in rich insights and conversations valuable to my development.

The countless rounds of rework for this research involved a new, overwhelmingly vast scope of literature and while I have my doubts about adequately representing the topics this research may evoke, I seek to demonstrate a broad yet focused participatory and exploratory account of the experiences I was able to put into words.

1.1 Rationale & Significance

While political scientists and sociologists have mostly looked into political strategy by drawing parallels between movements, it is an anthropological tradition to employ participant observation to explore particular movements, collectives, and networks. In such a manner, anthropologists have been able to produce nuanced understandings of how prefiguration takes place on the ground without losing sight of its shortcomings.

While I do look into the more disruptive, contentious aspects of XR, I also hope to answer the call to action of the scholars discussed in the following chapter; who note that there have been fewer studies highlighting the importance of prefiguration in the everyday lives of movement actors. Furthermore, I aim to consider how such processes take place within movements and what their significance is in terms of social movement emergence and success. The influence international environmental movements have had on the agenda of international politics have been undeniable when it comes to the multilateral agreements that have been put into place since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment.

The 21st century brings with it a ‘new’ environmental movement equipped with both the traditional concerns of conservation, preservation, and pollution and bolstered by more contemporary concerns with the environmental consequences of economic practices as diverse as trade, tourism, investment, and war. Instead of going green at all costs, these movements are often intersectional – encompassing matters of social and financial justice within their larger climate crisis mitigation agenda. This research seeks to make accessible and spread awareness about the inner workings of prefigurative movements such as Extinction Rebellion Nederland in hopes of learning more about how we can actualize transformative change through our individual, collective, and global practices.

This multidimensional advocacy for global justice has led many environmental movements such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) in their pursuit of climate justice. XR’s advocacy is action-focused, seeking to bring about prompt policy changes that mitigate for the climate and ecological crisis. Since its birth in the UK in 2019, XR has spread across the globe and with that came the need for the movement to embrace a ‘climate justice’ agenda, replacing its initial exclusive focus on matters of the climate.

As ideas of climate justice spread through the movement – and especially during times of an unprecedented global pandemic – various perspectives emerge. While many activists share similar views on non-violence and care, activists have different ideas of what they hope to achieve through their climate action. Whether one is apathetic or passionate about the role of social justice in the fight against the climate crisis, these activists are united under the movement’s ten core principles and values.

As a result, the emergent discourse and practices of movement actors do not always seem to ‘prefigure’ the same world after all. This research thus seeks to examine the role of individual prefigurative practices in the movement’s greater pursuit for transformative social change.

1.2 Extinction Rebellion

Extinction Rebellion (abbreviated as XR) is an international, politically non-partisan environmental movement established in the UK back in 2018. XR uses nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience to demand governments take action to avoid tipping points in the climate system, biodiversity loss, and risk of social and ecological collapse. XR is autonomous and decentralized, embracing all who agree with and adhere to the movement’s principles and values. This chapter provides some context

DEMANDS

In the UK, Extinction Rebellion has three main demands for the government to **TELL THE TRUTH** about the climate ‘emergency’, to **ACT NOW** by legally committing to reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2025; and to **GO BEYOND POLITICS** by forming a citizen’s assembly to oversee the process.

In the April 2019 Rebellion, XR in the Netherlands (hereafter referred to as XR Nederland or XRNL) also demanded the government ensures “a just transition that centers the needs and voices of those on the environmental frontline and holds those most responsible for ecological breakdown accountable” (XRNL, 2022a). This demand for climate justice is called **Demand 0** and is described as a “precondition [...] foundational to the logic” of the three key demands.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>0. CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR ALL – We demand a just transition that centres the needs and voices of those on the environmental frontline and holds to account those most responsible for ecological breakdown.*</p> | | |
| <p>1. BE HONEST about the climate crisis and ecological disaster that threaten our very existence. Make people aware of the need for large-scale change.</p> | <p>2. DO WHAT IT TAKES to stop biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025. Do so fairly.</p> | <p>3. LET CITIZENS DECIDE on a just transition by establishing a Citizens ' Council that plays a leading role in decision-making.</p> |

Figure 1. Demands of Extinction Rebellion Nederland

In July 2019, the original three demands were reformulated to incorporate matters of climate and ecological justice. At the time, the movement consented to this to make the demands easier to communicate. Since then, however, XRNL has witnessed the Dutch community's public understanding shift to one which overwhelmingly accepts there is a climate emergency. The next step was to shift the public understanding to one that acknowledges climate justice as a precondition rather than an add-on to the three demands. XRNL re-introduced **Demand 0** and since then, the demand has been officially recognized by local groups in Amsterdam, Breda, Den Haag, Roermond, Rotterdam, and Tilburg (Inclusion and Power Circle, 2022).

BE HONEST

XRNL argues that despite decades of climate scientist and environmentalist warnings about the crisis, the government has not fulfilled its constitutional duty to take care of its citizens and the environment.³ While the national government has shown some intention to address the crisis,⁴ XRNL assert that “the current targets and government measures to reduce CO₂ emissions are seriously inadequate” (XRNL, 2022b). Thus, XRNL demands the government declares a climate and ecological emergency and actively communicate the need for rapid and fundamental change in existing societal and economic structures and institutions. By telling the truth, XR believes the government can be held accountable for its past actions regarding the crisis and be spurred to take real action. XR instrumentalizes climate research to assert the urgency of the crisis, drawing attention to evidence that shows we face the risk of irreversible chain reactions – ‘tipping points’⁵ – in the decline of the climate system and global ecosystem.

DO WHATEVER IT TAKES

XRNL argues that the Dutch government has “[failed] to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions⁶ and to meet its own reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions⁷” (XRNL, 2022b). Thus, they demand the

³ Watts, Jonathan and Taylor, Matthew, ‘World leaders ‘have moral obligation to act’ after UN climate report’, *The Guardian*, 8 Oct 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/world-leaders-have-moral-obligation-to-act-after-un-climate-report>.

⁴ Rijksoverheid.nl, *Klimaatbeleid (Climate Policy)* [website]; <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/klimaatverandering/klimaatbeleid>.

⁵ Harvey, Fiona, ‘‘Tipping points’ could exacerbate climate crisis, scientists fear’, *The Guardian*, 9 Oct 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/09/tipping-points-could-exacerbate-climate-crisis-scientists-fear>.

⁶ CBS, ‘Emissions of greenhouse gases according to IPCC guide-lines’, *Statline*, 9 Sep 2022, <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/en/dataset/70946eng/line?dl=706CE>.

⁷ CBS, ‘Slight drop in greenhouse gas emissions’, *CBS News*, 9 May 2019, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2019/19/slight-drop-in-greenhouse-gas-emissions>.

government immediately set binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net 0 by 2025, despite recognizing the challenging nature of this target.⁸⁹

This demand asserts that the transition to a zero-emissions economy must consider the interests of the most vulnerable groups, both in the Netherlands and around the world, in recognition that the climate crisis has disproportionately large impacts on poor and marginalized communities. Given the Netherlands' "historical and current responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and environmental damage, as well as its prosperity and its technological opportunities" XRNL believes they should take a leading role in the transition.

LET CITIZENS DECIDE

Finally, XRNL demands that with a due mandate by Parliament, a randomly selected representative group of citizens must be appointed to consider appropriate public policies to achieve the required targets by 2025 in a fair and equitable manner. Experts and stakeholders – selected by an independent organization – inform these Citizens' Assemblies in a reliable and balanced manner who then, in smaller groups, deliberate openly and under competent supervision to ultimately decide on proposals for concrete policies. Neither the government, XR, nor any other stake-holding organization may lead the CAs and all documents and processes are to be made public and accessible. If these proposals are supported by a qualified majority of the members, it is then the government's legal duty to implement them.

The idea is essentially that Citizens' Assemblies take decision-making processes out of the hands of corporate and interest-group lobbying and foster meaningful public participation, deliberation, and conflict resolution. This makes CAs ideally positioned for finding the far-reaching and transformative policies required to tackle the climate crisis, especially in times of societal polarization and democratic fatigue.¹⁰

⁸ Healy, Hazel, 'What if...we reduced carbon emissions to zero by 2025?', *New Internationalist*, 6 Feb 2019, <https://newint.org/features/2018/12/17/what-if-we-reduced-carbon-emissions-zero-2025>.

⁹ Christiansen, Kristine and Hougaard, Inge-Merete, 'Copenhagen's failure to meet 2025 net zero target casts doubt on other pledges', *Climate Change News*, 16 Sep 2022, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/09/16/copenhagens-failure-to-meet-2025-net-zero-target-casts-doubt-on-other-city-pledges/>.

¹⁰ See XR NL's discussions on Citizen's Assembly in detail as discussed in documents retrieved here: 'FAQs about Citizen's Assemblies (CAs)' <https://resources.extinctionrebellion.nl/media/FAQs%20about%20Citizen%E2%80%99s%20Assemblies.pdf> 'Let Citizens Decide' <https://resources.extinctionrebellion.nl/media/Citizen%20Assemblies%20EN.pdf>

DECENTRALIZATION

Since XR organizes in small autonomous groups distributed around the world, they are connected by a set of ten main principles and values. These are formulated in the plural first-person evoking a sense of collective solidarity towards climate justice with the reader (see **Figure 2**). To successfully build a movement that is “participatory, decentralized, and inclusive,” XR asserts that anyone who acts on these principles and core values can act on behalf of Extinction Rebellion.

1 WE HAVE A SHARED VISION OF CHANGE Creating a world that is fit for generations to come	6 WE WELCOME EVERYONE & EVERY PART OF EVERYONE Working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.
2 WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY — Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – using ideas such as “Momentum-driven organising” to achieve this.	7 WE ACTIVELY MITIGATE FOR POWER Breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation.
3 WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE Creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable	8 WE AVOID BLAMING AND SHAMING We live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame.
4 WE OPENLY CHALLENGE OURSELVES AND THIS TOXIC SYSTEM Leaving our comfort zones to take action for change	9 WE ARE A NON-VIOLENT NETWORK Using non-violent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change.
5 WE VALUE REFLECTING AND LEARNING Following a cycle of action, reflection, learning, and planning for more action. Learning from other movements and contexts as well as our own experiences.	10 WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power. Anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of Extinction Rebellion.

Figure 2. The 10 core Principles & Values of Extinction Rebellion

Since 2018, these principles have spread to 86 countries, 1206 groups, with thousands of rebels taking to the streets in the name of XR. These activists organize in small, largely autonomous groups intended to distribute authority to individuals with clear mandates, empowering them to make decisions to take effective action on matters specified in their mandate without the necessary consensus of a group (XRNL, 2022d).

All the work that is needed to allow XRNL to operate is split over several **Circles** (or Working Groups) (ibid.). Every circle has its own mandate and can define and refine its roles. In the case of larger roles, the circle may create a sub-circle that will in turn self-organize. Beyond the national structure, activists also organize in local groups. At the time of writing, XRNL has thirty-three local groups across the country, each made up of smaller autonomous **Affinity Groups** (AGs).

Four to twelve individuals with a common concern or goal come together in a decentralized fashion to form an **Affinity Group** – often collaborating on actions and forming the bulk of the movement’s organizational capacity. Within these groups, everyone has an equal voice in the decision-making process and there are often specific roles undertaken by individuals. These include an **AG Representative** (first point of contact), a **Wellbeing Person** (provides support during and beyond actions), and a **Facilitator** (schedules meetings and facilitates discussion).¹¹

STRATEGY

Being a dynamic movement, XRNL continues to learn evolve, and update their strategy accordingly. In 2020, COVID forced XRNL to cancel the planned Spring Rebellion. In two online Peoples Assemblies, movement actors came together to discuss their ‘Vision for XR in Times of Covid’¹² which included discussions about vulnerability and social inequality, movement building, and the importance of community. Later that year, XR gathered input from the national circles (300-respondent survey) and two Peoples’ Assemblies to settle on three key strategies for change in 2021.

The first is to mobilize as much of the population to engage in **Mass Civil Disobedience** to pressure institutions to take action. This is bolstered by supporting existing mobilization efforts in local communities – such as local government climate emergency plans, air pollution, aviation expansion, coal, and oil and gas. Civil disobedience is outlined by XRNL as a three-pronged approach involving **Disruption, Vulnerability, and Escalation** (XRNL, 2022c). **Disruption** involves creating maximum (economic) disruption to bring attention to the climate and ecological crisis, so that the government cannot ignore them. **Vulnerability** represents the way movement actors show their “most human, vulnerable side” in actions to demonstrate what they consider is at stake. This includes the movement’s intentional and strategic commitment to nonviolent methods. **Escalation** describes the way actions escalate from being approachable and symbolic to large and disruptive, until the movement’s demands are met.

¹¹ See XRNL’s document: ‘Affinity Group Forming for Rebel Without Borders in XRNL’, retrieved from: https://resources.extinctionrebellion.nl/media/English_%20Handout%20Affinity%20Groups%20for%20RWB%20in%20XRNL.pdf

¹² See XRNL’s document: ‘XRNL Vision in times of Covid-19’, retrieved from: <https://extinctionrebellion.nl/app/uploads/2021/12/XRNL-Vision-in-times-of-Covid-19-EN.pdf>

The second is growing XRNL's connection to and understanding of its role in relation to wider movements for change, thereby co-creating new stories and visions of the future as a **Movement of Movements**. This involves finding common ground with other climate justice groups and social movements as well as amplifying the voices of other communities who have less visibility, particularly those marginalized, indigenous, and local.

After the 2019 October Rebellion, XR faced some criticism over its ability to reach diverse communities, some suggesting its tactics and framings of key issues show a carelessness around issues of race.¹³ Even though the movement had been working towards remedying this issue since its foundation, it has taken some time for the movement to embed matters of social justice within its current practices, actions, and organizations – especially around issues of leadership, power, and privilege. Thus, XRNL seeks to educate on existing power structures as well as encourage and facilitate reflection on power dynamics and intersections of struggle.¹⁴

And finally, XR refuses to simply wait for their demands to be met but seek to showcase the alternative cultures and systems the future will need. By supporting local groups and communities in showcasing different positions and solutions to the crisis, XR “prefigure change by interacting with each other from a basis of care, trust, and connection” and creating resilient and democratic **Regenerative Cultures** as alternatives to business-as-usual.¹⁵

1.3 Chapter Outline

The following chapter develops a theoretical framework to answer the overarching research question – **What role does prefiguration play in XR NL's pursuit for transformative change?**

This question is explored through three main sub-questions: First, **how do movement actors prefigure transformative change through climate action?** – this question is addressed in the first empirical chapter Welcome to the Rebellion in which I develop my access to the field of XR NL local groups and join a few community events, a protestival, and an action. This chapter develops an understanding of the prefigurative practices in play on the ground.

¹³ Gayle, Damien, 'Does Extinction Rebellion have a race problem?', *The Guardian*, 4 Oct 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/04/extinction-rebellion-race-climate-crisis-inequality>

¹⁴ Lord, Millie, 'XR Amsterdam and Climate Justice: Making the change?', *Amsterdam Alternative*, 4 Nov 2021, retrieved from: <https://amsterdamalternative.nl/articles/11313/xr-amsterdam-and-climate-justice-making-the-change>

¹⁵ See XRNL's document, 'Beyond The Crisis', 2020, retrieved from: https://extinctionrebellion.nl/app/uploads/2020/08/XRNL_Strategy-2020_EN.pdf

Second, **how do movement actors engage in prefigurative practices on the micro-level?** – In the Fifth Chapter, I begin to wonder about XR’s culture. XR NL has allocated mandates and working groups for developing their ‘Regenerative Culture’ as a way of practicing in the present what they aim to achieve in the future. The practical applications and manifestations of the concept vary greatly from mind/body practices and intersectional work to advocacy for burn-out prevention and non-violent communication. This section sheds light on the diverse perspectives that emerge in activists’ continued mobilization.

Lastly, **what role do actors’ individual practices play in the movement’s overall pursuit for change?** – In this Chapter, I examine the Growing Pains of XR NL and bring to the forefront the key debates I was privy to in my time with people as they spoke of their reasons for choosing to affiliate, or not affiliate, with Extinction Rebellion and Regenerative Culture as the tool for transformative change. This Chapter reflects on their descriptions of what they were repeatedly willing to put their minds and bodies on the line for.

The final chapter signs off with the reminder that ‘another world is possible’ – bringing together key insights and arguments together to argue that the impact of individual micro-political practices on the movement’s overall pursuit of the transformative change required for climate justice is far larger than some activists and even theorists continue to believe it to be.

At the end of this paper you can find the Appendices which contain many of the relevant materials used in this research.

2 Theoretical Framework

The following chapter develops a theoretical framework of the key concepts that bind together my research question: **What role does prefiguration play in XR NL's pursuits for transformative change?**

First, I provide brief background into 'new social movements' such as the alterglobalization movement which advocated for a more intersectional approach to climate activism in their pursuit for climate justice. The concept 'climate justice' is elaborated as the intersections between environmental and social justice that other global justice movements broadly advocate for. Intersectionality refers to the movement's advocacy for the emergent effects of simultaneous structures of oppression on bases of age, ability, gender, race, and beyond.

Next, I develop the term prefiguration and describe the ways it can be applied in the strategy of climate justice movements such as Extinction Rebellion. Following on from Maeckelbergh (2011) I note that movements for change have multiple co-existing goals culminating in a vast array of practices that can meet these goals or 'ends'. The key with prefigurative movements is that they experiment with, create, (materially) consolidate, and spread their perspectives and practices to ensure these values and actions endure past the present.

To empirically examine XR NL's practices on the ground through this lens I refer to the facets of prefiguration as discussed by social movement scholars Maeckelbergh (2011) and Yates (2015). More specifically to this research, I look to literature on the politics and practices of intersectional prefiguration in social movements (Ishkanian & Peña Saavedra, 2019) as well reflections on the impact whole-systems approaches such as those of XR's 'regenerative culture' contribute to the movement's political legitimacy ultimately pushing forward its overall agenda (Esteves, 2020).

Finally I speak to 'practice' drawing attention to how the structures of oppression that movements around the world seek to replace are the outcomes of continued processes of cooperation and conflict between different social agents. These social agents each have different powers being driven in different ways. If we are to embody what we believe are the necessary tools for prefiguring a just future, we must engage in practice. We are what we are continually becoming and reshaping and, ultimately, these processes of becoming are what yield social change.

These concepts come together over the course of this paper to reflect on, examine, and analyze data gathered during observations, interviews, and other forms of participatory fieldwork. The intention is to answer the overarching research question: **What role does prefiguration play in XR NL's pursuits for transformative change?**

2.1 Alterglobalization Movements & Climate Justice

The past few decades have witnessed the emergence of mass 'alterglobalization' movements in many parts of the world. These movements, also called 'global justice movements' – seek to challenge, interrogate, and overturn the perceived negative social, political, economic, and environmental impacts of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberalism here refers to the prioritization of financial markets and unbridled economic growth over the holistic wellbeing of the planet and all its inhabitants (Bourdieu, 1998). Enabled by policies of free trade, privatization, and austerity, the context of neoliberal globalization has brought many negative impacts to society from widening the gap between rich and poor to environmental destruction to escalation of civil and international conflicts.

Where neoliberal globalization denies people access and autonomy – from anti-unionism and inequality to unregulated resource depletion and fossil fuel lobbying – the alterglobalization movement advocates alternative forms of global interaction based on values of justice, environmental protection, and human rights. In saying 'another world is possible'¹⁶ the alterglobalization movement confronts the observed dominant tendencies of globalized capitalism such as market deregulation, dismantling of social rights, and the commodification of social relations (such as restrictions to social welfare and commodification of nature). In response, the alterglobalization seeks to "effect change and comprehensive democratization in institutional and everyday practices, as well as social values" (Brand & Makal, 2022).

The last decade has witnessed a global wave of alterglobalization movements. The anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe in response to the Great Recession that began in 2008; the Arab Spring protests of 2011 denouncing political corruption, poverty, and human rights violations; and the 2013 decentralized Black Lives Matter (BLM) denouncing racism, discrimination, and racial inequality all seek to address critiques of capitalism, structuralized oppressions, liberal democracy, and white supremacy. In some case, these movements prefigured alternative ways of imagining relations and sociopolitical formations, such as leaderless organization structures, direct democracy processes, and cooperative economic institutions (Graeber, 2009; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Murray, 2014).

¹⁶ The motto of the World Social Forms was: "Another world is possible, if only we want it."

One of the most well-known examples of prefigurative politics as enacted by alterglobalization movements is the global Occupy movement. From their refusal to recognize the legitimacy of existing institutions or legal order to their rejection of internal hierarchy, preferring consensus-based direct democracy, the Occupy movement was explicitly prefigurative. Activists experimented with and establish new ideas, norms, and conducts in their camps and local assemblies and through this ‘doing’ they were able to bring their struggle and their goal together in the present (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p. 13) prefiguring what they believe to be a better world.

The move away from NGOs and towards grassroots protest mobilization is also evident in contemporary international climate movements such as Fridays for Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR). While XR’s and FFF’s demands for climate justice are predominantly aimed at persuading states and governments to take action, Occupy believes doing so would legitimize the very power structures they seek to challenge (Graeber, 2011). Beyond their appeal to existing power structures, these movements have also been critiqued for downplaying the relationship between state policy and capitalist economy rather than insisting that the structural causes of ecological destruction stem from capitalism and striving for an alternative to the capitalist system (Brand & Makal, 2022).

In May of 2019, an open letter to XR was written by Wretched of The Earth – a grassroots collective for Indigenous, black, brown, and diaspora groups and individuals demanding climate justice. This letter, collaboratively written with dozens of aligned groups, demanded that XR centers climate justice in its Rebellion. Amongst other things they ask that transnational corporations be held accountable and that financial systems be restructured to be transparent, democratized, and sustainable (Wretched of The Earth, 2019).

While the urgency of the crisis makes critique and growth more tricky, this research wonders whether incorporating such social, economic, and political critiques into enduring prefigurative practices and strategy would be a revitalizing path for Extinction Rebellion. By embracing a ‘movement of movements’ approach (Maeckelbergh, 2013), XR is better able to build on the multiplex of social, political, and ecological critiques, analyses, insights, and forms of resistance enacted by other prefigurative political groups. This may help reinvigorate the movement which seems to have lost some of its momentum due to demobilization, dispersal and, in recent times, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Prefigurative Strategy

As alterglobalization movement surfaced, so did theoretical paradigms acknowledging the shift in movement aims, tactics, and participation. This increased attention was directed towards the political projects and political underpinnings of the practices that constitute movement strategy. Practice-based processes of experimentation, which favor diversity and horizontality, allow actors to “[learn] how to govern the world in a manner that fundamentally redesigns the way power operates” (Maeckelbergh, 2011, pp. 15–16). This process of “act[ing] out a vision of a better world” through experimentation with and practice of alternative political perspectives, values, and conducts is referred to as **prefiguration**.

Prefiguration was first defined in an article by Boggs (1977a) as “the embodiment within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal” (p. 7). Essentially, practicing – or ‘doing’ – the change we wish to see in the world. Since Boggs, prefigurative politics have grown to become embedded in the understanding of alterglobalization and other ‘new social movements’ (Pichardo, 1997).

Scholars have historically treated prefiguration as one of two dynamics: in terms of **building alternatives** and in terms of **means-ends equivalence**. These two dynamics are conceptually linked by the overarching notion of ‘**prolepsis**’ – which means that to prefigure is to anticipate or enact some feature of the ‘alternative world’ in the present, as though it has already been achieved (Swain, 2019; Yates, 2015).

Following Boggs (1977a, 1977b) and Graeber (2002) to name a few, **means-ends equivalence** sees prefiguration as a way of mobilizing where the ‘means reflect the ends’. This can be illustrated by participatory decision-making where the desired ‘end’ of a more democratic and egalitarian future can be actualized through the ‘means’ of establishing consensus (Maeckelbergh, 2011, 2012). While means-ends-equivalence is part of the process actors enact during the ‘doing’ and ‘acting out’ of desired alternatives, it does not adequately represent prefiguration as movements often have “multiple, open and context-specific” goals or ‘ends’ and so engage in a wide variety of practices, processes, and ‘means’ (Maeckelbergh, 2009).

On the other hand, following Epstein (1993) and Breines (1989), prefiguration is conceived of as the development and **building of alternatives** with which the movement will replace existing structures. While this concept highlights the prefigurative elements of imagination and experimentation, it does not encompass the intentionally strategic nature of alterglobalization movement practices – as opposed to other forms of idealistic or utopian alternative-building experiments (Yates, 2015).

Similarly, the alleged pre-emptive enactment in the present of what movement actors anticipate in the future has been critiqued for not sufficiently delineating whether this ‘prolepsis’ is strategically and culturally important for movement actors (Maeckelbergh, 2016) or whether these desired ‘futures’ represent movement goals (means-ends equivalence) (Swain, 2019). Could prefiguration simply be an analytical concept describing what some movements do unbeknownst to their participants? (Yates, 2015).

These caveats in delineating prefigurative practice are addressed by Yates (2015) in his ‘refigured’ model of prefigurative politics. The model argues that prefiguration necessarily combines the experimentation with and building of ‘alternatives’ within mobilization-related and everyday activities, with some strategic attempt to ensure their future political relevance (p. 19). The model retains some core components of the original instead presenting them as facets of the same process. While these practices are not entirely mutually exclusive, the model provided a detailed yet practical framework making it particularly fitting when observe prefigurative practices in the field.

*Refigured Model
of Prefigurative
Politics*

The refigured model proposed by Yates (2015) argues that prefiguration is the aggregate of five key elements:

- (i) **Experimentation** in political mobilization and everyday practices;
- (ii) Circulation of political **perspectives**, ideas, and social movement frames;
- (iii) Production establishment of new collective norms and **conduct**;
- (iv) Material **consolidation** of political messages, symbols, and conduct;
- (v) **Diffusion** and demonstration of practices and

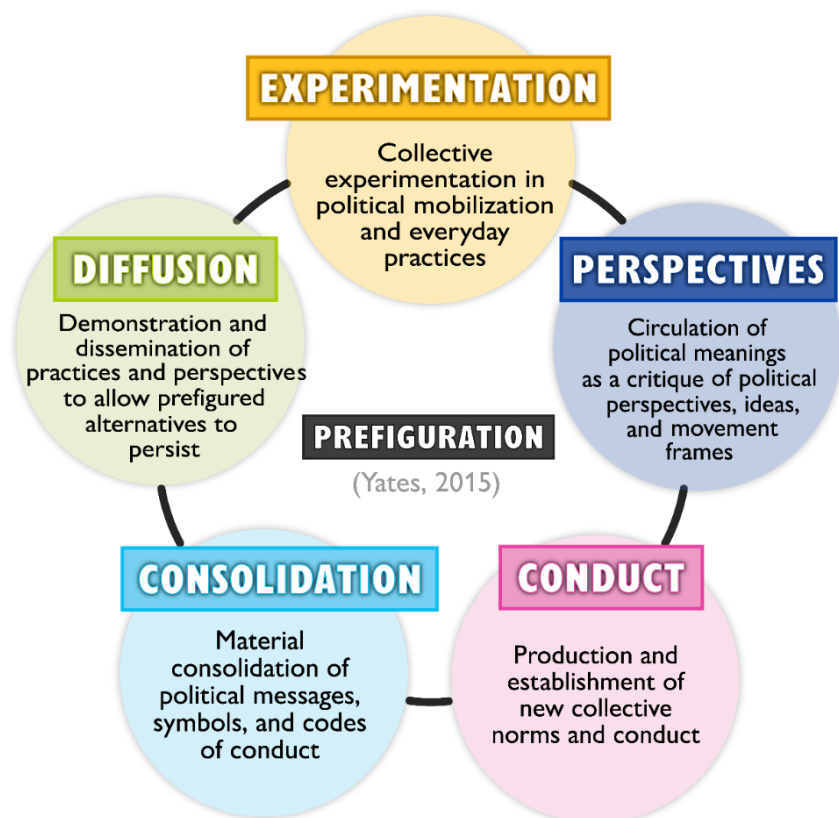


Figure 3. Illustration of Refigured Model of Prefigurative Politics

(iii) Production establishment of new collective norms and **conduct**; (iv) Material **consolidation** of political messages, symbols, and conduct; and (v) **Diffusion** and demonstration of practices and

perspectives to allow prefigured alternatives to persist beyond the present and the group in which it is taking place.

This model presents three key differences to previous perspectives on prefiguration. First, Yates (2015) concludes the building of alternatives can only be considered prefigurative when combined and balanced with processes of **consolidation and diffusion**. Second, rather than **means-equaling-ends**, it is more simply that the **micropolitics of practices themselves** are **considered important** in prefiguration. And third, rather than necessitating ‘prolepsis’, this model describes how struggles as well as ‘ends’ can be brought together in the present through prefigurative processes of imagination, experimentation and proliferation (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p. 13). To illustrate these components – hereafter referred to as experimentation, perspectives, conduct, consolidation, and diffusion – I refer to some examples from Extinction Rebellion themselves!

EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation is characterized by the enthusiastic manipulation of and open reflection on movement actors’ directly political mobilization as well as their daily practices and social interactions. When experimenting, actors treat activities as opportunities to displace established hegemonic relations with new practices. Using XR’s commitment to non-violence as an example, we can see that ‘principled nonviolence’ seeks to increase the movement’s legitimacy (see Berglund & Schmidt, 2020) and thus is being experimented with during political mobilizations in the form of nonviolent civil disobedience but also in actors’ everyday life in the form of nonviolent communication practices.¹⁷ These reflections and modified practices are often shared in assemblies and informal conversations during mealtimes or other communal moments, as well as following protests and actions (Yates, 2015, p. 13). While experimentation can be carried out for its own sake, generally it is an intentional attempt to reorganize or reimagine practices.

PERSPECTIVES

Prefigurative groups are said to host, develop, and critique political perspectives, ideas, and social frames by way of imagining, learning, and playing with ideological positions (Gillan, 2008). This enables activists to form ideas and frames that are then circulated visibly and audibly in the movement’s banners, slogans, and other messaging communicating during and beyond adversarial protest. Playing with perspectives can take place during workshops, discussions, or assemblies or through the production

¹⁷ Further insights on XR’s nonviolent communication can be found in XR Sydney’s REGEN 101 Booklet (p. 19) retrieved here: <https://ausrebellion.earth/docs/Regen101.pdf>

of brochures, zines, and various forms of media. These perspectives are thought to then explain and inform actors' aforementioned experimentation.

CONDUCT

Conduct involves the establishment of new collective norms which are debated, discussed, and decided on – often via consensus or consent and in assemblies or forums – based on the aforementioned experiments and perspectives. As a set of 'norms' – or in XR's case 'principles and values' – conduct is sometimes seen as the introduction of a new level of governance that is "in theory...more accountable to its constituency" of movement participants or the movement as a whole (Yates, 2015, p. 14). By normalizing and encouraging the breaking or reinterpretation of existing rules – such as responding to violence with non-violence – actors are better able to develop and improve their experiment of non-violence, in our XR example. Conduct culminates in the building of imagination, ideology, and reflexivity into actors' practices. While social movement studies have often focused on experimentation and movement frames and the conflicts that emerge over the course of collective identity formation (see Melucci, 1996), Yates argues that the outcomes of these processes in terms of "new repertoires and routines" beyond "tactical preferences" have often been neglected (Yates, 2015, p. 14). This is to say that beyond strategic purpose, the built ideology of 'nonviolence' can foster new reflexive repertoires of practices in actors.

CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation refers to the incorporation – in material environments and incorporeal social relations – of the codes of conduct, political perspectives, and experimentations that take place within movements. Consolidation can refer to anything from the way people sit during meetings or assemblies; to the intentional alteration of physical infrastructure such as blockades or occupations; to the alteration of communal spaces to encourage practices such as communal cooking or the sharing of resources or possessions. In our XR example of 'nonviolence' consolidation manifests in the role of 'Police Liaison' who then by fulfilling their role of keeping things non-violent with the police consolidate or incorporate XR's non-violent conduct, perspectives, and experimentation in novel social relations. While mostly temporary, these alterations and interventions can be very symbolically significant and when consolidation is prolific and accessible, it can be seen as an example of prefigurative movement success.

DIFFUSION

Diffusion is the performance and propagation of practices, orders, material, and perspectives to allow prefigured 'alternatives' to persist beyond the present. This can take place through alternative media circulated by the movement or community events which allow for enactment of alternatives. Diffusion

can manifest in workshops, lectures, and speeches which take place in public spaces. Even public protest and demonstrations, while involving a direct action element, were seen primarily as acts of communicating messages of “dissent, collective force, and the existence of political alternatives” (Yates, 2015, p. 14).

To develop the overarching argument that individual prefigurative practices play a positive role in movements’ overall strategy towards transformative change, I further develop this model to include how prefigurative practices feed into applied movement strategy. For the purposes of this research, strategy is defined following Ganz (2000) as **Reproduction, Mobilization, and Coordination**. The following section briefly delineates prefigurative strategy on these terms to develop my case that movements aimed at enacting transformative change must expand their scope of mobilization to consider the prefigurative processes through which movement actors – and thus, movements at large – are formed, performed, reproduced (Stall & Stoecker, 1998), and coordinated. By considering these three spheres of activity as necessary and complementary components of applied movement strategy, I am better able to examine the meanings and capacities of activists’ practices in the field.

APPLIED PREFIGURATIVE STRATEGY

While prefiguration plays an active role across different elements of movement strategy, it is often enacted through processes that are “underplayed and underappreciated by both academics and activists” (Yates, 2021, p. 1035). I enter the field curious to see if these long-established observations ring true in my time with the Rebellion.

REPRODUCTION

Reproduction is defined as “the social and political reproduction of resources, skills, relationships, and counter-power” that movements require in order to be capable of collective action (Yates, 2021, p. 1045). Reproduction is intended to ‘supplant’ well-established practices or institutions with its own ongoing production and performance of prefigurative alternatives. Beyond actions, reproduction of unglamorous routines and ‘latent’ resources also make up movements and their capacity for collective action. Reproduction can include practices of collective identity formation (Melucci, 1996) as well as social relations and caring for the movement community (Stall & Stoecker, 1998).

In practice, reproduction can involve procuring locations or supplies for movement projects and liaising with legal observers as well as the working relationships and friendships that constitute the fabric of collective action itself. Activism requires huge amounts of ‘reproduction’ work that are generally overlooked or undervalued, yet without reproduction there are almost no possibilities for mobilization

outside of one-off demonstrations. Without resources to mobilize, plans for ‘alternative’ societies become unrealistic.

So, while movements need to be reproduced in order to mobilize, empower actors, make demands, and generate change; it also runs both ways as reproduction of movements can also be achieved through mobilization and coordination. The ‘visible’ parts of movement organizing – such as marches and demonstrations – feed into and are fed by more ‘latent’ activities of movement building and maintenance (Melucci, 1996).

MOBILIZATION

Mobilization refers to the “processes of deploying social movement resources” – from persuading people to participate in collective action (through widely recognized tactics) to any other exercises of power and capacity coordinated and reproduced by actors towards a specific end (such as engaging in mass recruitment projects and creating new institutions). Like Reproduction, Mobilization involves practices that are done repetitively. For some activities these practices are not always explicitly or intentionally ‘political’ in that they are simply ‘doing what you do’ as an activist. Rather than maintaining existing power and reproducing the resources needed to continue the ‘struggle’, Mobilization changes the conditions of possibility through its creation of something new and its engagement in new forms of interaction with opponents and allies.

For instance, prefigurative mobilization may include setting up a new alternative practical project that builds oppositional culture or has some other practical purpose. In the case of XR NL, such projects have included a ‘potgrond’ action in which activists transform the sand that currently covers the Lutkemeerpolder of Amsterdam into potting soil “that instead gives life”.¹⁸ Since 2018, a collective called ‘Voedselpark Amsterdam’ has been trying to gather support and collectively purchase the 43 hectares of “great ecological value” if developed into an agricultural project. By mobilizing people to join the potgrond action, XR NL was able to create something new both in terms of interactions with the soil and the land that further its ecological preservation agenda; as well as with allies who collaborated on the action: Voedselpark and ASEED Europe – a small non-hierarchical non-profit based in Amsterdam focused on “exploring alternatives to the industrial food system and networking with groups that promote viable alternatives and sustainable development.”¹⁹

¹⁸ XR Amsterdam. (2022, Feb 6). *Potgrond Action* [Facebook event]. Facebook. Retrieved from: <https://fb.me/e/2S5jatOIE>

¹⁹ ASEED. ‘About us’. Retrieved from: <https://aseed.net/about-aseed-europe-our-mission-statement-and-safer-space-policy/>

COORDINATION

Coordination is the imagining, planning, deploying, and guiding of forces in a particular direction or towards a particular goal. This involves practices or effects of direct or emergent mapping out of actions, occupying roles of leadership, brainstorming, and resourcefulness. There are many ways in which groups, actors, and resources are coordinated which do not take place through direct processes of planning or leadership, but through improvised activity, improvised alliances, emergent opportunities, and provisional goals – whereby goals and actions are understood differently by different actors.

Coordination is often overlooked as some believe that means-ends-equivalence makes direct coordination redundant since the activity itself is thought to “literally” be the ‘end’ values or goals of actors. However, this is misleading because without direct coordination, significant complex and sustained social change is unlikely (Gordon, 2018) as movements have no agenda and thus may struggle to identify opportunities or resources; to force opponents to accede to demands, and to force change to occur through interlinked mobilizations. Considering that the primary political function of prefiguration is replacing dominant structures with alternatives (Boggs, 1977a, 1977b; Gorz, 1968), this suggests a plan for transformative change can be found within the movement’s Coordination.

In summary, strategy does not simply lie in the pursuit of multiple goals nor in particular overarching goals. Instead, strategy can be observed in the “navigation and hedging of multiple political priorities” (Yates, 2015, p. 19) combined – and coordinated – with conflicts and struggles necessary to force the establishment to accept settlements which threaten entrenched interests (Wright, 2013). In essence, the engagement of movement actors in experimentation, circulation of perspectives, establishing of conduct, material incorporation and consolidation, and diffusion are enacted through an applied prefigurative movement strategy to manifest political initiatives, projects, or proposals that are better equipped for confronting business-as-usual.

The intersections and mutual dependencies between reproduction, mobilization, and coordination are a helpful reminder that productive contribution towards a movement can take many forms. The important bit here is the ways in which these efforts are combined to build, grow, imagine, and coordinate with others towards shared goals.

2.3 Transformative Practices

The focus of this research is to illuminate the prefigurative practices of XR NL activists on the micro-level to look at the ways different practices play different roles in relation to the movement's overall pursuit for transformative change. The 'praxis' of prefiguration insists that the goals of activity emerge through lived 'practices', not external to them. Practice here refers to repeated acts of 'doing' – they can be distinct (intentional) and indistinct (unintentional) and are always taking place continuously shaping the ways we think, act, and feel. Transformative social change theorists call on activists to take on – with purpose – new practices that align with their values, to become engaged community members and organizers, to become people who embody or model the social visions they hold. The argument is that micro-level practices of self and community building and development support movements' prefigurative strategy towards enduring change.

Aforementioned processes of production and reproduction also promote consciousness-raising and -development within the participating actors. Thus, the development of actors' powers and capacities, their drives, wants, and needs, as well as their consciousness or awareness can be considered vital for social change (Isaac et al., 2020; Reger, 2004) and can most effectively be made sense of through an understanding of the forms of praxis that they emerge through and become part of.

For Touraine (1995, as discussed in King, 2006), the movement actor is the key protagonist, the primary agent of change because without developing a "will to act and to be recognized as an actor" (p. 207 on p. 874) Touraine argues that individuals merely reproduce society as it currently exists as they are caught in the web of social structures and discourse. Practices and processes of self-reflection and emotional reflexivity are thus considered essential for the construction of 'actors' capable of restructuring (King, 2006).

The argument made by Touraine is that since post-Industrial movements have shifted from previous concerns of economy and labor to contemporary concerns of identity, lifestyle, and culture (Pichardo, 1997), movement actors are perfectly positioned to affect the relations of domination characteristic of "the setting of a way of life, forms of behavior, and needs" (Touraine, 1988 as quoted in Edelman, 2001, p. 288).

This goes to show that political identities are experimented with, articulated, performed, and consolidated through everyday practices of 'doing' activism rather than "political identities pre-existing fully formed" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 479; and in Escobar,

1992, pp. 35–42). Rather than a hindrance, the processes and practices involved in this fluid co-production was often seen as an opportunity to allow ideas and identities to develop organically in avoidance of dogmatic or anti-state approaches (as elaborated in Holloway, 2010).

The juxtaposition of personal and political practices is a central tenet of prefiguration (Yates, 2021) and to examine this intersection this research looks at both macro-scale practices of collective organizing as well the micro-level practices – related to individual drives, needs, and consciousness – that actors enact in their everyday XR and beyond XR activities. This intersection of macro- and micro- forces is situated within a psycho-social understanding of the world, necessarily bringing the personal into the political and vice versa (Andrews & Hoggett, 2019).

Considering that creating spaces from which such practices can grow and propagate is central for constructing political actors and communities capable of enacting transformative change, this research wonders how such embodied micropolitical practices are perceived and enacted by movement actors of XR NL and what kinds of spaces are created from which such practices can grow and propagate.

According the Movement Strategy Center – whose aim is to help build movements for social and racial justice by increasing capacity of individuals, organizations, alliances and sectors – outlines three types of practices that make up the movement’s ‘strategic navigation’ or capacity to generate collective action in times of complexity and uncertainty.²⁰ The three ‘transition’ practices of strategic navigation are referred to as: audacious vision; deep embodiment; and radical connection (Movement Strategy Center, 2016).

Audacious visioning represents practices of developing vision and commitment by answering the question: What do we want and how much do we want it? **Embodiment practices** refer to those which promote awareness, proactivity, and agility as well as interrupt existing default habits, redirecting them towards the established mission. **Radical connection** refers to relational practices from the core of movements to the margins with the aims of reversing exclusion, isolation, and marginalization and developing holistic recognition of interdependence between human and non-human life. Altogether these practices facilitate strategic navigation practices that translate movement vision into implementation.

²⁰ Movement Strategy Center, ‘The Practices of Transformative Movements’, *Movement Strategy* [website], Retrieved from: <https://movementstrategy.org/our-story/>

3 Amateur in the Field

3.1 An Engaged Ethnography

The interest in making anthropology relevant and useful in the world has led to calls for “public”, “engaged”, and “activist” anthropology (Lassiter, 2005; Vine, 2011). This research aimed to develop my abilities to design and conduct an ‘engaged’ ethnography that centers **solidarity** with research participants and research **praxis** which produces insights in how micro-processes of ‘resistance’ are linked to a macro-analysis of neoliberal globalization (Mathers & Novelli, 2007). Since neoliberalism not only denotes shifts in discourse, ideology, or policy – but is an ‘embodied cultural system’ that reconfigures social norms and “the very parameters of personhood” (Harrison, 2013, p. xv), this research aims to make contributions towards advancing resistance practices that enact transformative change in their pursuits. To answer the call for engaged activist ethnography, I set out to conduct a “politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements” (Juris, 2007, p. 164) by actively joining XR NL by taking part in meetings, trainings, community and action events from January to May 2022 in different cities of the Netherlands.

The purpose for choosing engaged ethnography was three-fold. First, I aimed to establish relationships of ideological and practical expressions of solidarity with the people I encountered through my ‘abstract’ opposition to neoliberalism as well as a series of ‘micro-practices’ such as sharing personal and political experience, engaging in movement practice with body and mind, and contributing knowledge, skills, time, or manual labor from exchanging insights and resources to physically participating in actions, painting banners, or contributing to daily practices of cooking or cleaning. Second, I continue to be part of XR NL beyond my fieldwork, I seek to contribute to furthering movement goals (Graeber, 2009) by contributing to ongoing movement efforts through participation in collective reflection and visioning of movement practices; collective analysis of social processes and power relations that affect said practices; and collective ethnographic reflection regarding how diverse movement networks can interact (Juris, 2008, p. 299) to form a ‘movement of movements’. And finally, this approach brought me closer to my research aims of looking at “the attitudes and actual actions” of ordinary participants as a means of making connections between the less visible dimensions of prefiguration and the concrete, episodic involvement in prefigurative action (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 258). Since these emergent and evolving processes are “intersubjective, complex, highly fluid, rapidly shifting phenomena they are often “missed by macro-level analysis” ” (Juris, 2018 as quoted in Sutherland, 2013, p. 633).

3.2 Gaining Access & Meeting the Rebels

Prior to this research, I had created a personal Instagram account with the intention of expanding my understanding of the climate and ecological crisis. Since I exclusively followed news outlets, environmental groups, campaigning networks, and individual activists, I decided to use the account to kick-start my exploration of Extinction Rebellion NL. After posting an Instagram-friendly version of my information sheet to the profile to kick-start a voluntary-response sample (see Appendix A2.2), I then initiated contact by following and directly messaging – via Instagram – XR local groups, working groups, and activists with a presence on the platform. Through this account, I was able to watch livestreams of actions, engage with movement narratives and outreach, as well as forge connections with activists some of whom I later met, spoke to, and / or interviewed. Beyond XR, this account allowed me to consider and experiment with relevant research concepts of climate justice, degrowth, and regenerative cultures – supplemented by a myriad of published personal anecdotes and experiences of activists themselves.²¹

Once I established my research population of XR NL activists based around the country, I engaged in purposive sampling by initiating conversations about my research during an XR action training and community event as well via email to XR local groups in the Randstad region. Snowball sampling also took place as participants recommended events for me to attend as well as other participants they believed would be interested in sharing their insights on my particular research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Out of this batch of correspondence emerged an invitation to a protest-festival in Rotterdam through which I was able to meet more activists and be invited to community events. The emails also yielded an invitation to one WhatsApp group chat and a few Telegram Announcement chats, as well as one no-response and one delayed response. Unfortunately my local group in Leiden was inactive during the course of my research thus I mostly attended events in The Hague, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. However, since then, the Telegram group chat for XR Leiden has grown active once more and I look forward to being part of what emerges.

From January to May 2022 I was able to meet thirty-five activists who currently – or have in the past – affiliated with and participated in Extinction Rebellion NL. 11 activists were affiliated with XR Rotterdam, 7 had mixed or unknown local group affiliations; 4 from XR Utrecht and 4 from XR The Hague; 2 from XR Leiden; 1 rebel from XR Amersfoort, 1 from XR Arnhem, and 1 from XR Nijmegen; and 4 rebels who were involved on the national level. 17 rebels used he/him pronouns, 9 used she/her, 1 used she/they, and 8 of whom I was unable to ask for personal pronouns. Twenty rebels were aged 20 to 30, four rebels were 30 to 40, one rebel was 40 to 50, three rebels were 60 to 70, two rebels were

²¹ Complete list of Instagram accounts explored over the course of this research can be found in Appendix A2.5

70+, and five rebels' ages remain unconfirmed. Out of this sample, the vast population were of Dutch origin and spoke fluent Dutch although few activists disclosed their Belgian, Chinese, English, German, Italian, Indonesia, Surinamese, and Turkish backgrounds. Most were university students, a few were unemployed – one of whom was unemployed by choice; and a variety of professions were represented: a builder, secondary school teacher, pensioner, actor, potter, social worker, systemic coach, university professors, and entrepreneurs.

3.3 Data Collection & Analysis

I engaged in three key methods of primary source data collection in this engaged ethnography: Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), semi-structured interviews, and observation of participants culminating in the narrative ethnography you are currently reading.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

In preparation for fieldwork, I conducted an Ethnographic Content Analysis on as many online and offline resources on Extinction Rebellion and their practices. After identifying the key concepts of my research and turning them into initial codes, I began data collection. Sources included news coverage (mostly from the UK and the Netherlands), academic papers from XR members, and a variety of audio-visual content on YouTube and Spotify including interviews, debates, and workshops. A vast majority of the resources were XR-made, some organized by affiliated networks such as the Regen Advocates Network (RAN), a group of activists whose website aims to spread awareness regarding the need for regenerative culture within (and beyond) XR.²²

In addition, Extinction Rebellion Nederland has a – rather hefty – Resources library which contained an expanse of extensive, instructive, volunteer-made documents on matters such as starting a group, movement building, and the future of democracy.²³ This research delved into all the tabs from ‘Action’ and ‘Outreach’ to ‘Movement Building’ and ‘Regenerative Culture’ to collect a wide array of documents, presentations, links, and multi-media content such as non-violent communication handbooks, debriefing and arrestee support procedures, as well as a script, presentation, and workshop outline for conducting action wellbeing trainings.

²² Regen Advocates Network. ‘Who Are Regen Advocates?’ Retrieved from: <https://xr-regenerativecultures.org/regenerative-advocate-network>

²³ XRNL, ‘Resources’, Retrieved from: <https://resources.extinctionrebellion.nl/en>

The data collection phase was systematic and analytic but not rigid. Categories guided my quest but were not expected to emerge throughout. I was curious about what was being said and done knowing I would soon be getting a real-life glimpse of the terminology, communication methods, and non-hierarchical inner-workings of group dynamics in the next phase of research. I was glad to be affirmed that this process of constant discovery and comparison of relevant situations, settings, images, meanings, and nuances was in fact a normal experience with, if not the purpose of, this methodology (Altheide, 1987, p. 68). As a result my transition from data collection to data analysis and interpretation was performed reflexively rather than serially.

Following Altheide (1987) I paid attention to emergent understandings about content *source*, *narratives*, *format*, *response*, and *message* surfaced. *Sources* examined involved XR-affiliated groups or individuals (those currently as well as previously but no longer affiliated), independent activists, other movements or movement groups, political groups, news networks, or independent creators, as well as these individuals or groups' sponsors or investors, if any. This category also includes identity identifications, geographical locations, political ideologies, etc. *Narratives* observed everything from appeals to stereotypical imagery of the “annoying” climate activist by British daytime TV to hours-long breakdowns of the narrative, cultural, and power-laden routes to regenerative activism. *Formats* considers the latent information gathered about how books, debates, or podcasts – data is longer-form, verbally-driven, theoretical, and idea-driven – differ from livestreams, Instagram stories, or infographic ‘carousel’ Instagram posts – data is instantly disseminated often covering live action or time-sensitive event details. Keeping an eye on the *Response* elicited by the movement in public discourse provides insight as to which platforms hold which positions towards the movement and its practices as well as which topics and angles receive the most coverage. Overall, Ethnographic Content Analysis facilitated the ability for this research to triangulate its data and supplement its theoretical claims by having unique as well as categorical data for every case considered, thereby developing multi-dimensional and broadly applicable analytical constructs .

OBSERVATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Rather than participant observation – in which “ethnographers attempt to be both emotionally engaged participants and coolly dispassionate observers of the lives of others” – I set out to engage in observation of participants – in which “ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others’ co-participation within the ethnographic encounter” (Tedlock, 1991, p. 69). Since my participation in engaged activist ethnography was both a process and a product, my life as an ethnographer becomes embedded within my experiences of the field. Through this method I take a conscious choice to not edit myself out of my final written product.

I occupied the role of *participant as observer* which allowed my participation to be more salient than my researcher role, thereby facilitating access to insider perspectives and subjective insights (Lichterman, 1998). While being immersed can sometimes result in distracted data collection, I was able to enjoy the role of *complete participant* during which I felt fully engaged with other rebels and able to establish better rapport (Angrosino, 2007). I made note of participant physical descriptions, historic insights into their activism, physical settings that demonstrated material consolidation of prefigurative ideas, as well as my own personal reflections resulting in data that lend itself well to ‘thick’ description (Geertz, 1973). This method results in the Self (my experiences and reflections) and the Other (experiences and reflections of others) coming together within a single “narrative ethnography, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue” (Tedlock, 1991, p. 69).

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

All interviews were conducted in English due to my relatively limited proficiency in Dutch. Fortunately, all XR operations are often conducted in English however I was very cautious about evoking any feelings of alienation from people who preferred to speak Dutch by not assuming people’s proficiency in English, demonstrating flexibility with bilingual events, not excluding Dutch-content from my ECA, as well as singing along to Dutch chants. While this proved difficult during some more complex conversations that took place during XR Weekend, I was mostly faced with a willingness to speak English to me irrespective of proficiency and ‘whisper translations’ were kindly offered to me by rebels of all ages and backgrounds. While my language choice restricts potential interviewees from taking part in this research, I did not feel that took away from the value of the insights I was able to collect and makes me feel more secure in that limitation.

Semi-structured interviews were my primary source of insight in terms of which practices XR activists engaged in during explicitly political as well as more intimately political settings. In this research I was able to conduct sixteen semi-structured interviews – mostly over Signal and Telegram video calls with two taking place during XR events and actions, and one taking place in the respondent’s home. At two of the interviews we also shared a meal together and the activists were very hospitable and generous with their time. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours, with an average duration of an hour. Most conversations were not recorded due to participants’ varying preferences, however I was able to take extensive notes throughout. Recorded interviews were transcribed and coded alongside the typed-up records of my hand-written notes. Additionally over eight people have since reacted to my research outreach message however I was unable to pursue these leads due to timing constraints.

I employed open-ended questions with the aim of capturing activists' internal and experiential worlds, allowing them to tell their stories in as much detail as they pleased to allow organic narratives to take shape. My interview guide (see Appendix A2.3) consisted of a list of open-ended questions revolving around my three sub-questions allowing me to ensure all participants were asked a minimum set of identical questions such as "What does Regenerative Culture mean to you?" and "Which practices do you engage in during your climate activism?"

3.4 Methodological Reflections

Following Edelman's (2001) call for social movement research to show "greater sensitivity to the historical and cultural processes through which some of their main analytical categories are constructed" and "more genuine appreciation of the lived experiences of movement participants and non-participants" (p. 309), I engaged in a multi-dimensional ethnographic analysis of Extinction Rebellion Nederland inspired by Burdick's (1998) efforts to place his research findings at the service of the activist interlocutors through the reporting of "the patterned testimony" of movement actors "who on the one hand held views and engaged in actions very much in line with movement goals, but who on the other hand felt strongly put off, alienated, or marginalized by one or another aspect of movement rhetoric or practice" (Burdick, 1998 as discussed in Juris, 2007, pp. 173–174). Thus in this research the object of study is not Extinction Rebellion Nederland but rather the broader field within which it operates.

OBSTACLES & LIMITATIONS

While I had initially intended to engage in Participant Action Research (PAR), I found great portions of my organic data collection mirroring some Autoethnographic methods. I was growing increasingly aligned with and hyper-vigilant of narratives and ideas that asserted research is not always able to be neutral, impersonal, or objective. As I delved further into these intuitions, I discovered a realm of literature – outlined by Ellis et al. (2011) – "acknowledging and accommodating for subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (p. 274).

I experienced difficulties with the second component of PAR in that I found it difficult to keep activists who had made a lasting impact on the findings of this research in close quarters as I proceeded with the writing stage of the process. Due to the often overwhelming nature of academic research, the laborious nature of the writing process, and the time demands from other responsibilities at hand, I was unable to fully engage in true research co-creation with the individuals I met over the course of my fieldwork.

While this work will be shared with the activists involved upon completion and comments, questions, or critiques received ad-hoc will undoubtedly be integrated in any future work I engage in, it has been palpable to me how ethnography is both a process and a product (Singer, 2009) involving a spectrum of ever-shifting social relations in constant need of negotiating and re-negotiating. This experience informed my hesitance towards and subsequent decision to refrain from using the term ‘informants’, often suggesting a more fixed and non-contextualized role and dynamic (Turner, 2000, p. 53).

Nonetheless, the hurdles I encountered were of infinite value as I was able to profoundly examine and attempt to restructure my understanding of multitude of ways of being, valuing, speaking, and writing. With my developed capacity for hindsight, I can confidently say this research experience inspired a strong desire to conduct and present accessible and relevant research while engaging critically with the conventional ways of doing and thinking about research present in the institution. That being said, my position aligns with that of my Institute’s in that the variegated forms of knowledge I obtained during these methodologies “cannot be reduced to the unitary category of ‘data’ without loss” as “already commodified” data more easily “conforms to the replicable formats of large-scale quantitative surveys” (Pels et al., 2018, p. 393).

ETHICAL MATTERS

Ensuring the wellbeing of all rebels involved in my research was my top priority. I exclusively used pseudonyms since the majority of activists I interacted with expressed some preference for anonymity. I was requested by some participants to not record conversations and keep some insights off the record, which I have done in respect of their boundaries. I also did not include photos of anyone I interacted with unless their face was covered using a digitally-imposed XR ‘rebel’ symbol.

I remained mindful throughout my research about impeding or disrupting group efforts in some way when participating alongside rebels in activities. I limited exploitation of rebels and the movement by seeking to produce knowledge with and for them rather than about them, by centering their experiences and maintaining transparency about my positionality and intentions by openly disclosing to people that while I was a ‘new’ rebel who had just joined XR, I was also conducting qualitative social research into the macro- and micro-political practices of activists and particularly matters of Regenerative Culture. My transparency, openness, and curiosity seemed to be well-received by all participants and I hope to do their stories justice over the course of this paper.

4 Welcome to the Rebellion

This chapter seeks to answer the question: **How do movement actors prefigure transformative change through their climate action?** To reach some answers, I interweave empirical findings with my personal experience of how I came to ‘join’ Extinction Rebellion Nederland. These are held together by the theoretical concepts of prefigurative practice and strategy. With this, I welcome you, dear reader, to the Rebellion.

4.1 Training, Protestivals,²⁴ and Dal for Dinner

Extinction Rebellion Nederland calls onto everyone to take “real meaningful action”²⁵ in the forms of “direct action and civil disobedience [to] disrupt polluting industries and force government to take action.”²⁶ To join, you simply sign up for the XR Newsletter, join a local **Affinity Group** (ideally in my home city of Leiden), and take part in an **Action Training**. At the time, I was unable to find any taking place in Leiden and so attended an Action Training in Utrecht.

On the train, I re-read some sections of XR’s handbook *This Is Not A Drill* that I had previously highlighted to open the doors to any last-minute questions I could scribble down in my notes. The training was organized by an experienced activist **BE** who introduced myself – as well as 6 to 8 other activists of varying ages– to XR’s tactics of nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience, with discussions on the rationale, the logistics, and the legalities of taking part in action or protest regardless of intention for arrest. The session was bilingual to ensure everyone in the room was able to follow, especially since two older white Dutch gentlemen were in attendance and expressed a preference for that. This was customary within XR: while most operations are organized in English, there is a growing interest in making events bilingual or even using Dutch in cases of Dutch-majority groups.

The training also described the various roles one can occupy within their **Affinity Groups** and actions. From ‘**Arrestables**’ who directly get involved in higher-risk actions and ‘**Wellbeing Supporters**’ who look after everyone’s physical and emotional wellbeing during action; to ‘**Police Liaisons**’ trained to interact with the police and ‘**Action Coordinators**’ who keep everyone in the loop and give the action go-ahead, thus advised not to risk arrest. Individuals occupying these roles also sometimes have distinctive attire to differentiate their role: from high-vis jackets to differently colored sashes.

²⁴ Protestivals are protest festivals. Learn more from The Open University, ‘Protestivals – What are they?’, 14 Jul 2020, accessed via: <https://youtu.be/IZQC8jKVcds>

²⁵ XRNL, ‘Join’, accessed: <https://extinctionrebellion.nl/en/>

²⁶ XRNL, ‘Ready To Rebel?’, accessed: <https://extinctionrebellion.nl/en/join/>

The training addressed some legal matters such as when it is beneficial to participate as an ‘anonymous’ rebel and when you are better off bringing along your proof of identification. There were no formal recommendations but the advice we received as ‘new’ rebels depended on the circumstances (such as the size of the action and the risk of the role) as well as the personal preferences and experience of the rebels themselves.

The government owns the streets, that’s why we disrupt the streets.

BE, Action Training, 5 Feb 2022

As an international student of Moroccan origin currently residing in the Netherlands on a temporary student visa, I had some concerns about arrest and police identification and so asked **BE** whether XRNL had any specific legal advice for people like me, to which he shared that XRNL has had too little experience with rebels of my background to make definitive recommendations. This got me thinking about how many other individuals are unable to support XR efforts due to the movement’s predominant focus on direct action and civil disobedience as the only means towards transformative change, which many are unable to take part in due to ability or legal status amongst other reasons.

The training briefly covered the history of civil disobedience to lay the groundwork for XR’s non-violent direct action and civil disobedience. **Nonviolence** was “tactical” and XR engaged in ‘dilemma actions’ – a type of non-violent civil disobedience designed to create a “lose-lose” situation for those in power by forcing them to choose between conceding to the activist group, ignoring the group thereby giving them opportunities to escalate further, or using violence to repress them thereby highlighting the inherent violence of the system the movement acts against. When asked how XR defines violence, **BE** shared that while it is “always a discussion in grassroots movements,” a good question to keep in mind is: ‘Would I claim the action openly?’ By only engaging in practices they would openly claim, actors ‘prefigure’ a civil society in which individuals are able to exercise their legal right to peacefully protest. This not only contributes to the movement’s legitimacy further consolidates and diffuses XR’s commitment to non-violence making it more accessible to skeptics and non-rebels alike.

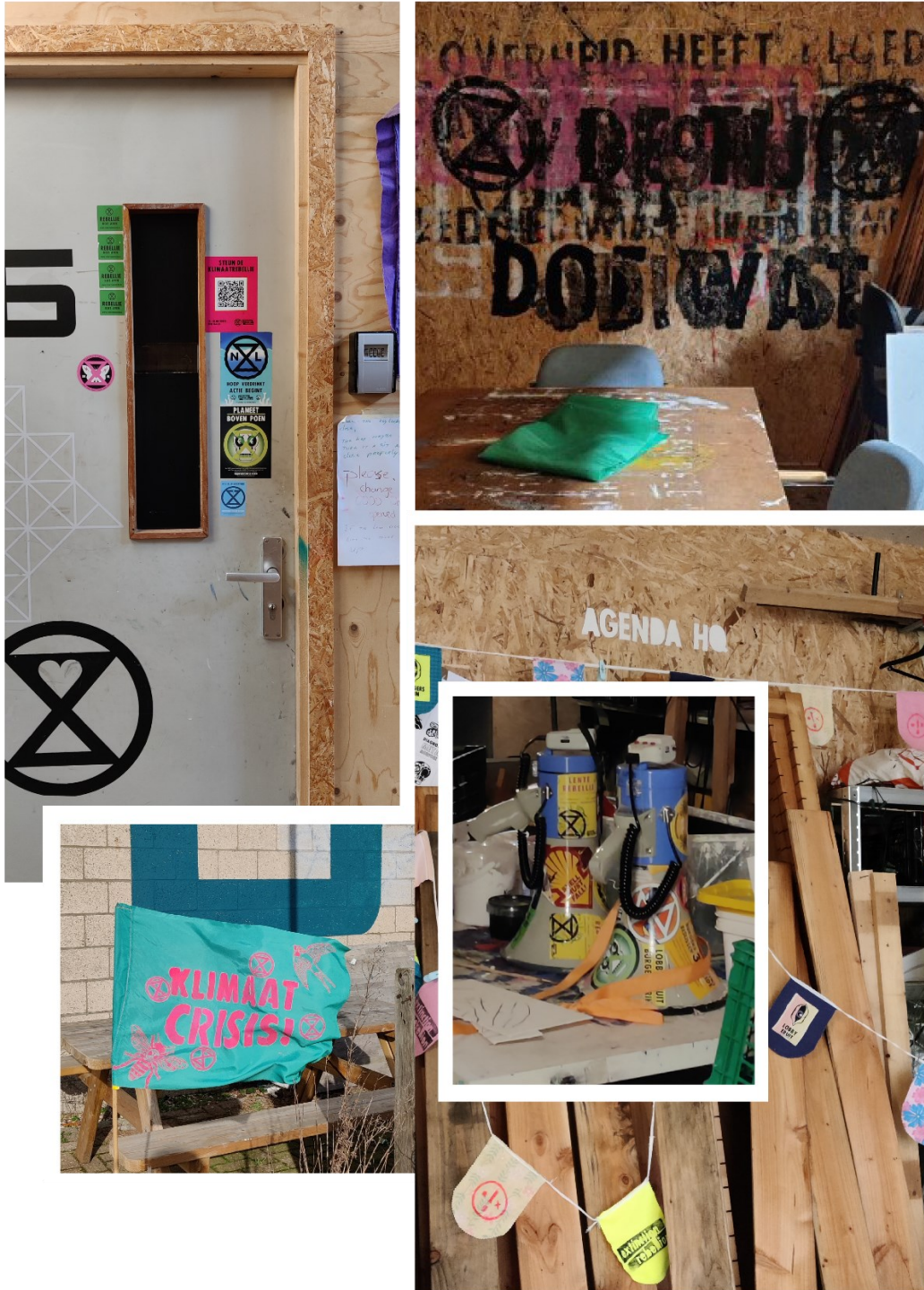
Nonviolence spurred conversation about XR’s relationship to the police. It is safe to say that while the vast majority of younger rebels (aged 20 to 40) I met seemed to be committed to non-violence, they did not have particularly favorable views of the police – recounting incidents of aggressive frisking or handcuffing and criticizing officers for helping erect and enact an oppressive structure of domination. Nonetheless, there are still some people who seek to maintain civil relations with the police, as one of the older gentlemen who happened to be a journalist photographer spoke up to say: “Remember your enemy and don’t turn on others with different ideas.”

The session also involved talks on strategy as **BE** explained that actions are broadly intended to be disruptive towards the government and symbolic towards the general public, thus being mindful of obstructing the daily lives of regular people holds a key to successful prefigurative movement strategy.

Finally, wellbeing was addressed and we were given three key tips for participating in high-risk actions. First, “don’t feel bad about feeling” – there are support structures – like XR therapists – in place prior to, during, and after actions that activists can make use of for emotional and psychological support. Second, “if things become too much, leave the action” – we were told to be mindful and respectful of our boundaries not just for wellbeing purposes but to ensure the longevity of the movement and message as well. Finally, “go floppy” – during confrontations or arrest activists are encouraged to fully relax their bodies (while maintaining some control in their neck to avoid injury) to demonstrate pacifist de-escalation and prevent the police from claiming resistance of arrest.

After the training, we visited the ‘headquarters’ of XR Utrecht at the time to a tightly-packed room filled with XR paraphernalia, posters and slogans graffitied on the walls, a custom XR pin-making machine which **BE** skillfully used to make us all pins, while thoughtfully responding to a few of the questions that kept coming up for me and a couple of the other rebels that stuck around. I learned that he was a proud father of a young girl and he dedicated around three days a week for work, two and a half hours for XR, and Sundays for self-care. He smiled as he shared he thought “XR people are too sweet” – to him, the rebels were weary and avoidant of conflict because they don’t want to hurt each other’s feelings. In contrast, he felt like a “rougner” member because he believed “you should enter conflict respectfully but leave room open to learn and grow.”

As I helped **BE** tidy up, I shared with him my research intentions and ambitions and asked for any advice on how I could reach out to more “XR people” – as they sometimes referred amiably to one another. Per his suggestion, I got in touch with all XR NL groups that I was able to travel to on a semi-regular basis via email. As I walked back to the bus stop at which I first arrived I felt gratitude for **BE**’s generosity with his time. I felt gratitude for one of the older Dutch rebels seeing how poorly adjusted I was to the cold easing my jitters; reaching out and smilingly saying “Koud, toch!?” before offering me tea. And I felt a lot of gratitude that there were other people out there who, similarly to me, were not quite sure what to do about the crisis but were surely trying to find out more.



Collage 1. Collection of photos from XR Utrecht's HQ featuring XR stickers on the door, graffitied slogans on the walls, 'Shell Must Fall' stickers adorning two megaphones, a hand-made string banner painted using XR stencils, and a climate crisis flag.

As I awaited a response, I joined a few public XR NL Broadcast Telegram chats,²⁷ and reflected on the undeniably sense of people power and creativity that emanated from the walls of the ‘HQ’. XR had made a resonant impression on me; one that showed glimpses of prefiguration at every turn. From the local non-hierarchical networks of activists that organized such trainings to those planning, participating in, and supporting local and nation-wide acts of mass civil disobedience and direct action, the movement was rich in its inner workings.

The first section I heard back from was XR Rotterdam. Twenty-five year old activist **DE**, responded to my email and got in touch via Telegram expressing interest in having a call. After sending him my participant information sheet (see Appendix 2.1) we hopped on a call. **DE** is a working psychology Master’s student in his last year, dedicating his final half-year to full-time XR coordination roles within his various Circles. While it was sometimes “exhausting” he was feeling “more relaxed” focusing just on XR for a change.

He outlined XR Rotterdam’s demographics as a mix of ages with mostly younger people; a “good mix” of students and working people; and overall “more Dutch [people] but international people pass by because of university.” He shared that different local groups employ different tactics depending on their local context and government. While he agreed that the movement should remain apolitical, he believes the movement can have allies while distancing itself from certain entrenched ideas that “conflict with [their] values.”

DE candidly described his journey from being an animal rights activist in 2015, going vegetarian then vegan, and after he had been “looking for a long time” for something like it, the Rebellion claimed the streets before his eyes in 2019 and for the first time it seemed as though people “actually listened” (personal interview, 15 Feb 2022). As he recounts his involvement in high-risk actions he shares that during moments of “excitement, tension, or anxiety, you need to be the calm for yourself.” He speaks to the importance of “clear communication” and having “XR therapists, mediators, and grief circles” accessible to rebels, making sure to “figuratively reach a hand” to those navigating climate anxiety.

The best XR actions to him were the “memorable”, “stunning”, “theatrical”, and “artistic” actions. He reflected on how they gave him “goosebumps” and had the capacity to “stay with you.” As we see in the prefigurative strategy literature, while actions intend to directly affect existing structures or relations, they are also very effective in terms of diffusing practices that convey movement values in powerful ways to unsuspecting spectators.

²⁷ Including @xrnlactiebroadcast, @XRrotterdam, @XRNLbroadcast, and more.

As for the worst actions? He describes how XR had moved away from ‘swarming’ – in which a group of rebels block a road for 5 to 7 minutes to spread awareness about the cause – because they had “outgrown” that stage. He said that “on average” XR NL activists felt the practice was “not targeting the problem” and since the movement had “outgrown that stage” there was no need for the practice anymore. People collectively discussed whether the mean was still serving the intended ends and when that was not the case, the practice was phased out in the interest of strategic advancement of the movement and its message.

Regarding movement structure, he describes “transparent Circles” of individuals with open-access to meeting minutes and other documents. He speaks of randomly selected Citizen Assemblies which would resemble an “independent party” that democratically discuss climate policy and make proposals. He elaborates on the choice to attend actions anonymously as symbolizing “solidarity” towards “ghost persons” a term which refers to undocumented migrants.

In his experience, the local police are generally there to facilitate safe actions while the *marechaussee* (military police) tend to be “pretty rough” and “not in the mood” when they take you away. He adds that rather than ‘going floppy’ he tells the police “I will just walk with you [to the van]” to avoid being handled in any aggressive manner. In the role of Police Liaison, **DE** says one must be “experienced [with] a specific skill-set”, “know details of what can happen”, be aware of “cameras and photography” around an action, “be calm and collected” especially when needing to “stall” an action to maximize disruption, and being “considerate” of oneself and others.

DE also shed light on the movement’s goals with regards to ‘intersectionality’. He shared that it was a national decision to pursue “intersectional activism” in the next phase of the movement’s growth and that movement seeks to target corporation board executives and CEOs while minimizing harm on axes of social and economic justice. He described how the upcoming Rebellion was “changing the narrative” towards targeting the fossil fuel industry while centering those most affected the crisis referencing “indigenous people” as one of these groups.

Thanks to **DE** I was put in direct contact with three other rebels: **AA** from XR Leiden, **SU** from XR Rotterdam, **MA** from XR NL, **JE** from XR The Hague, and **RJ** from XR The Hague. **DE** also invited me to XR Rotterdam’s #RED010 festival protest which was taking place on Saturday February 19th in front of Rotterdam City Hall in the lead-up to the municipal elections. The intention was to raise awareness about the absolute necessity for prompt and unwavering climate justice policy.

#RED010

After Storm Dudley wreaked havoc across the Netherlands causing train delays, flight cancellations, and power cuts, Storm Eunice was expected to hit on the afternoon of Friday the 18th. In preparation, the Dutch Weather Institute (KNMI) issued a code red weather warning and the NS cancelled all trains after 2 PM. This of course, slipped my mind at the most inconvenient time as my friend, Rick and I made our way to Rotterdam on Saturday morning only to realize all trains were cancelled. Anxious to catch as much of the festival, we quickly made our way to the nearest bus and began our hour-long, journey to the Stadhuis.

With one hand I held on for balance and with the other I watched XR Rotterdam's Instagram stories. Despite the weather and the wind, the rebels pushed on with the city march, paraded their DIY anti-fashion show, adorned their booths with stickers and banners, made noise with their slogans, and started conversations with members of the public for outreach. They also – in explicitly prefigurative fashion – organized a test Citizen's Assembly to deliberate over Rotterdam climate policy in the light of the city's upcoming municipal elections.



Image 1. XR Rotterdam's #RED010 protestival featuring handmade signs, banners, and a kiddy-pool symbolizing an alternative world in which the climate crisis is not addressed and may need to float.

We learned that the Citizen's Assembly had begun at a different location out of the rain and as the rain continued it became increasingly difficult to keep everything up given that most of the rebels were getting quite cold and tired. Nonetheless, we had vibrant conversations as Rick and I helped everyone pack up chairs and tables.

As one activist **AD** gave away hugs, smiling from ear to ear as she talked about “how great” physical support and affection was. Another activist from XR The Hague **MN** had invited some friends from XR Belgium to join in the fun.

While **DE** had placed emphasis on “teaching people that care starts with yourself first”, others like **AD** and **MN** were more hesitant about the seemingly individualistic conflation they believed takes place between self-care and the cultivation of a regenerative culture. Unprompted, **MN** expressed his concerns about members needing to take a break from the movement and asserted that “[XR’s] main focus should be to create a community in which people can take breaks from everything else in their lives at XR”.

This sentiment became more and more evident as my research progressed: that Regenerative Cultures – or prefigurative micropolitical practices – were often seen as a protective factor or safety mechanism through which the movement could ensure its own longevity, while on the ground it was a very common phenomenon for members to burn-out from XR activities thereby needing to take extended breaks from the movement and from their activism.

Once everything was packed up and ready to go, we all gathered around to watch Rotterdam’s own *Tramahus* – who has been described to “cheerfully continues the tradition of dangerous, obstinate Rotterdam bands”²⁸ – perform. Throughout the performance, some rebels approached interested passersby with more information and others simply savored the moment by dancing in the rain.

²⁸ Rotown Rotterdam, ‘TRAMHAUS SUPPORT: A FUNGUS’, Retrieved from: <https://www.rotown.nl/agenda/tramhaus/>

ART DAY @ WORM WITH XR ROTTERDAM

When I heard from the activists at #RED010 about an community art day on March 6th, I was set on attending. Every Sunday, people from XR Rotterdam met between 3 and 7 PM at their own HQ – WORM – a network organization at the intersection of culture and art with fully operating analogue and digital cinema facilities, exhibition and performance spaces, a sound studio, a café, and more. According to their website, WORM is “the ultimate test environment for alternative art production, experimental ways of living and non-academic knowledge development.” Their promotional Instagram story for the event described that they will be making flags and buttons, experimenting with sustainable paint, and making a trash dress – a variety of symbolically prefigurative practices that experiment with the building of sustainable alternatives.

When I arrived, I was welcomed by **ME** who showed interest in me and how I came to be there. After sharing my story – what became my usual: “Hi, I’m a Leiden-based Master’s student from Morocco interested in joining the movement and currently conducting anthropological research on XR’s culture” – **ME** gave me a little tour of the premises. At the time there was a band occupying the space downstairs but the upstairs space was entirely for XR use for that time. The space was quite large with an arts station of sorts with a stunning amount of material (consolidation) used for promotion and outreach projects; a bunch of couches, carpets, and beanbags; and a kitchen with a dishwasher, a long dining table, and a mini-fridge.

I was told that some people were busy creating promotional material for an upcoming action; some were sewing XR patches onto their shirts; and **ME**, photographer **DA**, and a couple of other rebels were creating an infographic of the various hand signals used by XR activists during meetings and discussions (see Appendix A1.4 for signals).

They were going to create a hand-made collage backdrop of repurposed XR posters, flyers, and stickers on the kitchen wall – and activists were to be photographed depicting the signals in front of it.

As a lover of collages myself, I was eager to get involved. It was feeling like a very positive experience doing creative tasks with other individuals towards a larger purpose, up until we had to strategize about mopping up the water which had been leaking – unbeknownst to the rebels – from the dishwasher for a little while.

In acknowledgement of the irony, the cleaning was a success, the wall was covered, the photos were taken, I even managed to poorly sew a patch on my shirt, and it was now time for dinner. An activist – **NO** – I had previously met during the #RED010 protest volunteered to do the groceries for the meal we were going to be cooking and sharing together and I was quick to join her.

As **NO** and I walked to the nearest store to gather the ingredients of our soon-to-be vegan dahl, I asked her about her time with XR Rotterdam. Little did we know at the time, we would be having a long and lovely conversation on XR's prefigurative politics a mere few months later.

While action was clearly an essential part of being 'part of' Extinction Rebellion, the social ties that made up XR's many local groups were distinctly palpable. Brought together over a meal, these people shared common values and visions for a 'regenerative' future they believe their actions – whether explicitly political like occupying the streets with their bodies or more 'micropolitical' like reducing or eliminating their consumption of meat and sharing resources to limit waste – cumulatively bring to existence.



Collage 2. Collection of photos I took at XR Rotterdam’s Art Day depicting our photoshoot of the hand signs; a table full of posters, stickers, and tape; my fellow activists preparing dinner; the banners that were being painted; and the delicious vegan dal we had for dinner.

4.2 A Taste of Civil Disobedience

At its core, XR seeks to achieve system change through mass mobilization of 3.5% of the population. This ‘theory of change’ is drawn from empirical research done by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) on civil resistance campaigns from 1990 to 2006. In their data set of 200 violent revolutions and over 100 nonviolent campaigns, every campaign that achieved the active and sustained participation of at least 3.5% of the population was successful. In addition, 26% of the violent revolutions were successful while 35% of the nonviolent campaigns succeeded, with every single campaign that surpassed the ‘magic number’ of 3.5% mobilization being a nonviolent one.²⁹ Chenoweth and Stephan’s data was drawn from campaigns against autocratic regimes and occupying military forces, making it difficult to apply to XR’s predominantly liberal democratic contexts. Despite this, XR is committed to the 3.5% rule³⁰ and this philosophy is evident in the movement’s emphasis on direct action and civil disobedience.

Generally, XR’s actions can be broken down into **three main types**: *Disruption*, *Outreach*, and *Visioning*. Most actions achieve all three at some level, but are often organized to focus on one over the other to get a particular message across. As a rebel, you can choose to partake in any of the three different ‘levels’ of **civil disobedience**, each associated with a different risk and criminality level.

Non-arrestable rebels can include symbolic rebels who participate in the creative and performative spreading of the movement’s message as well as rebels responsible for the wellbeing of all those engaging in the civil disobedience.

Disruption involves creating disruption through mass civil disobedience, primarily towards achieving the movement’s demands.

Lower risk rebels may participate in brief roadblocks or ‘vandalize’ using chalk spray. Higher risk rebels may engage in lock-ons, longer road blocks, and the occupation of locations such as banks, oil refineries, and municipality buildings.

Outreach involves informing the public about the crisis and bringing people together through media platforms as well as protest.

Visioning involves an element of alternative building, in which movement actors demonstrate the desired future through beautiful or inspiring collaborative action.

²⁹ TEDx Talks, ‘The success of nonviolent civil resistance: Erica Chenoweth at TEDxBoulder’, 4 Nov 2013, <https://youtu.be/YJSehRIU34w>

³⁰ XR UK announced **Project 3.5** in June 2022 – a “scalable, repeatable, and fun” plan designed to mobilize 100.000 people in the UK.³⁰

Action **locations** depend on the type of action being organized, as well as what will gain publicity and what a group can achieve given its number of active and sustained participants. Locations may be **strategic**, in that they actively **disrupt** practices exacerbating the climate and ecological crisis, such as blocking access to Europe's largest oil refinery in the port of Rotterdam³¹ or obstructing the A12 motorway in protest of the annual 17.5 billion euros subsidy to the fossil fuel industry.³² These actions **directly** challenge the damaging practices taking place by attempting to literally stop business-as-usual operations while **symbolically** demonstrating why the kinds of social relations on which it is founded were unnecessary, thereby performing their larger vision of societal change in a prefigurative manner.

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Actions can also be **symbolic** in that they raise awareness of a particular issue or injustice without necessarily attempting to resolve it. Perhaps they tell a narrative or are intended to reach out to a larger group or community. These actions can include parades, vigils, festivals, and fasts. Waving flags, chanting slogans, singing songs, and distributing badges are also symbolic actions. Oftentimes, such actions may include workshops or talks, taking place in the location during actions or shortly afterwards, intending to pique the interest of local community.

³¹ Extinction Rebellion Nederland. Twitter Post. Aug 25, 2021, 11:25 AM.

<https://twitter.com/NLRebellion/status/1430461408882434051?s=20&t=nsshuuNtakd-VuAWOqiLPA>

³² Extinction Rebellion Nederland. Twitter Post. Oct 15, 2022, 1:37 PM.

<https://twitter.com/NLRebellion/status/1581247908120530944?s=20&t=cafgYYCiKs4wTzNpQ6BfNg>

³³ Extinction Rebellion Nederland. Twitter Post. Aug 25, 2021, 11:25 AM.

<https://twitter.com/NLRebellion/status/1430461408882434051?s=20&t=nsshuuNtakd-VuAWOqiLPA>

³⁴ Extinction Rebellion Nederland. Twitter Post. Oct 15, 2022, 1:37 PM.

<https://twitter.com/NLRebellion/status/1581247908120530944?s=20&t=cafgYYCiKs4wTzNpQ6BfNg>

A great example of this was the aforementioned **XR Rotterdam's #RED010** 'protestival' that I attended back in February, strategically organized in the lead-up to the city's municipal elections to spread awareness about the necessity for effective and timely climate policy. The festival began with a small march followed by a program of speakers, musical performances, poetry, as well as a model Citizen's Assembly.³⁵ Although officially politically non-partisan, XR's festival welcomed political parties such as the anti-capitalist progressive left-wing **BIJ1 Rotterdam**, who later announced their support of XR Rotterdam's action highlighting the importance of "decisions [being] taken at neighborhood tables and in citizens' deliberations."³⁶ Such events reveal the powerful impact such 'non-direct' forms of action have and the opportunities they open up to spread awareness, galvanize spectators, and include the local community in political matters that will inevitably affect their lives.

XR's actions sometimes also include an element of escalation – shifting from being approachable and symbolic to large and disruptive depending on what can ensure the movement's demands are met. Perhaps after one door has been blocked for a while without any arrests, groups will escalate to blocking an additional door. Nonetheless and like all XR actions, escalations are also committed to nonviolence. Nonviolence – while hard to define – is the refusal to engage in any physical or verbal violence towards others. Incorporated within the movement's core values, nonviolence is part of XR's strategy for three main reasons. First, the movement acknowledges that the resources of the authorities will always outnumber theirs when it comes to violent means. Second, the movement believes nonviolence is the path towards creating a more stable transition to system change. Nonviolence is inclusive, accessible, and more likely to attract wider segments of the population. Finally, nonviolence hopes to expose the violence of the systems XR is challenging – be it the state, police, or security. By being nonviolent, some activists hope their vulnerability gains the empathy of large numbers of people who may be perturbed by the injustice and violence they witness being used against them or compelled by their courage and sacrifice to put their bodies on the line perhaps incited to support the cause.

Mindful of the public going about their day-to-day activities and in acknowledgement of the disruption workers who rely on their jobs to provide for themselves and their families may face, XR acts in the belief that unless action is taken, impact will be minimal. To mitigate for the effects of disruption, rebels often consult with local municipalities and traffic plans to ensure actions or blockades do not affect emergency routes.

³⁵ The enactment of a model Citizen's Assembly can also be considered a prefigurative practice in the sense that it enacts these formats of discourse in the here and now, despite the government not yet meeting their demand of being advised by a body such as the Citizen's Assembly.

³⁶ Rotterdam BIJ1. Twitter post. Feb 20, 2022, 8:55 PM.

<https://twitter.com/RotterdamBIJ1/status/1495487222489010180?s=20&t=cafgyYCikS4wTzNpQ6BfNg>

Back on page 42, I shared that XR Rotterdam's **DE** had put me in contact with a few rebels, one of whom was **MA** – a rebel from XR Utrecht currently engaged in Regenerative Culture work on the movement's national front. In our conversation, I was pleased to hear that he had also conducted his cultural anthropology Master's research on Extinction Rebellion's horizontality and how it gives rise to hierarchies and social authorities that limit power inequalities within the movement. The day after our first call, **MA** invited me to what was going to be my first action.

MY FIRST (SECRET) ACTION

Upon receiving **MA**'s invitation, I tried to look up the action on XR's events page to no avail. Turns out, this action was "secret". Once I said yes, **MA** switched our communications to a more secure platform and gave me the details: this was going to be a disruptive action on Monday 14 March against the construction of a data center in Zeewolde.

At the end of last year, the Zeewolde city council approved plans to construct a Meta data center. The data center was to be the largest in the Netherlands and promised additional jobs and tax revenue. This was faced with a lot of resistance among the residents of Zeewolde and opponents of the project (such as the largest party of Zeewolde - Leefbaar Zeewolde).³⁷ The cabinet was also not a fan of the energy and water-guzzling mega data center, which would require as much energy annually as 460.000 households.³⁸

The action – organized by local groups from Almere, Utrecht, and the Hague – was going to involve blocking the main entrance of the Ministry of Finance in The Hague for several hours on Monday morning. The Ministry is where the Central Government Real Estate Agency is also located. The goal was to demand a commitment from the Central Government Real Estate Agency that the land would not be sold to Meta – Facebook's parent company.

³⁷ de Stentor, 'Leefbaar Zeewolde happy with the suspension of plans for the Meta data center: 'Step in the right direction'', 29 Mar 2022, <https://www.destentor.nl/flevoland/leefbaar-zeewolde-blij-met-opschorten-van-plannen-datacentrum-meta-stap-in-goede-richting~adb854efa/>

³⁸ NOS News, 'Mega data center Facebook puts extra pressure on already high energy demand', 15 Dec 2021, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2409557-megadatacenter-facebook-zet-extra-druk-op-al-grote-energievraag>

While I was unable to attend the briefing which took place that same night at 8.30 PM, I read through the briefing documents shared in the action group chat. These documents emphasized the importance of timing, outlined our two groups and their allocated meeting location, and detailed the coordination: from giving the signal, to blocking the Ministry's doors, to the four high-risk activists locking themselves in. The document also listed suggestions for preparation (such as warm clothing, food and drinks; bringing IDs was optional) and the location of the cell complex activists would be taken to in the event of an arrest.

It was so powerful to be on the streets, you know? I can claim the street and say “Hey, this sh*t is not going well and here we are, altogether, and feeling connected. That’s what it felt like. Really, I was hooked.

MA, personal interview, Mar 8, 2022

It was a classic cloudy Dutch day the morning of the action. **MA** and I arrived a little before 11.30 am, I introduced myself to the other rebels. I was pleased to see another familiar face when I saw **BE** – the activist who hosted the Action Training I attended (back on page 38). He was now taking on the role of Police Liaison, a role he had previously shared having plenty of experience with.

MA was an experienced activist who had often occupied Wellbeing Support roles and was responsible for Wellbeing today. There were four other high-risk rebels – two male-presenting and two female-presenting) preparing for the ‘lock on’. This method of action involved placing one’s arm in a reinforced pipe cemented in a tub of concrete with an internal bolt to which one links the carabiner attached to their wrist. It was evident that before you could volunteer for a high-risk role, you required a lot more action training than I had received. Unaffected by my insecure train of thought, a high-risk rebel I had just met, **DN**, says: “Oh sh*t! I forgot I have to dog-sit tomorrow!”

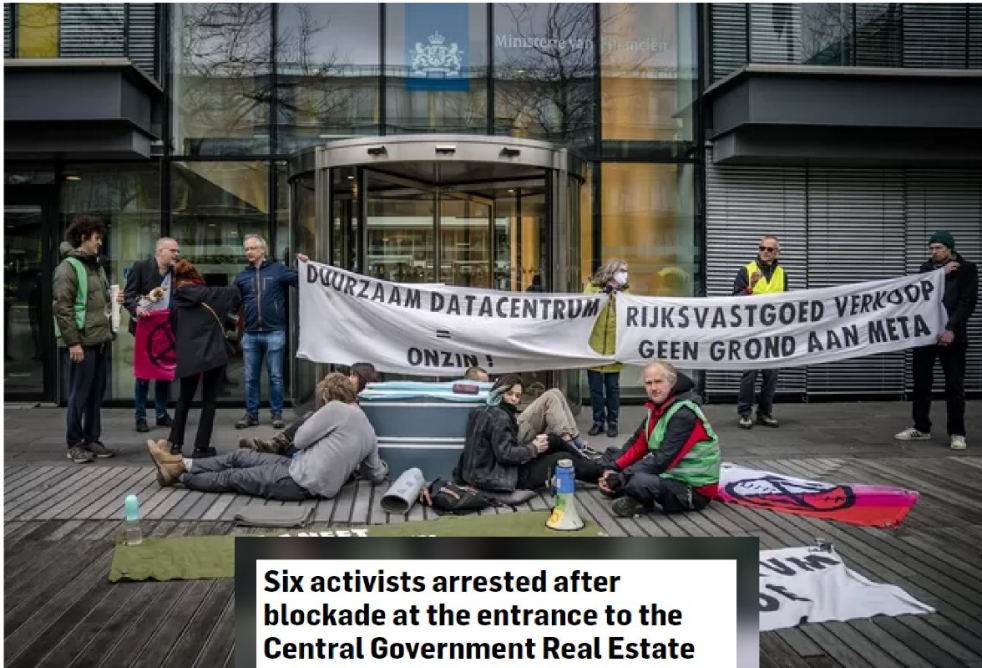
As we were getting to know one another and getting ready to make our way to the Ministry of Finance, one of the rebels – an older white man seemingly in a coordinating role – approached us, placed his hands on the shoulders of the two male high-risk rebels, and said: “These are the real heroes!”

Perplexed by the underlying meanings and implications of such a comment, MA, myself, and the female rebels exchanged a few look. I was surprised to hear someone from XR – a movement who requires more than action alone to continue its growth and meet its demands – contribute to the stigma some people hold towards forms of activist participation that do not involve direct action. Furthermore, this type of rhetoric also reinforces the sexist gender roles associated with high- and low-risk roles, through the erasure of the female high-risk activists’ ‘heroism’.

At this point in time, the majority of the XR NL spaces I had been a part of seemed to have a combination of female, male, and non-binary representation, with women and non-binary people actively taking part in just as many high-risk actions as the men. Nonetheless, it was clear that movement actors engaged in a lot more ‘work’ in their climate activism than the actions alone: they actively opposed the exclusionary narratives that may sometimes surface, continuing to enact in the present, the equal and inclusive community they wish to be a part of.

Having personally conducted engaged ethnographic research on hierarchies of power within XR, MA was particularly versed in the themes of my research: eagerly volunteering information, encouraging me to ask questions, and sharing personal insights. He disclosed that usually a pre-Action check-in is facilitated for the rebels by a Wellbeing Supporter. The purpose of such a check-in is the creation of a safe space in which rebels can reconnect with their motivations, anticipate challenging experiences, and explore doubts and fears surrounding the action. Unfortunately, we did not have enough time for a check-in and MA shared that without things like check-ins, activists often reported feeling the “jitters” as the lack of grounding made them a little anxious or restless.

Over the course of his extensive experience with Wellbeing roles, MA noticed that rebels were often quick to dismiss the need for such check-ins. However once they partook – albeit begrudgingly at times– they reported feeling less overwhelmed and more connected to themselves and one another. I found MA’s cognizance of and openness about such experiences to be greatly affable and reassuring. He, seemingly effortlessly, created a safe space for the uneasiness of others by divulging his own discomfort.



Six activists arrested after blockade at the entrance to the Central Government Real Estate Agency: 'Don't sell Zeewolde land for data center!'

UPDATE Climate activists from Extinction Rebellion blocked the main entrance of the Ministry of Finance in The Hague for several hours on Monday, where the Central Government Real Estate Agency is also located. They demonstrated against the plans for the construction of a much-discussed data center of Meta, the parent company of Facebook, among others, at Zeewolde. The action resulted in six arrests by police.

Anton van Noorel 14-03-22, 14:00 Last update: 14-03-22, 16:07



Collage 3. Photograph published on X of the action in The Hague (Top), Photograph taken by MA on my phone (Bottom), Headline published by de Stentor³⁹ (Middle). In the photos, I can be spotted pouring tea, in the center are the high-risk activists undertaking a lock-on, and all around are other rebels who alternate holding signs, singing songs, and offering support to one another.

³⁹ van Noorel, Anton. 'Zes activisten aangehouden na blokkade bij ingang Rijksvastgoedbedrijf: 'Verkoop grond Zeewolde niet voor datacenter!' *de Stentor*. 14 Mar 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.destentor.nl/veluwe/zes-activisten-aangehouden-na-blokkade-bij-ingang-rijksvastgoedbedrijf-verkoop-grond-zeewolde-niet-voor-datacenter~adf4483e/>

During the action, WBs are entrusted with providing physical and emotional support. In this action, physical support included **MA** bringing along mats and space blankets, other rebels bringing vegan snacks, and all low-risk rebels intermittently switching positions to hold the banners and allow for small breaks. Emotional support involved **MA** checking in with high-risk rebels about any needs they may have, initiating chants, and making jokes. We were also there to de-escalate when needed, express support for rebels during arrest by reminding them of the value of their contribution, and accompanying them to the police van.

Having things like wellbeing in actions is because we acknowledge that we are human, and we are fragile and weak and vulnerable and we need- you know, it's an emotional moment. So we need someone to hold a bit that space or to be there for us when we feel sad or scared or vulnerable or hungry or so, to really create structures for emotions as well.

NO, personal interview, 12 May, 2022

Solidarity was in the chilly air. Jokes were being made about licorice not being a fan favorite when it came to the non-Dutch rebels.

A high-risk member of the lock-on, DN, requested to “DJ” on the communal Bluetooth speaker and sang along to songs such as *It Isn't Nice* as performed by political activist Barbara Dane, Tracy Chapman's *Talkin' Bout a Revolution*, and contemporary climate crisis protest song *Groter Dan Ik* [Bigger Than Me] by Dutch singer-songwriter Froukje.

Despite my trepidations about doing a good enough job at my first action, I found these moments of connection particularly solacing. Throughout the action, I was hyper-attentive, making myself available to all rebels. I poured tea, helped hold up the banners, checked in with the high-risk rebels, and sang along all while feeling an atypical sense of purpose. I had long been feeling guilt and shame about my lack of active participation in climate activism and despite occupying a low-risk role at a very small action, it felt especially gratifying to be there with the rebels.

By 12.30, the police had arrived but the action's spokesperson – Guus Dix, an XR climate activist and Assistant Professor at Twente University – was still awaiting a conversation with a representative from the Agency. Around 15.30 the conversation was over, described as a “good conversation, but unsatisfactory”⁴⁰ as we did not ultimately receive a commitment from them. The action was not escalated further and six rebels were arrested.

A little while later all rebels not taking part in the lock-on were faced with compulsory identification by the police. In that moment I thought back to **BE**'s Action Training: it is less likely to fine or prosecute 100 unidentified rebels than it is 10. Furthermore, if you are occupying a WB role, it is unlikely that you will be arrested in the first place as you are not directly engaged in the civil disobedience. With this information, I decided to bring my ID and was indeed identified by the police, after which we were told to leave the premises.

We walked away as **MA** shared how the local police were getting more adept at dismantling the lock-ons, perhaps calling for even newer tactics on behalf of the movement. We watched as the rebels were carried to the van.

Although there was no debriefing, **MA** and I had a little chat recapping the day. He expressed feelings of fatigue accompanied by an anticipation for an XR Arts and Crafts evening taking place that day, during which he intended to relax and regenerate. As I was ready to go, I go to thank **BE** for the support in the action. He checks in and says: “There you go, that was your first action. **We trust you now.**”

The following day I got in touch with **MA** to check in if everyone who was arrested was alright in the end and he let me know that they were all out an hour after their arrest. I was very happy to hear when, by the end of the month, the Dutch Senate had voted on a motion to stop any further site preparation for the time being.

⁴⁰ van Noorel, Anton. ‘Zes activisten aangehouden na blokkade bij ingang Rijksvastgoedbedrijf: ‘Verkoop grond Zeewolde niet voor datacenter!’ *de Stentor*. 14 Mar 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.destentor.nl/veluwe/zes-activisten-aangehouden-na-blokkade-bij-ingang-rijksvastgoedbedrijf-verkoop-grond-zeewolde-niet-voor-datacenter~adf4483e/>

4.3 ‘Doing is Believing’

At first glance, I was able to observe many of XR’s feats in prefigurative politics. From their non-hierarchical format prefiguring equality and empowerment to the movement’s values which are rooted in ideas of nonviolence, care, and wellbeing (lovingly termed ‘regen’ after ‘regenerative culture’). Not only does their nonviolence make them less alienating to the public and more effective at mobilization, their practice of such values demonstrate those of the healthy, caring, and nonviolent human and non-human communities they aim to foster through their advocacy.

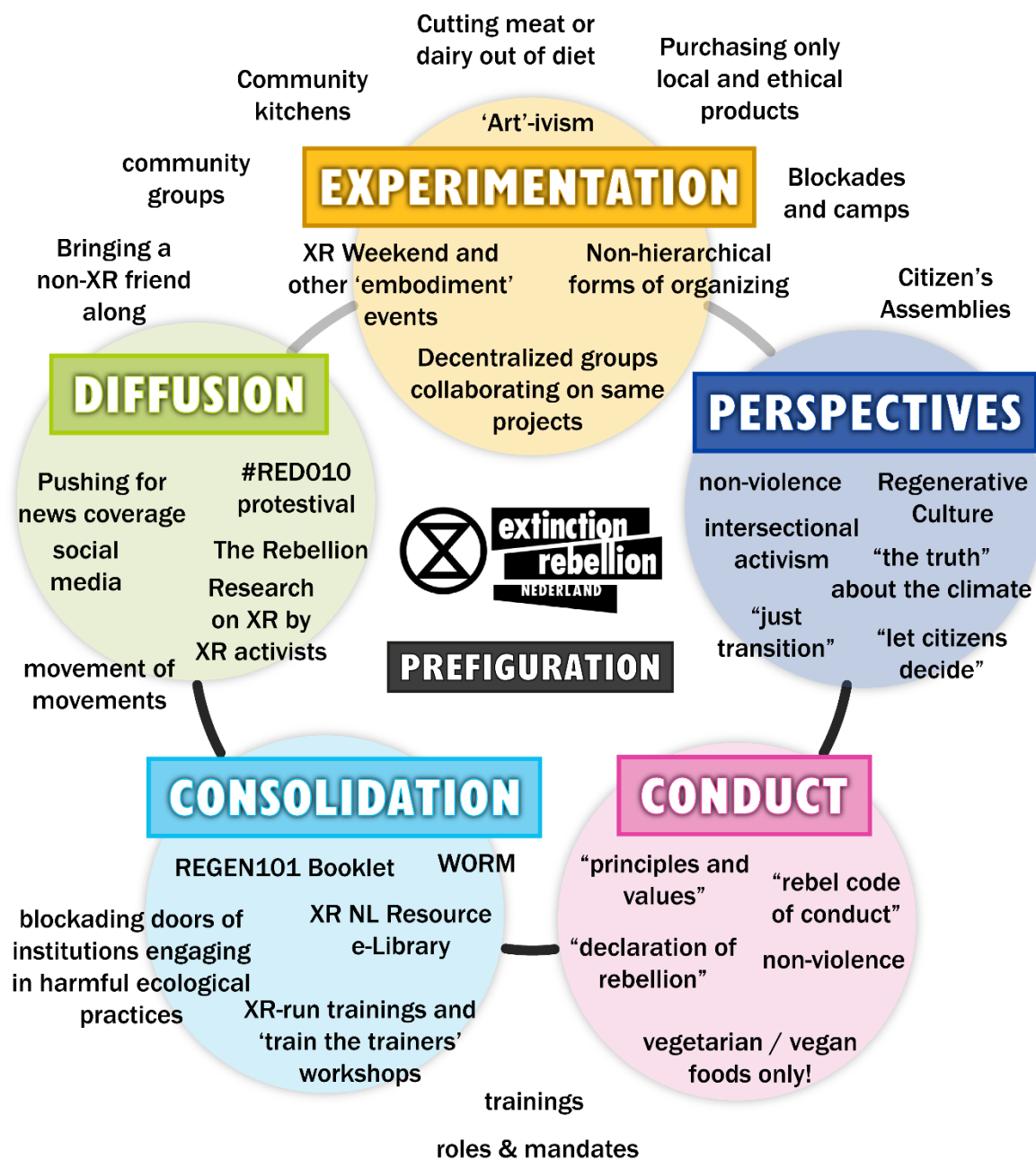


Figure 4. Summary of XR NL prefigurative practices mapped onto Yates’ (2015 model of prefiguration

As we waited for an afternoon while the staff scrambled to follow protocol before a representative finally emerged to engage in dialogue with our group's spokesperson, the rebels were exposing the mechanisms of power by attempting to literally stop it in its tracks. Whether police came by offering space blankets or coarsely asking for our identification, telling us to get off the property, or carrying some of the rebels into their vans – the rebels remained civil, polite, and non-violent. This starkly demonstrated why the kinds of relations on which power is currently based are ultimately unnecessary, counterproductive, and destructive given the scope of the climate crisis.

Another example of prefiguration can be seen in the organization of street-style Citizen's Assemblies – such as during the #RED010 protestival – which perform the movement's pursuit for participatory and democratic decision-making processes which include local communities in matters pertinent to their livelihoods. Making all of this possible is XR's decentralized organizing which empowers and enables local groups and individuals to be autonomous and recruit, act and communicate the movement message in the most applicable context rather than waiting for instruction from distant leaders through a hierarchical system.

These enactments reveal that while prefiguration has been criticized for its lack of efficacy and impact on real structural change, XR's – inherently prefigurative – direct approach, nonviolence, and decentralized organization can be considered strengths to its strategy and efficacy. As rebels serenaded the Ministry of Finance building with chants of: “The oceans are rising and so are we”; “One solution, revolution”; “No more carbon, no more oil, keep the carbon in the soil!”; and the frank “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now!” These chants and slogans are meant to be taken literally (as Graeber illustrated with the Seattle protestor's slogan: “This is what democracy looks like”) as a prefigurative performance of what the alternative world looks like.

While XR's actions make up all of what some people know about the movement, their movement-building practices were oftentimes the star of the show for me. Watching how new norms informed by political framings of equality and community were established to guide all sorts of practices – from meetings and actions to mopping up the leaky washing machine and cooking dinner. Members worked simultaneously in order to level the value of different tasks, they rotated positions of responsibility, and more often than not in company, with one or more people, in these little groups of affinity.

Even beyond action, organizing, and coalition-building, there were also diffuse forms of activity taking place that related to less specific movement goals. Certain kinds of communication and negotiation are put forth as a precondition for a good decision and sensible group norms, thus for the production of communal living. Evidence of this communication can be seen in the ways rebels problem-solve, regularly described as a source of a sense of efficacy and empowerment.

Learning to communicate differently in order to make decisions and compromise maintains group morale but was also a crucial ingredient for constructing their shared norms and conduct. As I observed and experienced events, actions, and interactions alongside and together with these activists, I was growing more and more fascinated by the practices they had developed, disseminated, and embedded within their lives, their groups, their movement, and their local communities. To take a closer look, I introduce you to XR's 'Regenerative Culture'.

5 Regenerative Cultures

Regenerative Culture – also referred to as Regen – is a collection of practices and principles aimed at supporting and improving the physical and mental wellbeing of movement actors in order to create “healthy, resilient, and adaptable” human communities that “care for the planet and for life in the awareness that this is the most effective way to create a thriving future for all of humanity” (XR Sydney, 2020, p. 12). These practices are outlined as five forms of “mutually supporting” through care.

As activist **NO** describes:

...For me, it's about having care and connection as a priority, caring for each other and caring for oneself and for the rest of the world – other people and animals and nature and all this stuff

NO, personal interview, 12 May, 2022

REGENERATIVE CULTURE INCLUDES A HEALTHY FOCUS ON MUTUALLY SUPPORTING THROUGH:

Self-care	how we take care of our own needs and personal recovery from this toxic system.
Action care	how we take care of each other whilst we undertake direct actions and civil disobedience together.
Interpersonal care	how we take care of the relationships we have, being mindful of how we affect each other, taking charge of our side of relationships.
Community care	how we take care of our development as a network and community, strengthening our connections and adherence to these principles and values.
People and planet care	how we look after our wider communities and the earth that sustains us all.

Figure 5. Five Forms of ‘Care’ Practiced by Regenerative Cultures

A nebulous concept by definition, regenerative culture advocates for mutual support through care for the self, for others, during actions, for the community, and for the planet at large. Through these practices, regenerative culture has been shown to pursue four main goals: (1) moving away from individual blame towards shared empathy and grief (Bond, 2019); (2) devotion to an ethic of care thereby rejecting violence and promoting wellbeing; (3) collaboration and cooperation (known as ‘we are all crew’ within XR); and (4) mitigation for unjust hierarchies of power to make space for the voices of many (Pigott, 2019). In doing so, regenerative culture advocates for the embodiment of the norms, values, and practices emblematic of the society activists wish to prefigure in their activism.

The term ‘regenerative cultures’ as used by XR is directly adopted from works of systems theorists and scholars of deep ecology Daniel Wahl – author of *Designing Regenerative Cultures* (2016) – and Joanna Macy (Macy, 2006; Macy & Johnstone, 2012) who speaks to matters of ‘active hope’ and the ‘work that reconnects’ people to nature at large.

REGENERATIVE CULTURE OR CULTURES

In his abundant writings and appearances, Wahl highlights that regenerative cultures are “unique expressions of the potential inherent in the people and places of a given bioregion” (Wahl, 2016; Wahl, 2020b). This is why in his writings he uses the term in the **plural**. On the other hand, despite being directly derived from Wahl’s book, XR’s definition had used and in some places continues to use the term in the singular. Wahl addressed this distinction in a letter ‘To XR with gratitude: why the plural in ‘Regenerative Cultures’ matters’ (2020), in which he highlights that a key characteristic of a regenerative culture is that it is place-sourced and expresses the uniqueness of its local cultural and ecological diversity. Despite being a global movement today, XR was formed in the UK and continues to receive criticism for its middle-classness, lack of diversity, and unsuitable tactics for engaging minorities such as strategically seeking mass arrest to inundate the police and justice system (see Bell, 2021; Cox, 2019; Knights, 2021; Wretched of The Earth, 2019).

Since such challenges are inevitable when a popular white-led movement’s structures, methods, and tactics are imported to other locales without adjustment (see Morgan, 2021), speaking about regenerative cultures in the plural can contribute to decolonizing the process of building a global movement, thereby facilitating the co-creation of diverse regenerative cultures everywhere (Wahl, 2020a). As Gupta & Ferguson (1992, p. 18) note – “In suggesting the requestioning of the spatial assumptions implicit in the most fundamental and seemingly innocuous concepts in the social sciences such as “culture”, “society”, “community”, and “nation”, we do not presume to layout a detailed blueprint for an alternative conceptual apparatus. We do, however, wish to point out some promising directions for the future.” In line with this perspective, this thesis recognizes that the regenerative culture(s) observed in the field are manifestations of locales specific to the XR NL activists involved in this research.

To me, regenerative cultures largely evokes Tsing et al. (2017) when they speak of collaborative efforts of art and survival in a ‘more-than-human anthropocene’. As a result, ‘Regenerative Culture’ brings to the forefront the emergent characteristics of the deeply relational nature of engaging in climate crisis advocacy. This chapter takes the opportunity to shed some light on this holistic and multidimensional concept as well as its material and incorporeal applications for movement actors before, throughout, and beyond their activism.

I first discovered Regenerative Culture long before my fieldwork and my first XR source on the concept was a 36-page document created by XR Sydney for a workshop they had been organizing called: REGEN 101. This workshop was devised in response to XR Working Groups and the wider community seeking to learn more about what ‘regenerative culture’ really means. During this one-day workshop, XR Sydney cover Self-care and Burnout, Intersectional Work, Mindfulness, Earth Emotions,⁴¹ and Nonviolent Communication, as well as provide tools and techniques for activists to “build resource and resilience” (XR Sydney, 2020).

Through a discussion of these themes and a vignette of my experiences at an XR-organized ‘Psychology of Climate Activism’ weekend, this section pursues an answer to the question: **How do movement actors engage in prefigurative practices on the micro-level?** The practical applications and manifestations of regenerative cultures vary greatly from mind/body practices and intersectional work to advocacy for burnout prevention and non-violent communication. This chapter sheds light on the diverse personal practices that emerge during activists’ daily life and mobilization. The first section begins by providing a brief summary of the numerous insights I gathered on ‘regenerative culture’ throughout my year-long relationship with the concept.

I open with activist **NO**’s thoughts on regenerative cultures:

I see the main functions of regenerative cultures as a culture but also as a practice in the movement think structurally and so on. It holds space for emotions [...] but besides that, it also has the function of – it’s more like having a vision of a more regenerative world that is more caring and more connected and more loving and so on. I think the way we’re trying to work in the movement as a structure but also as a culture, is very much related to the kind of world we do want to have. [A world] that is more regenerative, more inclusive, more fair, so things like non-hierarchy or different democratic practices, all these kinds of things are things we would like to build, like to see more of in the world.

⁴¹ ‘Earth Emotions’ is a term coined by environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht (see Albrecht 2007; 2019) meaning any positive and negative emotions experienced towards and in relation to the planet Earth.

5.1 Prismatic Ethic of Care

*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation,
and that is an act of political warfare.*

Audre Lorde

The words of Audre Lorde lead the way into the self-care landing page of XR’s regenerative cultures website.⁴² Following feminist movements who have long been engaging with self-care, collective care, and wellbeing as themes of political significance for movement-building and social change, XR has grounded self-care as the foundation for the movement’s ‘regenerative culture’. When asked what Regenerative Culture means to them, activists across the board placed emphasis on self-care as the soil from which other acts of care can sprout. Most agreed that regenerative culture must begin with the preservation of individuals’ emotional and physical wellbeing or “being the calm for yourself in moments of excitement, tension, and anxiety” (**DE**, personal interview, 17 Feb, 2022).

In our conversations, it is clear that questions are being posed within and beyond the movement: how can our work for climate justice be made less draining, stressful, and likely to lead to burnout and exhaustion? How do we bring our values and politics to life in our organizations and movements while centering wellbeing (of the marginalized) and dismantling oppressive social hierarchies in our organizational structures? How can our movement be transformative through its embodiment of the change we wish to see in the world? Regenerative Culture’s answer to these questions begins with caring for oneself.

Self-care urges activists to recognize their susceptibility to unique stressors due to the overwhelming nature of the “multiple, simultaneous, cascading crises that are washing over our culture and washing it away” (**RJ**, personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022). Some rebels described their “own more established practices” of self-care, such as stretching every morning to open their body or engaging in “small decisions that are regenerative” by being attentive to one’s limits and boundaries (**NO**, personal interview, 12 May, 2022). Others describe self-care as a shift in consciousness, a process in which “they embrace again being human and let go of all the ideologies that are disempowering for [themselves], for the planet and for other people” (**MA**, personal interview, 8 Mar, 2022).

Due to the movement’s highly decentralized and autonomous organizing, its advocates often highlight that as long as care and connection are at the core of their practices, “the practical part should be very adapted to each context” (**NO**, personal interview). Rather than being about doing things in a specific

⁴² Regenerative Advocates Network, ‘Self Care’, *Regenerative Cultures*, retrieved: <https://xr-regenerativecultures.org/selfcare>

or right way, **NO** expresses that care lies “in the small decisions”; in “trying to prioritize care, and trying to understand what that would mean in each situation”. Other activists were more focused on care – and Regenerative Culture as a whole – as a tool to ensure wellbeing of activists particularly during direct action and civil disobedience, thereby ensuring the movement’s longevity and the resonance of its message. This is highly prevalent in the way more action-oriented activists shared that ‘Regen’ was most important and necessary to them when it was supporting overt political action, suggesting less faith in care as a prefigurative political practice in itself.

The call for ‘inner work’ was echoed by another activist – **LI** – a prolific feminist human rights activist, mother, grandmother, and potter. From the early 1980s, **LI** worked intensively on migrant and sex worker issues, forced labor, and slavery-like practices in the Netherlands and across the globe as well as support programs for women to resist and overcome the negative impacts of cultures and religions on their rights. The central tenet of her practice involved internal and personal as well as collective processes of reflexivity and mindfulness, which she believed to be essential for humanity and particularly activists who seek to engage in intersectional work

The first time I spoke with **LI** her spirit was intoxicating and passion infectious as she spoke of the “precarity” she witnessed while providing aid during natural disasters or incidents of violence and the absolute necessity for structures that facilitate and provide care. She shared that at her older age she joins XR actions in low-risk Wellbeing roles and participates in workshops, potlucks, and other community events in Utrecht. Her primary preoccupation regarding XR was her observation that some activists – “smart people, students...where is this energy going?” – had a lack of “curiosity” and appreciation for the “long-term,” “conscious,” “deep,” inner work that ‘Regenerative Culture’ represents to her. She felt that the majority of XR meetings, actions, and discourse were action-oriented to the point of overshadowing other elements she believed were crucial to successful prefigurative political practice. To **LI** there was undeniable value in connecting with one’s body through bodywork – “when you talk to your body, the body talks back” – and discovering one’s own true meaning of ‘wellbeing’ – “When you talk about ‘wellbeing’, what do you mean? When you’re ‘unwell’, what do you do?”

On the other hand, another activist – **NO** – who was due to host her own embodiment / bodywork session during the Rebellion of spring 2022 contends that “because the movement is decentralized, all the groups are adapted to find their own ways, right? So I also wouldn’t want to have such a uniform culture. In some groups it’s nicer to have this more and then others it doesn’t work as well. And they have other ways of being.” She believes that besides “having care and connection as a priority” which she admits are “quite open and quite ambiguous [as] it should be because the practical part of it, [she

believes] should be very adapted. Regeneration doesn't have to be slow and meditative and it doesn't have to be rituals. Regenerative culture has been more prevalent [in the movement] and it hasn't matched everyone, which makes sense. So it's nice to also look into this diversity of practice and what regenerative means for everyone, or for each person.”

Activist **NO** speaks to communal practices of prefiguration when she spoke of the community care practices enacted through community organizing by friend organization of XR, the Amsterdam-based De Sering – a “community kitchen, public space, experimental restaurant, and whatever you want to make of it.”⁴³ She describes – echoing Monbiot’s call for “private sufficiency, public luxury” (Monbiot, 2017):

What they are doing there is very much related to what kind of world we want to build, you know? Where food is healthy and affordable for everyone, accessible. Where it is more community-based, where it brings people together to learn together and to share knowledge, skills, get to know each other, create a community. That's a very clear practice of what we want to bring more of in the world. They're really growing now and they're doing such cool things. They had a kitchen and a place where they served food two times a week and it was like €2,50 for soup and a main dish, or something like that. And then also people from XR came there and there were meetings and trainings and they also wanted to be more engaged in the neighborhood. And connect activism more to the local context and make it accessible also.

NO, personal interview, 12 May, 2022

She goes on to say that “at actions, for example, there is food [...] Instead of having a meritocracy, there are some things that everybody needs and we try to make sure they are there. Just because they are human and they exist and that's what makes them deserve that.” Since activism often demands an immense amount of selflessness, empathy, and compassion in the face of adversity, self-care is spearheaded by efforts towards burnout awareness and prevention on the action front. There is an awareness amongst those I spoke with that one's political work enmeshes with one's daily life. This can include exposure to trauma and pain of oneself or others, misunderstandings, and even violence.

The Regenerative Action Cycle – a model developed by Jon Young to highlights that every stage leading up to and following an action is vital for the activists to arrive prepared, leave invigorated, and restore their energies afterwards. The model is “based on the observation of natural cycles” and likens the stages of preparation, action, and recovery to natural cycles such as the rising and setting of the sun or the transitions from one season to the next. Thus ‘Action care’ serves to promote the self-care and

⁴³ De Sering, ‘What is De Sering?’, Retrieved from: <https://www.de-sering.org/en/wat-is-de-sering>

wellbeing of activists prior to, during, and in the aftermath of actions, as illustrated by XR’s ‘Regenerative Action Cycle’.

In the formulation of this model, the creator Jon Young had been interested in what made “indigenous cultures work well” in comparison to the “dysfunctional” culture he was familiar with. In his pursuit, he identified some cultural points that he believed contribute to “peace, harmony, and cooperation”, which he then synthesized into eight archetypal energies – referred to as ‘shields’. These shields are thought to support activists in “fostering connection and regeneration within themselves as well as their human and non-human communities.”

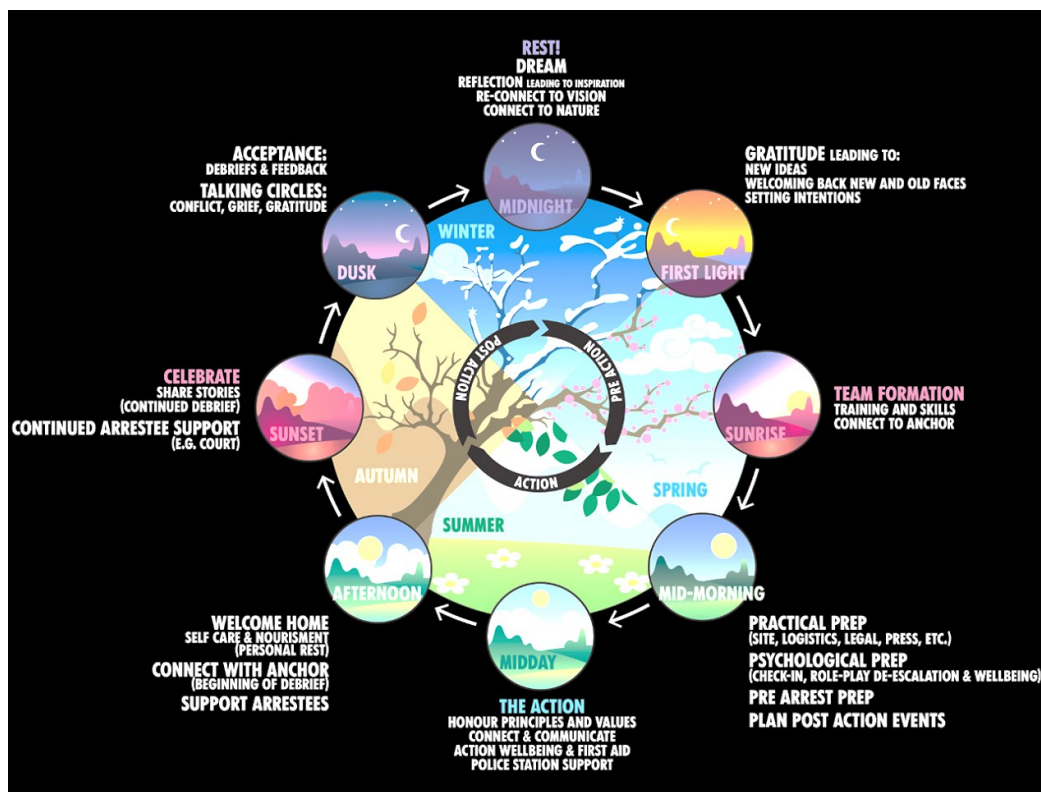


Figure 6. XR’s ‘Regenerative Action Cycle’ drawing parallels between natural cycles of days and seasons and movement cycles of team formation, preparation, and rest.

ON “INDIGNEITY”

Notions of ‘indigeneity’ as being linked to nature, connection, equality, and harmony frequently make appearances in XR’s vast pool of resources and messaging. XR uses the term in solidarity with indigenous claims to land, water, and environmental justice in the belief that they are the first communities to face the direct consequences of the climate crisis “because of their dependence on

and close relationship with the land” This is deemed problematic considering that Indigenous People contribute very little to greenhouse gas emissions and safeguarded 80% of the planet’s biodiversity (Sobrevila, 2008).

In this vein, XR’s use of the term resonates with intentions of solidarity and an acute acknowledgement that Indigenous People – due to their long-term intimate relationship with nature – possess a sophisticated knowledge of the natural world. Thus, through concepts such as ‘regenerative culture’, seek to be active agents of the preservation and dissemination of knowledge vital to tackling the climate crisis. While I agree with all of the above, I note that the concept of ‘indigeneity’ is also a rather relative term – produced and contested within and beyond the movement (Ellison, 2018). This makes it rather tricky to use without explicit demarcation of its meaning; thereby reproducing essentialist conceptualizations of ‘culture’ in the movement’s – as well as my own – engagement with the term.

Nonetheless, I value movement actors’ desire to stand in solidarity with the rights of marginalized groups and believe that every XR group will have its unique grapples with matters of ‘indigeneity’ depending on their region’s historical, geographical, and sociocultural context. XR Quebec, for instance, has written a ‘Declaration of Indigenous Rights’ to describe its policy to the rights of Indigenous Peoples, while the homepage of XR Australia’s website asserts that the movement “acknowledges the First Peoples of all the lands in which we live, love, and rebel” and “[offers their] respect to Elders past and present.”

5.2 Intersectional Work

Intersectional work is described by XR Sydney as “the decolonization of the self, how we connect and communicate with others” (XR Sydney, 2020, p. 17). This reflects an explicit prefigurative rearticulation of existing norms and conduct toward new and alternative forms which recognize that all people possess “internalized prejudices and behaviors” that “we have a duty and an opportunity to...undo” (ibid.). While XR identifies as a ‘non-partisan movement’, they reject “forms of oppression and domination” including anthropocentrism, racism, sexism, eurocentrism, heteronormativity, and classism for they defy multiple of the movements core values.

These forms of oppression are believed to have been coded into our societies and institutions, requiring the movement to problematize them through practices of self-decolonization. Without ‘intersectional work’, XR would not be able to adequately shed light on the contexts of capitalist extraction and dispossession of land and resources that the movement exists within. As a result other climate justice collectives have also urged XR to take colonial appropriations and intersectionality of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism seriously in order to move beyond its white, urban, middle-class biases for which it has been criticized in the past.

Despite XR’s rampant spread around the globe, the grassroots movement was conceived in the UK and later imported to other parts of the world in a pre-made ‘package’ of sorts. This has made it a target of criticism regarding its lack of diversity, middle-classness, and unsuitable tactics for engaging minorities such as strategically seeking mass arrest to inundate the police and justice systems without regard for some individuals’ and communities’ difficult relationships with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, XR has received criticism for not taking a firm stance in critiquing the economic structures that exacerbated the climate crisis in the first place.

In Holland we don’t really understand what Regenerative Culture is. We took on the XR branding and we tried to imitate what we saw on the social media of XR UK – like many European delegations tried to do and most of them found it impossible and started having discussions about what they were doing. In Holland we almost managed to imitate [XR UK] so well that we thought we knew what we were doing. But, there is so much writing and so much reading and so many meetings happening in the UK that do facilitate people with the slow and steady process of “unplugging from the matrix” and opening your mind to another paradigm.

RJ, personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022

While currently **RJ** and other activists feel that “Regenerative Culture and wellbeing have basically been mashed together and it’s just” **RJ** specifically addresses the way “Regen is [reduced to] that you are nice to each other and have cookies at your actions” adding “I wish I was exaggerating more than I am by putting it this way.” While I hear plea for practices of regenerative cultures to diffuse beyond wellbeing, and definitely beyond times of action, I do note that the micropolitical and structural practices of care that ensure there is food or snacks at action may seem insignificant but makes a significant difference in terms of providing basic necessities and support for actors during mobilizations.

Classic activism kinda failed in the Netherlands, it couldn't pull anything off, so when XR came, all the usual suspects gathered under its flag and changed literally nothing about the way they were operating, they just got a bigger Instagram account.

RJ, personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022

He felt that when XR was imported into the Netherlands, it was “so well-branded and smooth”, “a little bit too tempting, a little bit too convenient” to take the science, principles, and tactics provided by them and just get to it. While this was definitely successful in terms of bringing a lot of eyes to the movements, a number of activists expressed to me their perceived lack of “inner work” necessary for “changing your mind and changing your cultural outlook and building a regenerative culture together.”

By not thoroughly engaging with the multivariate impacts of the crisis, **RJ** fears that XR will be more easily co-opted by people who seek to “greenwash the nonsense of the ‘old world’ ...to support their own position in [its] hierarchy.” He goes on to share “I think XR tried to grow too quickly and started recruiting people at its maximum rate. Let’s mobilize 3% of the population and we’ll see the change. But it takes time to go through the whole process, to ‘detox’ your mind, to listen and reconnect.”

5.3 Rebellious Emotions

Through its ethic of care extending from the self to non-human life at large, Regenerative Cultures write a new story for climate activists struggling to resist violence and promote wellbeing. Regen supports the Rebellion through its actions and beyond through non-violent communication, provision of necessities, and burn-out awareness and prevention efforts. With a call for further decolonization training, the movement aspires towards mitigating for unjust hierarchies of power to make space for the voices of many.

Regenerative Culture also speaks to the internal world of activists in its conscious choice to move away from individual blame and towards practices of shared empathy and grief. To better illustrate this, I look back to the XR ‘Psychology of Climate Activism’ weekend event organized by XR Enschede back in March. I had two main goals for this weekend: First, I was eager to take part in collective practices of navigating and processing emotion with an interest in learning new practices that could support movement actors’ pursuits; and second, I sought to reflect on this chapter’s research question: **How do movement actors engage in prefigurative practices on the micro-level in their macro pursuits of transformative change?**

The following pages take you through a brief vignette accompanied by a collection of photos from the weekend. Although some of the activists were happy to be featured in this research, I chose to anonymize everyone with an XR ‘rebel’ sticker to maintain privacy and hold onto the intimate magic of the moments captured.

XR WEEKEND

I was up before the sunrise on the 6°C morning of Saturday March 19th. A fellow rebel, **WD**, a middle-aged mom based in the area, who was often involved in the organization of XR weekend (this was the 5th of such events) was going to pick me up from Almelo train station at 10.45 AM which meant a 2 hour train journey awaited me. Upon arrival, **WD** was incredibly open and friendly and we sat on a bench outside Almelo train station waiting for another rebel, **SA**, who was going to be joining us in the van. While we waited, I scarfed down a *kaasbroodje* as **WD** asked me where I was from, where I was based, and how I came to learn about and become a part of XR. Her demeanor was welcoming yet sharp. She mentioned that she only had two spots in the van, one in the passenger seat and one in the back where she had set up a bed and hung up a little net with coffee, toothpaste, a toothbrush, a lighter, and other miscellaneous necessities. She asked if I would be comfortable sitting in the back and hiding from the police until we made it to the outskirts of town and I was more eager than she had anticipated.



Image 4. The setting in the back of the van featuring my travel bag and yoga mat.

This led the conversation to her sentiments towards the police, which from what I gathered were largely negative. She did not appreciate being identified mandatorily without any reasonable suspicion and expressed distaste for the mandated CoronaCheck QR codes as another affront to our privacy, sentiments that I often

encountered amongst the Gen Xers of XR who spoke to matters of freedom of speech, choice, and movement as essential to their sense of autonomy.

Within 10 minutes we had arrived at our destination: the *Opporren* in Zenderen. Founder Ico, an outspoken climate activist himself, had been organizing team canoe trips and recreational outdoor activities here for 35 years. During these outings, he noticed that something changed within the group under the influence of these experiences and, as a result, the *Opporren*'s methodical experiential learning approach was conceived.



Image 4. Vast green fields at the entrance of Opporren experiential learning center.

Since then, **Ico**'s organization has been offering teambuilding activities for volunteers, professionals, secondary school students, and other special target groups such as individuals with disabilities, with psychological problems, asylum seekers, and the homeless. For the past five years, XR has collaborated with Ico on these XR Weekends. The two-day program was advertised for those who “feel anxious about the climate crisis”, struggle with “confrontation with authority”, or would “simply like to increase [their] coping skills for when emotions inevitably arise during Rebellion.”⁴⁴

When I arrived we began with a simple exercise: list the things that activism gives you and the things it takes away. Some activists describe experiencing discrepancies between their as an activist and the lives of friends who aren't living the same way or advocating for the same causes. They share that while activism has brought them “alignment”, for some it has hurt their connections with peers, creating rifts, disconnection, and alienation.

⁴⁴ Quotes from XR Weekend Facebook event page. Retrieved here: <https://fb.me/e/3bfAzSuYt>

The work of climate activism is described as so incredibly pressing that many feel a great burden of responsibility to take on and partake in as many tasks and actions as possible with little consideration for other aspects of their personal lives. In **Oscar**'s words: "Activists are not very good at balancing their needs and the needs of others." As they spoke of feelings of "fear", "doubt", and "helplessness"; feelings of "grief" and "guilt"; feelings of "self-righteousness", "indignation", and "anger" one feeling seemed to bring about another.

To address these feelings, Oscar taught us about cycles of oppression in which targeted individuals or communities can become conditioned to internalize intergenerational patterns of oppression and unless we break these cycles we risk becoming oppressors ourselves, internalizing the process and accepting misinformation, biased histories, and stereotypes. To break the cycle, it was essential people go against their conditioning towards paths of liberation. These paths are described as paved with practices that raise awareness about co-existing systems of oppression, leading us to both acknowledge and confront our personal responsibility in these cycles as well as build bridges that shift our consciousness and promote values of forgiveness and empowerment. This approach seeks to be empowering for actors of change while minimizing feelings of anxiety and overwhelm – barriers that are exacerbated by the same systems that exacerbate the climate crisis.

As I listened to these individuals – whose experiences I honored and felt privileged to be privy to – I also heard about the ways in which this work brought them "purpose", "fulfilment", "meaning", "connection", and an alignment between one's values and daily life practices. As we came together and experimented with practices of empathy, reconciliation, and non-judgmental active listening, a collective sense of awareness and respect was being developed, poignantly captured by the words of retired Geography teacher **LO** on our last night: "I feel at home [here today] and I'm wondering if I will feel at home tomorrow evening."

Extinction Rebellion NL has brought together a sizeable community of widely diverse individuals over one cause. Seeing these emergent relations form before my eyes clarified to me some of the ingredients of the "secret sauce" that gave XR its quick rise.

Oscar facilitated these exercises called ‘Constellations’. One by one, the rebels put forth a question, issue, or theme to the group and – with Oscar’s guidance – the problem is ‘drafted’ with different roles (so-called ‘representatives’). This involved the individual selecting someone to physically represent their emotions – “Will you sit in the corner and be my grief?” – or people in their lives – “Could you lie down on the floor and represent my father who passed away?” Through this iterative process, the problem or question is spatially clarified allowing the main individual to visualize, interact with, and perhaps understand, resolve, or overcome the unconscious relationships and dynamics that play a role in their situation.



Image 5. Photo taken by facilitator during the grief constellation. One activist is laying down to represent a father who had passed away, the other portraying the deceased ‘mother Earth’

As a ‘representative’, we were asked to notice what comes up when we occupy these physical positions and abstract roles, and ask ourselves “Is this my feeling or the feeling of the space?” We were reminded that we did not need to know the details of what someone was sharing in order to understand or relate, in fact in Oscar’s words “Constellations work best when we know little” because we were less likely to intellectualize our experiences, instead navigating them through embodied emotional reflexivity. Through embodiment and relationship practices, these exercises strived to create a ‘bigger we’ that extended past our personal circles, neighborhoods, friends, cities, or nations in recognition of our interdependence across borders through our planet.

In between sessions we huddled around to enjoy the sunshine or make some tea in the communal kitchen. I was astonished at the wide variety of transformative practices these activists engaged in in their private and daily lives. Conversations about enacting more sustainable alternative world through the conscious avoidance of air travel emerged, as well as XR “origin stories” and people’s other political projects beyond the Rebellion. One of the activists made quite an impact on me with her writing campaign ‘Warme Groet’ (Dutch for Warm Greetings) – in which, every week, she writes a template letter that citizens concerned about the climate can edit and send to their local politicians to “keep MPs sharp on their climate goals.”⁴⁵

I could understand since the beginning that [Regenerative Culture] was about reconceptualizing the way we live in this world. The way we think and the way we take care of ourselves. The things we do...Living in a certain place shapes you and then you keep reproducing that. How do we create a new culture? How do we try to be different and embrace again our being human and let go of all these ideologies that are disempowering for us, for the planet, for other people, and co-create a new place where we can all thrive. So yeah, I got really busy in the inner component of XR – the community and organization and, you might call it, ‘prefiguration’: the way you try to prefigure the new world ‘within the shell of the old’, like in your own organization through democracy, like a new way of working together and a new way of communicating.

MA, personal interview, Mar 8, 2022

Transcending generational, cultural, and gender-based barriers, the activists ultimately came together to learn more about themselves and like-minded others in the hope of understanding how best to navigate and balance one’s personal wellbeing with their climate action.

The constellations were a unique experience for me. One activist navigated her sense of moral righteousness about the crisis, another explored the feelings she harbors regarding her father’s passing that have intermingled with her colossal grief for the Earth. The purpose of the constellations was to temporarily breach our boundaries of rationalization, independence, and self-sufficiency so we can face and share the stories – and accompanying emotions – that we carry with us. Once we are aware and present, we are better able to take responsibility for developing skills of emotional reflexivity and

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.warme-groet.org/>

regulation that are the foundation for engaging in effective prefigurative action both in intimate as well as public political arenas.



Image 6. Photo taken by facilitator during a constellation.

Besides constellations, we also partook in an exercise in which we stood across from one another in two parallel lines with one side representing activists and the other representing climate change deniers or people simply apathetic about the climate crisis. **HU**, a 30-something year old single dad, was the first to go. He shared that he harbors a lot of anger and rage for climate crisis deniers and perceives them as selfish, preposterous, and even evil. Despite Oscar prompting him – and the group – to express and channel vulnerability rather than rage, **HU** held on to his anger in the belief that he is entitled to feeling that way, a sense of indignation quite common within activist communities (see Jasper, 2014).

At the same time, we were prompted to imagine what it was like in the shoes of a ‘skeptic’. Sentiments that came up in those roles included: ‘I did the best I was taught,’ ‘I don’t know how to behave when the game changes, it makes me insecure and defensive,’ and ‘I derive some sense of stability from the existing oppressive structures and so I am struggling to let them go.’ Similar sentiments to those described by another interlocutor of this research, **RJ**, who said: “If people feel afraid and disempowered...they’ll hurry back to known supports. Even if [they] are diabolical.” (personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022). The purpose of the exercise was to explore how when activists are vulnerable – rather than

resorting to force – they make it easier for those outside the movement to connect with them and their message. This furthers the cause and nurtures a ‘regenerative’ community capable of paving a way to the new world. As the evening approached and we started setting up for dinner – a menu of vegan Indonesian-inspired recipes envisioned and prepared by our own HU – there was magic in the air as a group of newly acquainted strangers collaborated and cooperated over a much-desired warm meal.



Image 7. Photo taken by facilitator at the end of constellation.

Images 8 and 9. Our delicious Indonesian dinner followed by poached pears.



While saying that XR NL is a heterogeneous group of people is an understatement, XR NL has a way to go in terms of diversity. While myself and another German activist being the only non-Dutch participants there made sense given our geographical context, besides myself there were no people of color in attendance. Nonetheless, it was evident that what brought these people together were the shared values and ethics of care for human and non-human life alike that Regenerative Cultures speak to.

6 Growing Pains

We all embody the system. So we all buy into it. What we learned and are learning [in XR], it's hard work. We need to have people that give you this different knowledge, that spread these different ideas, and you need to like them also because otherwise you're not going to open up your mind to different ways of being [...] It's a tricky one, because indeed the climate crisis is so urgent and pressing that a lot of people tend to put Regen and urgency in opposition because Regen encourages you to consider other stuff, that it's not all about taking streets, but it's really about building a community in which you can really see and understand what you need instead of going over your boundaries to always be on the street, for example. It ensures that the more you check in with yourself and learn about your boundaries, the more you're going to respect them [...] So there is definitely a tension between Regen and Actions. Focusing on mass mobilization instead of looking into other strategies through which you can change the system. And, again, changing ourselves takes time and effort and you need to be willing to do that. It takes effort to pause and say no to things and say, "Hey", like, "What's up with other parts of my life?" or indeed, like, "Let's unlearn and then let's grow and let's develop together and as a community."

MA, personal interview, 8 Mar 2022

In Chapter 4 we looked into the various prefigurative practices that play a significant role in XR's actions-based strategy for transformative change to find a wide array of mobilization forms, multiple 'game-plans' for prefigurative coordination, and an ethos supporting the reproduction practices called Regenerative Cultures. In Chapter 5 we further delve into this concept as a symbol of regenerative caring practices and a powerful tool with which to initiate conversations about intersectionality and climate justice. We also caught glimpses of how movement actors embody and enact the movement's strategy of change through practices of care and (emotional) reflexivity that not only support actors' wellbeing through the creation of support structures for those suffering with oppression, trauma, or burnout, but also curtails behavior that does not necessarily graft onto political axes of power (such as bullying, ego trips, or hostility) to minimize the replication of oppression within the movement and improve organizational effectiveness.

This chapter seeks to take a step back and reflect on XR NL's overall trajectory towards their intended goals of climate justice through prefigurative practices of transformative change.

6.1 Tactical Frustrations & Pandemic Blues

Reflecting on the early days of XR, professor **AN** who specializes in political ecology and environmental anthropology describes how the movement began at a time “when climate change, despite the overwhelming consensus among those of us who study environmental issues about the climate – climate change was still very low on the political agenda and the broader cultural agenda.” Thus at the time one of XR’s aims “was not to focus on specific methods or solutions” to increase awareness and make it to the forefront of political and public debate. While this intended to avoid splitting the movement – since people have different visions for what future solutions really look like in practical terms – “the minute you begin to get into those specifics of how you get there, you fragment the movement” (**AN**, personal interview, 27 Apr, 2022).

In order to avoid this fragmentation – which significantly encumbers XR’s goal of mobilizing 3.5% of the population – the movement continues to avoid talking about “pathways to action” despite many activists like **AN** feeling like “we’re at a stage where climate change is now higher in the political agenda, is much more present in social and cultural discourse...and it’s really now about: ‘Do we do A, or do we do B?’ or ‘Are we doing this quickly enough? Can we and should we do more of that?’ These kinds of “nuts and bolts of what it actually means to transition” is what seems to be missing from XR’s plans for transformative change. It just won’t work if some of us are willing to go green at all costs while others believe we definitely should not divert to toxic, extractivist, or offsetting alternatives. While many theorists continue to argue that pre-defined ends are not a pre-requisite for effective prefigurative strategy that is capable of enacting change, a lot of activists are at a point where the “focus just on ‘tell the truth’ has sort of run its course.” **AN** brings up Stop Oil describing how

...Activists blockading oil terminals is much more what I’m down with because then it’s really focused: What do we have to do? Well, one thing we have to do is transition immediately away from using fossil fuels like oil. So that focus on actual direct action targeting oil distribution networks and refineries, that speaks to me more than blockading parts of central London.

***AN**, personal interview, Apr 27, 2022*

What **AN** describes as direct action with a clear target is the coordination that is often overlooked when people perceive means-ends-equivalence as strategic simply because the means resemble the ends when in fact it is the direct coordination that allows for significant and sustained complex changes to take place. The type of transformative changes we need to achieve climate justice.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, which began its spread across the globe just under three years ago now – triggered severe social and economic disruptions in its wake. As education, work, and travel came to a screeching halt, so did the possibilities for XR’s disruptive actions. Given XR’s reliance on direct action and civil disobedience, the pandemic brought with it some restrictions that necessitated the movement adopt a ‘hybrid’ strategy – meeting and organizing online while maintaining focus on the possibilities of reclaiming the streets once again.

During this period, many activists developed a complicated relationship with their movement, experiencing increased disillusionment about the possibilities of action, the hybrid approach of organizing, and the mixed bag of public response culminating in tensions between activists who disagreed on how XR should engage with the pandemic and its accompanying government mandates.

For starters, activist **RJ** expressed concerns about the movement’s “bureaucratized” response to the pandemic which he believed limited and censored XR constituents. He asserts that by refusing to take a stance on the pandemic, XR missed an opportunity to strategically employ COVID-19 as illustrative of the possibilities of system change: as nations and large corporations – who have long dismissed the urgent need for prompt and decisive climate policy – enacted wide-scale regulation to mitigate for the effects of the pandemic on their bottom-line. As a result, he felt that “over time, [XR] sort of hollowed out.”

Although XR NL continued to take actions throughout the pandemic, things did not seem to “work here like they used to” as polarization led to widening rifts amongst activist groups. **JE**, an activist I met during XR Weekend laments at how much

A big part of [my disillusionment] is probably because of COVID. As soon as COVID came around there were attempts at having a discussion about how we would respond to that as a movement. But instead of having a discussion about it the way that you would have in a leaderless, sociocratic, new paradigm organization – no, there was already an executive decision from the PR department, basically from the NGO or the imperial core, that we would not be touching covid. We won’t use it to describe anything. And from then on, XR just happened on Zoom calls. And that was not something I could manage, I feel emotional thinking about it. It was not accessible to everybody. For me, it doesn’t work, I don’t do Zoom calls. I do very bad with meetings already when they’re face to face and I just want to work on something together. I’m not interested in just erecting a democracy. But for some people it is very convenient, because that’s just how they’ve been raised, and what they’ve been educated into. And it feels very comfortable and feels like home for them. And during the two years of corona lockdowns, those people basically restructured XR into the toothless NGO that it is now. Which is where my disillusionment comes from. And also from feeling sad that I was unable to stop it even though I saw it happen.

RJ, personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022

more vibrant and populous the movement was before the pandemic and worries that the movement will not be able to overcome these hurdles in the ways it operates today.

This sentiment was echoed by **AN**'s local group who had disintegrated in the wake of the pandemic. To him, a few reasons are responsible for this stagnation. Not only has there not been a continual influx of people over the last couple of years but “existing people have gradually filtered out...partly due to COVID and COVID-related burnout and excess screentime” an experience and perspective that rang true for many of the activists involved in this research. Despite the undeniable effects of the pandemic on the movement, **AN** remains skeptical about attributing all of XR's ‘growing pains’ to the pandemic, wondering if “as we come out of the pandemic, we might begin to see a change and a revival of fortunes, even for groups that haven't tackled their own issues some regards.”

6.2 Beyond Instrumentalism

In line with the pandemic blues, the last prominent fault-line that I was able to observe in my time with XR was the way in which different activists perceived XR's ‘culture’. On the one hand, most activists believe that XR's ‘Regenerative Culture’ served a practical, instrumental, and strategic purpose of maintaining the wellbeing of activists engaged in overtly political direct action and civil disobedience. For as long as rebels are not burning out under the weight of the pressure and leaving the movement in droves, XR is able to continue with its advocacy.

In his observations, **AN** notes that during larger national events, “you see that Regenerative Culture is built into the fabric of the practice” as “times are set aside for regeneration, healing, discussion, and thinking through or working through feelings one might have in the case of arrest.” However, in his time with the local group, he “didn't see [Regenerative Culture] filtering through into the ways things were being done.” During the pandemic this manifested in “lots of screentime and people burning out left, right and center” as “long meetings in front of Zoom really didn't feel regenerative for people who were also doing the same thing at work all day.”

On the other hand, many believed that if XR is serious about achieving the transformative change it speaks of, a Regenerative Culture with a climate justice agenda founded on XR's core values is vital for enacting real change.

Activist **MA** has dedicated a significant amount of his activism towards spreading the principles of Regenerative Culture across the movement. He recounts:

I was struggling because Regen was very much stigmatized and it was very hard, because it was so broad – you know, the co-creation of a new culture – that it was hard to do something with it. People really were reducing it to kind of ‘recharging your batteries’ instead of the whole broader spectrum of practices and ideology and philosophy that Regen is.

MA, personal interview, 8 Mar, 2022

Also concerned about the way Regenerative Culture is considered only for its ancillary rather than explicitly prefigurative role, **RJ** shares:

I feel like in Holland people have been skipping [the inner-work] and just jumping into getting really really active and making themselves irreplaceable and that’s how you got an organization that still calls itself XR but is not the advocacy group for Regenerative Culture that XR needs to be in order to bestow its gift upon the world [...] The actual role of XR in society – XR is society’s regen circle. And XR itself should function based on being 80% regen, 20% everything else including actions. XR’s story should be Regenerative Culture, not that the world is going to sh*t and the only way to solve it is to join us. It’s like no, because you’re not going to consume and brand yourselves out of this, this time. We gotta get out of this mess and into another world through our own collective transformation. And we have to be a catalyst for this transformation. Regenerative Culture ultimately is the gift that XR has to bring to the world, something that wants to happen in the world that XR can be one of the driving forces behind. We have to be the heralds of another model of civilization.

RJ, personal interview, 19 Apr, 2022

Due to the intricate and vastly subjective nature of its philosophy, Regenerative Culture continues to be quite tricky for activists to spread across the movement. Action-oriented rebels struggle to see the short-term, tangible effects of Regenerative Culture practices as they do not align with what they consider to be meaningful climate action. On the other hand, rebels with experience in XR organizing also fear that the activists that are most moved by Regenerative Culture tend to “lack a component of ‘organizational interest’ and thus face some difficulties when trying to spread Regen beyond its core of impassioned enthusiasts.

6.3 Know Justice, Know Peace

Since its emergence, many members of Extinction Rebellion NL have been busy envisioning ways in which XR can better embody an intersectional agenda in its pursuit of climate and ecological justice, with the aim of ensuring people of different ages, races, abilities, sexualities, and religions feel welcome and are able to thrive within the movement. Despite this widespread commitment to intersectionality, fault-lines remain in terms of the movement's tendencies to 'depoliticize' climate change through its 'beyond politics' approach which is thought to privilege moral action over political analysis. Professor **AN** is an active member of XR and has had experiences with local groups in Amsterdam and in Leiden, where he is based. When asked about his local group, he shared that "things [had] happened that have sort of split the people who were involved." What took place was an incidence in which "quite a bit older white Dutch members" had used "racist language and rhetoric that alienated other younger – often non-white – members" who then left and did not return.

Well, I think the trouble is that you have the younger generation in Leiden is very invested in issues of, for example, racial justice. And also, gender and sexuality, like queer activism. [Meanwhile] the older generations of mainly white Dutch, don't see climate activism as intersectional with these other kinds of struggles, even though as someone who has who studied that I know that they are; there's a very clear and obvious historical relationship between the development of the economy that is producing climate change and colonialism, for example, and even today there's still very clear links between say, racism, and climate denialism, et cetera. So there's all these kinds of links, but they don't see it that way. So when you have the younger generation saying: "We'd also like to-" – say – "put information out here about this queer pride march that we're putting out." Then you get them saying: "Well, how is that anything do with climate activism? We don't want to get involved in that." Then inevitably that means that the young members quite rightly say: "We're not really on the same side as these people in many respects

AN, personal interview, Apr 27, 2022

Such interactions – in addition to incidents of "racially insensitive language or racist speech" – can be "profoundly alienating" for non-white members or members for whom climate justice is also about intersection with other forms of political struggle. Rather than politically-minded intersectionality, XR has often taken the path of putting forth its core values – such as commitment to nonviolence and acceptance of everyone committed to climate crisis mitigation – as intersectional awareness. However, by not taking an explicitly intersectional stance, AN believes the movement would be an "apolitical,

disinterested in structural racism party trying to appeal to the climate sensibilities of the majority” – a movement unlike what XR seeks to be, resembling existing forms of environmental organizing such as Millieu Defensie “that don’t tend to position themselves in dialogue with other forms of struggle.”

Despite the persistent resistance to matters of social justice, activists seem broadly and profoundly occupied with matters of intersectionality, some highlighting that XR “had the social justice component [they were] looking for” with its recognition that “the climate crisis intersects with other systems of oppression to indeed be more impactful for certain people than for others” (**MA**, personal interview, 8 Mar, 2022). In addition to the many conversations I was able to have with activists, the gradual adoption of Demand 0 – demanding a just transition in terms of centering the needs and voices of those on the frontline and holding those most responsible accountable – demonstrates a growing interest among local XR groups to incorporate intersectionality within the Dutch movement’s ‘DNA’.

With ‘climate justice’ at the center of the movement’s practices, the future is filled with necessary and exciting possibilities. XR’s apolitical stance resonates with many activists who feel the climate crisis goes “beyond politics” and believe XR’s purpose is to bring together people solely on the basis of their commitment to putting an end to climate and ecological degradation, without dictating their positionality in terms of political affiliation. When asked how she feels about XR’s choice to be apolitical, **NO** says: “Yeah, I think I’m in line with that because [just like] regenerative cultures, for me it’s about certain principles and then the practices can be very adapted to the different contexts.” She goes on to add: “Similarly, I feel that we hold some principles that are not – of course they’re political – but they’re not necessarily in line with a certain political party or a certain political agenda also on other topics, right? Like what we’re saying is political but it’s not. It doesn’t give any clear instructions and it leaves space for adaptation” (personal interview).

While **NO** speaks of explicit political affiliation – which I am happy is not part of XR’s ideology – my qualms with XR’s apolitical stance stemmed from my initial skepticism of XR when I had heard that the movement takes no explicit position in terms of tangible economic, social, or climate policy. As I learn about going ‘beyond politics’ I found that while I valued the spirit that climate change should be everybody’s concern regardless of their various ‘identities’, there is a disregard for the variegated forms of oppression that may resurface if not directly and meticulously combed through, addressed, and navigated collectively by movement actors.

NO’s as well as the vast majority of the other activists’ desire to detach from the politics of the ‘old world’ and replace them with new structures founded on care and nonviolence motivates their position on XR’s apolitical stance. However, without rooting themselves in matters of intersectional climate justice and centering the voices of the marginalized, XR risks recreating existing unjust hierarchies of power in the present as a result of exclusionary and alienating practices and positions held by actors who don’t agree that without intersectional climate action, truly transformative change is unlikely.

Conclusions: Another World is Possible

How would you describe the culture of Extinction Rebellion?

Ideally, we are the revolution.

DA, personal interview, 27 Apr 2022

This research pursued an engaged activist ethnography of the prefigurative practices of Extinction Rebellion Nederland movement actors with specific interest in the role of ‘Regenerative Culture’ in advocating for transformative change through macro-political prefigurative strategy and micro-political prefigurative practices to answer the research question: What role does prefiguration play in XR NL’s pursuit for transformative change?

The focus on the transformative capacity of practice was intended to shed light on the often undervalued and overlooked aspects of engaging in communal (climate) action. With an approach of empowerment, individuals and communities are encouraged to and supported as they take matters into their own hands through various forms of climate action at all levels – from the personal to the public, the individual to the communal. Keeping in mind that the crisis will be part of our future, we will have to increase efforts on all fronts to adequately mobilize so why not bolster reproduction supports and begin laying the foundation with accessible yet political coordination efforts.

While we do not require mass consensus to address the “nuts and bolts” of the climate crisis that **AN** speaks of, this research argues that by breaking down the barriers and creating the right conditions for fostering new forms of relations across what may initially feel like demographic or generational chasms. By centering diversity, designing participatory and engaged democracies, and enacting climate and ecological justice in our smallest locales we come closer to prefiguring these patterns on larger scales.

If Extinction Rebellion intends on fundamentally restructuring the ways existing power structures operate, movement actors must prepare themselves by engaging in collective experimentation in political mobilization but most foundationally in their everyday practices. By bringing the personal into the political and vice versa, XR is able to form political perspectives, ideas, and movement frames that ultimately mirror their ends from the very core practices of each movement actor to their reverberations.

For as long as there are deep-set inconsistencies between the movement's climate justice aims and local groups' and individuals' everyday practices and intrinsic values, XR may struggle with persisting beyond temporary acts of civil disobedience thereby making it harder for their collectively imagined norms, conducts, and material consolidation to enact far-reaching systems change.

Thus I open the doors to other forms of political practices that all people – regardless of age, ability, race, or gender – can partake in, can more effectively propagate the movement's message and bolster its impact. As RJ says: “To make yourself mentally ready to engage with Regenerative Culture is a process as well. You got to meet people where they're at in their process and there's a lot of pain to work through for everybody.”

Through the embedding of wellbeing and care practices within actions and organizing, and through the expansive scope of literature and resources curated to help shape this idea of 'Regenerative Cultures', I argue that one way in which XR NL can revitalize its movement is by challenging doubts that activists and theorists alike may have about the macropolitical value of 'micropolitical' principles and practices such as those which make up 'Regenerative Culture'

With Love and Rage

Appendix A1. Extinction Rebellion

A1.1 Pre-2019 XRNL Demands (*translated from Dutch*)

OUR DEMANDS

- 1** The Government must tell the truth about how deadly our situation is, and must communicate the urgency for change: including what businesses, communities and individuals need to do. Ecological consciousness should be embedded in all education.
- 2** As of now, the Government must enact legally-binding policies to year-on-year reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Netherlands to net zero by 2025. It must remove the excess of atmospheric greenhouse gases by regenerating ecosystems. It must reverse all policies and international agreements not in alignment with that position. It must cooperate internationally to create an economy which stays well-within planetary boundaries.
- 3** The Government must enact and finance a Climate Delta-plan, committing to initiatives and mobilisation of a size and scope necessary to address the ongoing climate crisis. We do not however, trust our politicians to make the bold, swift and long-term changes necessary to achieve this. Hence, we demand a Citizens' Assembly to oversee the changes, as we rise from the wreckage, creating a democracy fit for purpose.
- 4** The Government should ensure the welfare of all living beings as it acts. It must make polluters pay for environmental and social damage and protect the livelihoods of people who may be disproportionately affected.

Extinction Rebellion Nederland. (April 17, 2019) *Who We Are*. Retrieved from:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190417072200/https://extinctionrebellion.nl/en/>

A1.2 XR's Principles & Values – Complete Descriptions

1 WE HAVE A SHARED VISION OF CHANGE

Creating a world that is fit for the next 7 generations to live in.

Our hearts tell us a different world is possible. Our vision of change is sufficiently broad that it can contain a variety of opinions on how best to work towards that change: "A healthy, beautiful world, where individuality and creativity are supported, and where people work together, solving problems and finding meaning, with courage, power and love. This will be underpinned by cultures rooted in respect for nature, genuine freedoms and justice."

2 WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY.

Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – such as "momentum-driven organising".

The change needed is huge and yet achievable. No regime in the 20th century managed to stand against an uprising which had the active participation of up to 3.5% of the population (watch Erica Chenoweth's TEDx talk). We acknowledge that we are in the midst of a massive crisis, one which can be hard to comprehend and cope with. We are experiencing the 6th mass species extinction and we are not taking adequate steps to avert our civilisation from the most horrendous trajectory of climate change. The world is deeply unequal, with wealth and power levers concentrated in a small minority. We have crises in our mental and physical health, including our children, based in different forms of malnutrition and an increasingly toxic environment. We live with the threat of pandemics alongside antibiotic failure. Our financial system is destined for another crisis bigger than the last. There is a global culture of conquering "others", of competition, of revenge and of terrorism.

We recognise that our job may be less about "saving the world" and more about trying to develop our resilience as multiple collapses take places. We are focussed on significant change towards:

- A functioning democracy, where people have real agency in decision making. This would include devolution of power to the level closest to people and communities, with structures to facilitate decision making locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, where appropriate.
- An economy designed to maximise well-being for all people and minimise harm to each other, our fellow creatures and our home planet. We need policies and laws that

achieve greater equality, localised production, reduced consumption, zero carbon emissions and zero waste.

- Creating a regenerative culture. We can begin doing that right now! (See 3. Below and interspersed throughout).

We can focus on symptoms of this toxic system, yet we also we take opportunities to point out that full system change is needed. We also focus on the pillars that keep the current neo-liberal system in place:

- A debt and interest based, deregulated finance sector.
- A fake and decaying democracy.
- A media captured to the interests of exploitative rich people and corporations.

3 WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE.

Creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable.

A regenerative human culture is healthy, resilient and adaptable; it cares for the planet and it cares for life in the awareness that this is the most effective way to create a thriving future for all of humanity. Regenerative culture means improvements year on year, taking small steps to heal and improve, and on all levels, including individuals, communities, our soil, water and air. More than being a network of "activists", we seek to find ways of being and doing that support positive change. This can include ceremony and prayer (in ways that are neither dogmatic nor expected) as formats to find inspiration from things bigger than ourselves. We need to reconnect with our love for ourselves, our country and our people alongside wider neighbours; people and the natural world.

Regenerative culture includes a healthy focus on mutually supporting categories of:.

- Self care: how we take care of our own needs and personal recovery from this toxic system.
- Action care: how we take care of each other whilst we undertake direct actions and civil disobedience together.
- Interpersonal care: how we take care of the relationships we have, being mindful of how we affect each other, taking charge of our side of relationships.
- Community care – how we take care of our development as a network and community, strengthening our connections and adherence to these principles and values.

- People and Planet care – how we look after our wider communities and the earth that sustains us all.

It's about relationships. Our relationships with ourselves and personal histories, our relationships with what we struggle against, our relationships with other individuals day to day, and our relationships as a group – these are completely interdependent. Self-care is also about taking care of the animal parts of the self that respond instinctively to stressful situations with fight or flight or faint.

4 WE OPENLY CHALLENGE OURSELVES AND THIS TOXIC SYSTEM.

Leaving our comfort zones to take action for change.

We have a duty to disobey this system which destroys life on earth and is deeply unjust. Some of us will undertake open ("above ground*") actions that risk arrest and charges. Evidence suggests that such open civil disobedience and direct action are crucial to change (See for example evidence in CounterPower by Tim Gee and This is an Uprising by Engler & Engler). It isn't necessary or required that everyone do this, as for some there are good reasons not to (we ask everyone to take time to be clear on their own circumstances, fears and motivations here). Importantly, our Extinction Rebellion culture should support those of us willing to put ourselves on the line in this way – there are also many support roles that are useful and we need to enable at least 3% of the population to actively participate. We will practice a security culture to the extent that it enables actions to be planned without being intercepted before they are completed. However our civil disobedience and direct actions are in full public light, organisers accept the risks they are taking, and we have issued a "necessity statement" online as to why we believe our actions are justified. However we are not just about being out there and taking action, we must also resource all aspects of a regenerative culture and also take time to reflect on whether what we are doing is effective. We might find it challenging to keep a focus on some aspects of this work, including self-care and looking after each other. There can be a pull to do the next thing, to be "active", but this can lead to burn-out.

There is a value in us making changes in our own lives to reflect the changes needed, such as changing our diets, where we go on holiday and so on (however personal responsibility can be overstated and is based, to some extent, in privilege). For all of these challenges we ask for room, patience and willingness to try new things to see if they support our goals.

*We appreciate and admire those willing to take "below ground" or "covert" actions to fight for environment and social justice, within other settings. For clarity, and for the safety of those

organising in Extinction Rebellion it is important we are clear that all actions taken in the name of Extinction Rebellion are "above ground," i.e. that they are taken in the open and no below ground actions are taken as Extinction Rebellion.

5 WE VALUE REFLECTING AND LEARNING.

Following a cycle of action, reflection, learning, and planning for more action. Learning from other movements and contexts as well as our own experiences.

We don't know how things will change so we are willing to experiment and learn from what we do. Through ongoing questioning, reflection and learning about what has worked elsewhere we will improve what we do and not get stuck in repetitive behaviour. This is an active and ongoing process, requiring time and input for individuals and groups to think about what has gone well and why, what would be better to be done differently.

6 WE WELCOME EVERYONE AND EVERY PART OF EVERYONE.

Working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.

As a movement we are committed to campaigning for the right to life, and for the future life of our children and the planet. We recognise that in order to change the world, we must change the way we think about and form relationships with those we work and ally ourselves with. The world is currently defined by multiple hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. For those lower down these hierarchies, much of the world isn't a safe space. To create safer spaces we need to work actively to continuously build understandings of how these hierarchies operate, so that we can challenge them and build inclusion through making our spaces more accessible. Therefore, for our movement to be safe for everyone, it needs to be safe for the most marginalised.

This principle includes a commitment to making safer spaces to support inclusivity. It is our goal that every individual is welcomed regardless of ethnicity, race, class, gender, gender identity, gender presentation, sexuality, age, income, ability, education, appearance, immigration status, belief or non-belief and activist experience. Every individual in the movement is responsible for creating and maintaining safer, compassionate and welcoming spaces. New people to the movement need to be explicitly welcomed. A simple starting point is adherence to these core principles.

Physical violence or the incitement of violence towards others is not accepted. Discriminatory behaviour, language or behaviour that exhibits racial domination, sexism, antisemitism,

islamophobia, homophobia, ableism, class discrimination, prejudice around age and all other forms of oppression including abusive language towards others, either during an action or elsewhere, is not accepted whether physically or online.

We also recognise that we are complex beings and exhibit many different parts of ourselves at different times and in different circumstances. For example, sometimes we might be caring, at other times judgemental, and at other times carelessly reactive. Some of those parts are parts of us that we're happy to bring, and some of those parts are parts that we're struggling with, or perhaps not even aware they existed until they revealed themselves. With this knowledge, we approach each other from a place of compassion, and encourage each other to increase our own self-awareness.

7 WE ACTIVELY MITIGATE FOR POWER.

Breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation.

The ground on which this network stands is on the relationships between its participants. We will work every day to build trust, respect and reciprocity among all of us. We assume all members to have good intentions and will react against disrespect. We use conflict resolution techniques to deal with conflict in a healthy way that will bring growth to our movement. We ground our work in dialogue, healing, collective transformation and justice. We won't tolerate shaming of each other or bullying in any form. This requires us to be honest and clear with ourselves and each other; we all hold prejudices and biases, and these must be acknowledged rather than dwelled upon negatively. It is everyone's responsibility to change destructive habits and behaviours.

We recognise that our world as it stands is currently structured by various intersecting hierarchies based on class, race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability and so on. As such each person's experience is shaped by their position within these various social hierarchies. For instance, being a black woman one encounters different forms of oppression to a white woman, because of how race and gender combine and compound to shape experiences.

Whilst we aim to live in a world where these hierarchies no longer exist, we cannot simply pretend that they don't within our own network. For this reason we aim to centre voices that are normally the most marginalised, by allowing space for them to speak and encouraging those who normally wouldn't to take leadership / coordination positions. This isn't about deciding 'who is the most oppressed', it's about consciously making space for the people who have to fight the most to be heard, recognised and respected.

In practical terms this means:

- We weight coordinating roles towards marginalised groups.
- Our media messaging includes issues and voices that are normally ignored (e.g. the link between climate change and immigration detention centres). However we are mindful of not trying to speak on someone else's behalf.
- Accessibility is important (in terms of child care, wheelchair access, not speaking in technical jargon), both for meetings and actions.
- We recognise that oppressive behaviours are socially embedded within us, and privileged people are asked to commit to questioning their privilege and to be open to being challenged.
- We refresh those who hold positions of responsibility so that power doesn't get entrenched.
- We embed anti-oppressive practice into our training materials.
- Our strategy is focussed on doing the work it takes to forge genuine alliances with the grass roots movements of the people who are most marginalised.
- We also recognise that sometimes people make mistakes, misjudgements and missteps, and we seek to avoid humiliating exposure when it is clear that an issue needs to be raised and dealt with.
- Having a database, social media and a website; fundraising for meetings, etc, means that there is inevitably a centralisation of some power. To mitigate any power issues that can arise we have an Anchor Circle, whose role is transparent and into which there is a process for people to rotate in and out.

Thinking about these questions is encouraged: If you always do a role, is it possible to train someone else to do it? If someone else is taking leadership on a role, can you learn from them so that you can step in? Can you challenge yourself to take on a more upfront role if this is something you don't usually do? Do you take time to learn about power and privilege? Do you have an understanding of how the power and privilege you hold has an effect on other people and the movement you are part of?

8 WE AVOID BLAMING AND SHAMING.

We live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame.

Blaming and shaming will not serve us in the long run. Whilst a specific campaign may seek to highlight the damaging role played by an institution, including individuals serving that institution, our starting point is that we live in toxic system that has damaged everybody. We can point out behaviour that is unhelpful, exploitative or abusive, and we won't tolerate such

behaviour, yet we don't hand away our love or power by blaming and shaming. This is also true in our interpersonal and group dynamics as well as our relationship to ourselves.

We embrace change that creates unity in diversity; we need to set right the relationships between us, avoiding the interpersonal traps that come from games we may inadvertently play and bringing awareness to the structures that would divide us. We accept that emotion sometimes needs to be expressed, that a period of venting can be necessary. We ask each other for good grace in how we share emotion and to return to a baseline of love, respect and conviviality. We need to be compassionate when mistakes are made. Mistakes are opportunities to learn. We look for ways to connect and understand. Listening deeply to each other is a powerful tool. We especially need to listen to those of us that come from groups whose voices tend to be silenced.

9 WE ARE A NONVIOLENT NETWORK.

Using nonviolent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change.

Non-violence keeps our movement alive. We use non-violence to reveal the true perpetrators of systemic violence that people suffer from daily all over this world. It is our strategy to bring light to the injustice that too many suffer each day. We feel pain from the abuses of the police and others, and we will keep exposing their violence through our discipline. Non-violence has unequivocally been demonstrated to be an effective tool in mass mobilisations (see the work of Gene Sharp and Erica Chenoweth) and so we base a cornerstone of our movement on this.

At the same time we also recognise that many people and movements in the world face death, displacement and abuse in defending what is theirs. We will not condemn those who justly defend their families and communities through the use of force, especially as we must also recognise that it is often our privilege which keeps us safe. We stand in solidarity with those whom have no such privilege to protect them and therefore must protect themselves through violent means; this does not mean we condone all violence, just that we understand in some cases it may be justified. Also we do not condemn other social and environmental movements that choose to damage property in order to protect themselves and nature, for example disabling a fracking rig or putting a detention centre out of action. Our network, however, will not undertake significant property damage because of risks to other participants by association.

10 WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION.

We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power.

We recognise that we can't look to government to solve the world's problems. It tends to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a very privileged few, and often does not have the interests of the majority of people and the natural world at heart. We understand that we must self-organise to meet our own needs, which in the context of Extinction Rebellion means that we are working to equalise power by disrupting the usual pillars of power that govern our lives. In so doing, our intention is to create access to the resources we need, such as democratic structures that ensure everyone has a voice and an influence, information that comes without the bias of the rich and powerful, decent healthcare, education, social care and housing, clean energy production, and protections in law to prevent ecocide.

Any person or group can organise autonomously around the issues that feel most pressing for them, and take action in the name and spirit of Extinction Rebellion – so long as the action fits within Extinction Rebellion's principles and values. In this way, power is decentralised, meaning that there is no need to ask for permission from a central group or authority. We also promote the ideas of "holocracy" over consensus:

- That it may be agreed in a group for one or two people to do a specific task for the group. Those people are then fully empowered to do the task.
- They are best to seek advice and feedback but they don't need anyone's permission to complete the task.
- They are fully responsible for outcomes and should reflect on them and how to improve in future. If anything goes wrong they should help to "clean up".

At the same time, as a network, Extinction Rebellion self-organises to provide for the needs of the people participating within it, working to provide training in strategic action for change, educating ourselves and each other around issues of power, privilege and how to decolonise, creating better accessibility, caring for our emotional needs in relation to working together, and making time for connection and fun.

Extinction Rebellion Global. (2022). *About Us*. Retrieved from: <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>

A1.3 XR NL Structure

HOW DOES XR NL ORGANIZE?

XR organizes in small autonomous group across different scales and temporalities. Within **Affinity Groups**, individuals can occupy specific roles. These include someone representing the group at meetings, someone to facilitate decision-making and mediate internal conflicts, and someone responsible for supporting the wellbeing of those in the group (during Actions) and mediating the facilitator's power within the group dynamic. While hierarchy may be introduced to manage the group's longer term goals or if the group is large enough to require delegation of responsibilities, generally these groups operate in a non-hierarchical fashion.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, all the work that is needed to allow XRNL to operate is split over several **Circles** or Working Groups. Currently XRNL has **Circles** focused on 'Action & Logistics', 'Political Strategy & Change', 'Finance', 'Outreach & Training', 'Regenerative Culture', and more. Each circle has one Internal Coordinator who schedules meetings, provides resources, and assigns roles, and one External Representative who communicates the interests of the group to outer Circles. All of these Circles are said to be 'Anchored' by the **Coordination Circle** which has no direct authority or hierarchy over the other Circles, but simply is focused on supporting and facilitating the activities of all other Circles as well as mediating and informing in moments of disagreement or conflict.

XRNL also adopted XR UK's concept of Community Groups. Community Groups are a way for members from shared communities or identities to connect and work together, thereby creating an XR presence for their community on the local and national levels. In the Netherlands, these include XR NL Families, Scientist Rebellion NL, XR NL Fashion Action, XR Landbouw, XR NL Youth, University Rebellion NL, XR News Media, and XR Healthcare Professionals.

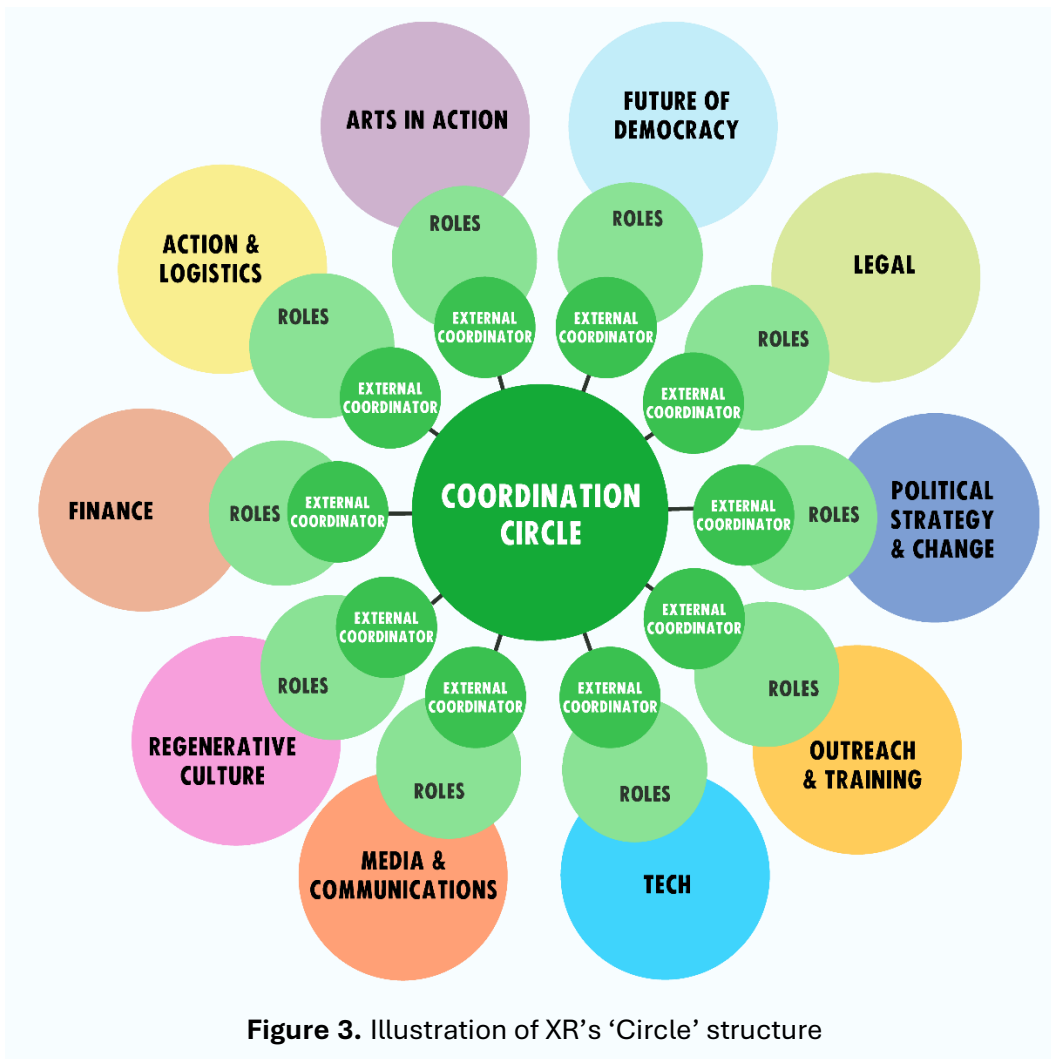


Figure 3. Illustration of XR's 'Circle' structure

Sociocracy is the system of governance that we employ within XR. It's about the different circles and how they're connected with each other, but it's also like a **decision making technique** that allows you to make decisions as a group using **consent**. Moving away from the idea of consensus: we all have to agree that this is the best possible option – to consent as in: Is this good enough for everyone? Basically, you consent to a decision if you don't object to it. Of course, I'm making it simple because it's never that easy. Decision making is full of power dynamics and people sometimes consent to things that they don't really agree with because of like, indeed, people having more influence or some people being more oppressed. I could really also see, you know, like, that it was different within XR. That we're really trying to do something different. And it was working and it was super empowering in terms of making decisions together.

MA, personal interview, date

A1.4 XR Hand Signals

XR hand signals are intended to make workshops and meetings run more smoothly as well as help the facilitator spot emerging sentiments and common ground.⁴⁶ While I knew to wave my hands to convey agreement and make a T shape using both hands for a technical point from previous experience with Erasmus Student Network board meetings and Model United Nations, during my fieldwork I also learned to make a C shape for clarification, raise a hand if I wish to contribute, and make an L shape with my thumb and forefinger to request translation.

Hand signals

Hand signals are agreed gestures or shapes that people make with their hands, to communicate in a non-verbal way (e.g. "I want to speak", "I agree", "I don't understand" etc.)

Using hand signals can make workshops and meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground.

There are lots of different hand signals out there, and groups use them in many different ways. They work a lot better if everyone is clear about which signals to use in the session and what exact purpose they have.

For some people hand signals will feel alienating, artificial, or 'like being at school'. These people might become less keen to participate, not more! Notice what's going on in your group, and if the tools aren't having the effect you wanted, try something else.

We find it best to use a small number of hand signals that are clearly explained at the beginning of the meeting. We often find just two signals sufficient: a raised hand or forefinger for wanting to speak, and waving your hands in the air to say you agree.

'I want to contribute to the discussion'

Raise a hand or forefinger when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.



'I agree' or 'Sounds good'

When you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave your hands with your fingers pointing upwards by the sides of your body, around shoulder/face height. This lets everyone see how many people agree and saves a lot of time as people don't have to say "I'd just like to add that I agree with...". The gesture comes from British Sign Language where it means applause.



Direct Response

Raise both forefingers if your point is a direct response to a point that's just been made or a question that's just been asked. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, in front of all those people raising just one finger.



It is best to reserve direct response for occasions where there is a clear advantage to the group of your point being heard first. For example, you could use it to interrupt a conversation about train times, by pointing out the trains are on strike and you will need to catch the bus. This option can easily be over-used if people don't fully understand how it is different from raising a single hand.

Language

Make an L shape with your thumb and forefinger to request translation, or to ask someone to use simpler language. This can be especially helpful in any multi-lingual group. Some groups use 'C' for 'clarification' in a similar way.



Technical point

Make a T shape using both hands. We've seen this used in a variety of ways by different groups, so always check you have a shared understanding. One use of 'technical point' is to interrupt the discussion with urgent factual information not related to the meeting (e.g. 'Lunch is ready', 'Can someone help me set up the tea urn for the break.'). Another is to jump the queue with a facilitation suggestion, e.g. 'Can we break into small groups for this conversation?'



Proposal

Make the shape of the letter P to show that you have a proposal. Note: some groups use P to signal a point of process (a suggestion about the facilitation of the meeting).



⁴⁶ Hand signals PDF accessed here: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/handsig.pdf> linked here: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/XR-Affinity-Group-Pack.pdf>

Appendix A2. Methodology

A2.1 Information Sheet

Participation Information Sheet for XR Netherlands Members

Title of Study: Practices of Regenerative Culture by Members of Extinction Rebellion Netherlands

Department: Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: Hiba Argane (+31 655613420 – hibaargane@outlook.com)

You are being invited to take part in this MSc research project - thank you for being generous with your time! Before you decide if you'd like to join, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Feel free to ask me if anything is unclear or if you would like more information

What is the purpose of this project?

This research hopes to explore the regenerative ideas and pursuits of members of Extinction Rebellion Netherlands. As the third core principle of the movement, the cultivation of regenerative culture(s) remains understudied in the context of environmental activism. This research aims to gather insight directly from members regarding how they perceive and practice the concept. You have been invited due to your interest, membership, and or affiliation with Extinction Rebellion Netherlands.

Do I have to take part?

Your membership in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw, you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data you have provided up to that point.

What does taking part entail?

The degree of your participation may vary based on your willingness to partake. In this research I will be conducting participant observations (online or offline meetings, action trainings, workshops, actions, etc.) and semi-structured interviews (online or offline). Participant observations will involve my participation in events you may be attending, during which I will be taking notes and asking questions. Semi-structured interviews will be arranged according to participant and researcher availability. During these interviews, I encourage you to communicate your preferences or boundaries freely! Research will span from January to April 2022, however you are not expected to be available throughout that period.

What data will be collected and what will happen to it?

The methodology of this research involves: note-taking, voice-recording of interviews, and discourse analysis of social media content. Only with your explicit consent will conversations be recorded, photos be taken, or social media content referenced. All information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications unless you explicitly request otherwise. All data collected will be stored securely in a password-protected iPad and laptop as well as secure notebooks that only I have access to. Data will only be accessed by myself, however access to specific insights may be granted to my research supervisor throughout the review and writing process. Once a draft of the research project is complete, you will be provided access to it for feedback, if you wish to do so, prior to submission of the thesis.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch.

A2.2 Information Post for Instagram

CREATING A CULTURE WHICH IS HEALTHY, RESILIENT, & ADAPTABLE

HOW DO MEMBERS OF EXTINCTION REBELLION NETHERLANDS CREATE A REGENERATIVE CULTURE?

CURIOUS?

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

DESPITE BEING THE THIRD CORE PRINCIPLE OF EXTINCTION REBELLION, THE WAYS IN WHICH MEMBERS CREATE A 'REGENERATIVE CULTURE' REMAIN UNDERSTUDIED.

REGENERATIVE CULTURE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE EXTREMELY SUBVERSIVE, PREFIGURING THE RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE SOCIETY IT HOPES TO MANIFEST. YET, THE CONCEPT REMAINS FOREIGN TO MANY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE MOVEMENT.

CARE TO SHARE?

WHY:

CHANGE NECESSITATES A SHIFT IN CONSCIOUSNESS

regenerative practices are said to facilitate the shift from believing the natural world is somehow 'separate' from us to a deep acknowledgement of the interdependencies & intersections at play

with your help, I hope to gain a better understanding of the regenerative culture being cultivated by members of XR NL and what we can all learn from it.

INFO SHEET

WHO:

MEMBERS OF XR NETHERLANDS

in XR fashion, this research welcomes everyone & every part of everyone

WHAT:

A LITTLE BIT OF YOUR TIME!

what does regenerative culture mean to you? does it play a role in your activism? your wellbeing? your interpersonal relationships?

WHERE & WHEN:

LET'S CHAT!

thank you for reading this and being curious I would love to arrange a chat with you If you are too, feel free to comment, DM or email me

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

P.S.

my fieldwork spans from January to march however I intend on taking part in de lenterebellie.

I entered this project spurred by my personal intention to educate myself further about the climate and ecological crisis as well as to learn more about how I can participate in what I believe is necessary action.

as a result of my relative inexperience but great willingness to learn, I hope to enter our conversations with openness, curiosity, and respect.

Liked by [profile icons] and 4 others

[INFO SHEET]

What does REGENERATIVE CULTURE mean to members of @extinctionrebellionnl?

💡 Through this research project, I seek to learn about the regenerative ideas and pursuits of individuals within the movement, thereby glean an idea of the regenerative culture being cultivated in the Netherlands.

👥 Whether you're at the periphery or in the heart of the movement, older or younger, new to it all or a distinguished activist, I want to hear from you.

💬 If you have stumbled upon this and are interested, feel free to get in touch and I will provide you with more information. If you've been referred here by me, thank you for taking the time. You would have already received your info sheet.

A2.3 Interview Guide

Research Question *What role does prefiguration play in XRNL's strategy for change?*

Sub Question 1. *What are XRNL's strategies for change?*

- Interview Questions*
- Could you tell me about the first time you heard about XR?
 - Could you tell me about when and why you decided to join XR?
 - In your words, what is the purpose of XR?
 - Could you describe the internal structure of the movement?
 - Could you describe XR's strategies? What do you think of them?
 - Could you describe what XR's principles and values mean to you?
 - Could you describe one of your most memorable experiences with XR?
 - Could you describe one of your most challenging experiences with XR?
 - Could you explain how you dealt with it?
 - I hear XR pursues arrest - Do you have to get arrested? Have you ever been arrested? Could you tell me a bit about your experience?

Sub Question 2. *How do movement actors engage in prefigurative practices?*

- Interview Questions*
- Could you tell me about the first time you witnessed / attended / participated in an XR event / action?
 - Could you tell me how you got in touch with other activists in your local area? How (and how often) do you communicate with fellow activists?
 - Could you take me through an average day in your life as an active / full-time / part-time / occasional activist?
 - Could you tell me about how you prepare for actions?
 - Could you describe a typical XR action?
 - Could you describe what happened from the moment you arrived?
 - Which tasks / activities were challenging / enjoyable / rewarding for you?
 - Could you tell me about how you unwind / recover from actions?
 - Could you describe a typical XR meeting?
 - Could you describe to me a typical check-in / check-out / debrief?

Sub Question 3. *Do prefigurative practices support XR's strategy for change?*

- Interview Questions*
- What does 'regenerative culture' mean to you?
 - What does 'wellbeing' / 'care' mean to you?
 - Who would you contact within XR if you needed help / had questions?
 - Have you ever experienced burnout during your time at XR?
 - If you feel overwhelmed or get sick, what would you do?
 - Could you describe to me your schedule? Do you have free time and what do you enjoy doing with it?

A2.4 Research Participants

Alias	Local Group	Pronouns	Age Range	Encounters
AA	XR Leiden	he / him	-	Got contact from DE & interacted via Telegram. AA then put me in touch with SU, MA, and JT
AD	XR Rotterdam	-	20 – 30	Met during #RED010 protest
AL	XR NL	she / her	-	Met during XR Rotterdam’s Art Day
AN	XR Leiden	he / him	30 – 40	Online Zoom video interview on direct action, group dynamics in XR Leiden, and overall XR strategy
BE	XR Utrecht	he / him	30 – 40	Informal interview at Action Training about XR in general, legal consequences of being a high-risk activist, and regenerative culture.
CA	XR Amersfoort	he / him	60 – 70	Met during XR Weekend
CH	XR Rotterdam	she / her	20 – 30	Informal interview at Art Day (while painting banners for upcoming action)
CI	XR Rotterdam	-	20 – 30	Informal interview at Art Day about general XR insights – put me in touch with MA
DA	XR Rotterdam	he / him	20 – 30	Met during Art Day - Online Signal video interview
DE	XR Rotterdam	he / him	20 – 30	Online Telegram audio-only interview about XR’s actions, roles, and regenerative culture. Invited me to #RED010 protest

DN	XR NL	she / they	20 – 30	Met during Meta action in The Hague when they were occupying a high-risk lock-in role
FA	XR Rotterdam	he / him	20 – 30	Met during Art Day. Attempts to schedule an interview were unsuccessful
HE	-	she / her	60 – 70	Met during XR Weekend
HU	-	he / him	30 – 40	Met during XR Weekend and cooked dinner together for the rest on the last night.
Ico	-	he / him	70+	Hosted and participated in XR Weekend
JE	XR Nijmegen	he / him	20 – 30	Informal interview during XR Weekend about drop-out rates in XR and mobilization struggles
JO	XR Utrecht	he / him	20 – 30	Met at the train station on the way to LI's house for a Culture Working Group meeting which he facilitated
JT	XR The Hague	-	-	Got in touch with me via Instagram, however we were unable to schedule an interview
RJ	-	he / him	20 – 30	Previously affiliated with XR – 3 hour long audio-only Signal interview about regenerative culture, 'greenwashing', and the negative effects of the pandemic on the movement
KI	XR Rotterdam	-	20 – 30	Met during Art Day
KL	-	she / her	20 – 30	Met during XR Weekend – conversation about grief and the climate crisis

LI	XR Utrecht	she / her	70+	Online Telegram video interview about the de-prioritization of regenerative culture within the movement. Hosted Working Group meeting at her house and later invited me to a dinner she hosted for a family of refugees
LO	-	she / her	60 – 70	Met during XR Weekend
MA	XR Utrecht / NL	he / him	20 – 30	Online Telegram video interview followed by an invitation to the Meta action in The Hague. We occupied low-risk Wellbeing roles.
ME	XR Rotterdam	-	20 – 30	Met during Art Day – informal interview about XR Rotterdam and their community events. Unable to schedule an interview.
MN	XR The Hague	he / him	20 – 30	Met during #RED010 protests. Shared some insights about the sparseness of regenerative culture, the drop-off rate, and the lack of cultural diversity in the movement.
NI	XR The Hague	-	20 – 30	Got in touch with me via Instagram, however we were unable to schedule an interview
NO	XR Rotterdam	she / her	20 – 30	Met during #RED010 protest. Met again during Art Day: did the groceries and cooked a vegan meal together for the group.
Oscar	-	he / him	30 – 40	Facilitator of the XR Weekend sessions.

SA	XR The Hague	-	20 – 30	Met during XR Weekend. Learned about their other political activities and had a personal conversation. Unfortunately were unable to schedule an interview.
SU	XR Rotterdam	she / her	-	AA put me in contact. Active in Regenerative Culture in Rotterdam. Brief contact.
TS	XR Utrecht	he / him	-	Responded to my XR Utrecht email, put me in contact with LI (from their Local Regenerative Culture Circle).
TM	XR Rotterdam	he / him	20 – 30	Met during #RED010 and Art Day – communicated online briefly.
VV	XR NL	-	20 – 30	Online audio-only Signal interview about their leadership roles with XR NL and her perception of regenerative culture’s importance for the movement.
WD	XR Arnhem	she / her	40 – 50	Picked me up from the station for XR Weekend. Informal interview about police activity in the area, police violence / maltreatment, and raising your children in the midst of the crisis.

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