


# The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland

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 The Fridays for Future (FFF) movement is a major climate movement on a global scale, calling for systemic change and demanding politicians act on their responsibilities. In this paper, we present and analyze original findings from a case study on the FFF movement in Finland, at a watershed moment for young climate activism. We explore the representations of young people's environmental citizenship within the framings of the FFF movement, using an environmental citizenship framework analysis of the Finnish news media and Twitter discussions. We identified three frames within the media debate on the school strikes: the sustainable lifestyle frame, which focuses on the individual aspects of environmental citizenship, the active youth frame, which focuses on justifications of youth participation in politics, and the school attendance frame, which is concerned about the young people's strike action. Our results explore the many aspects of environmental citizenship that young people express in the FFF movement. We reflect on the dominance of adult voices in the framing of this historic movement of young people for action on climate change. Our analysis contributes to a step change in the study of this important global movement, which is shaping the emergence of young people as active citizens in Finland and around the world. We argue that the FFF movement is shaping young people's perceptions of active citizenship, and we advocate a youth-centred focus on the collective action and justice demands of young people.

Keywords: Fridays for Future, youth participation, social movements, social media, environmental politics, environmental citizenship

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## Introduction

In the fall of 2018, 15-year-old Greta Thunberg held a one-person climate strike outside the Swedish Parliament and started a new global climate movement called Fridays for Future (FFF; [www.fridaysforfuture.org](http://www.fridaysforfuture.org)). The FFF movement, also referred to as the climate strike movement, is a grassroots environmental movement that uses protest tactics to demonstrate against the inadequate

climate actions taken by politicians (Ernman *et al.* 2020). The movement is historical in its scope and tactics as well as in its capability to mobilise young people in particular to participate (Wahlström *et al.* 2019; de Moor *et al.* 2020). Millions of young people around the globe have joined the environmental movement in over 150 countries, and FFF has been characterised as one of the most remarkable mass movements of our time (Bowman 2019; Hayward 2021, 3). Its method consists of young people striking on Fridays for climate. These climate strikes are organised weekly around the globe on a smaller scale as well as on a larger scale on specific international climate strike days, which attract considerable participation. In March 2019, the international FFF climate strike mobilised over 1.6 million young people around the world (Wahlström *et al.* 2019), and on September 27, 7.6 million took to the streets in 185 countries (de Moor *et al.* 2020).

In this article, we explore how the FFF climate strikes were framed in media discussions in Finland in 2019, both in the news and on social media. We focus on the phase during which the movement gained momentum and visibility, exploring the climate strikes of March 15 and September 27, 2019, which were the main events organised by young people in Finland as part of the FFF movement. The FFF movement marks the emergence of a new generation of climate activists. According to studies, the movement mobilised a significant number of young first-time protesters, often female, through social media and peer networks (Wahlström *et al.* 2019; de Moor *et al.* 2020). Young climate activists have broadened public discussion into a more encompassing moral debate on the rights and responsibilities of individuals and collectives to achieve a sustainable future that resonates with the concept of environmental citizenship (Hayward 2021, 3–4). Social media has acted as a platform to share information about the climate strike movement and mobilise young people into action (Boulianne *et al.* 2020).

Research into the FFF movement provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of youth participation and the concept of *environmental citizenship*. In this context, by youth participation we mean the process of young people becoming actively engaged in different forms of political activities. According to the political scientist Norris (2002, 16), political participation is “any dimension of activity that are either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempts to alter systematic patterns of social behaviour”. We join scholars who have argued that young people are political actors and that their agency should be better recognised (e.g. Pickard 2019; Wood & Kallio 2019). Environmental citizenship, explored further in the next chapter, refers to the intersection of democracy and the environment, where citizens’ rights and responsibilities are critically important (Dobson 2003; Horton 2006). Young people are channelling their climate anxiety into action through environmental citizenship, and their environmental citizenship comes into play in places of everyday life, such as school and spare time activities (Albrecht *et al.* 2020; Kallio *et al.* 2020; Reis 2020). Young people are not only educated on environmental and ecological politics by adults and institutions such as schools, they are also co-actors and leaders in such politics (Schindel Dimick 2015; Bowman 2019). Their activity shapes the concept of environmental citizenship, and they are a social group that should be better recognised as environmental citizens (Wood & Kallio 2019, 11).

Thus, to deepen our understanding of environmental citizenship and the young, we examine the representations of the FFF movement as an expression of environmental citizenship. Our aim is to fill the knowledge gap on news media and social-media framings of the young climate strikers’ environmental citizenship. To achieve this, we conduct a frame analysis and explore how the climate strikes were framed in the news media and on Twitter in Finland in 2019. This article is structured as follows: first, the theoretical framework is presented, followed by the research design. Next, the results are displayed, after which the discussion and conclusion are presented.

## Youth participation and environmental citizenship

Many scholars have argued that young people’s views on politics and participation differ from those of older people (Inglehart 1997; Dalton 2008; Chou 2017). In political science, it is often contended that young people are politically less active than older people in institutionalised forms of political participation – elections and political parties – but politically active in a variety of ways outside the conventional forms of political engagement, such as ecological consumption, protest or online

activism (Dalton 2008; Chou 2017; Grasso *et al.* 2018; Pickard 2019). Changes in societies have transformed expectations and attitudes regarding political participation across generations: higher educational levels and citizens' increasing cognitive capabilities have led to greater demand for different types of participatory options from the traditional ones (Inglehart 1997; Dalton 2007). Especially more direct forms of political engagement have gained popularity amongst younger generations. For example, young people engage in a range of single-issue movements and participate in a more cause-oriented way, in which the political cause determines the forms of participation (Dalton 2008; Chou 2017; Pickard 2019).

In the context of environmental movements, in addition to increasing material well-being, new technology and media forms have emerged, facilitating environmentalism with greater speed and on a larger scale than traditional forms of social movements (Caren *et al.* 2020). The FFF movement has successfully mobilised young people around the globe (Wahlström *et al.* 2019; de Moor *et al.* 2020), and the movement challenges the ways we think about youth participation. Young people are actively shaping political action on climate change through school strikes on Fridays to motivate action against climate change and by using social media while protesting (Boulianne *et al.* 2020).

In addition to youth participation, we draw from Dobson's (2003, 5) concept of environmental citizenship, defined as the "ecological politics of everyday life". Environmental citizenship broadens citizen participation in ecological politics beyond nation states to global citizenship (Dobson 2003; Bang 2005; Bowman 2019). According to Dobson (2007), this non-territorial form of citizenship develops in the cultural and social spaces of environmentalism. Cao (2015, 2) argued that ecological politics can radically transform what it means to be a citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century environmental movement is characterised by single-issue-oriented causes and lifestyle politics (Portwood-Stacer 2012). In this regard, it is relevant to study the individual and collective aspects of environmental citizenship. Giddens (1991) and Bauman (2013), for example, have conceptualised the relationship between individual and collective in late modernity and noted how individuals have varying abilities to make lifestyle choices and how individualisation corrodes citizenship. Here, we focus on citizenship in the form of acts and processes rather than status (Huttunen *et al.* 2020, 196). This notion has been conceptualised in three ways.

First, environmental citizenship has been conceptualised as an individualised project of a sustainable lifestyle (Horton 2006; Wood & Kallio 2019), which deals with an individual's relationship towards the common good in environmental issues. This notion is embedded in private lifestyle choices and consumption – how citizens recycle, buy ecological products, eat vegan food and refrain from using excess plastic. Environmental citizens practice these lifestyle choices because they trust that these actions will have public consequences and that acting in an environmentally sustainable way is their duty not as citizens of a nation state but as part of a global environmental movement (Dobson 2003, 2007; Neuteleers 2010). Individual lifestyle choices, for example switching off lights, saving water, improving energy efficiency and recycling, are rewarded as green behaviour.

Second, within green political theory, environmental citizenship has been considered to be citizens' participation and involvement in environmental decision-making (Dobson & Bell 2006; Hobson 2013; Viherala 2017; Wood & Kallio 2019). This highlights the point that individual actions alone are insufficient to address environmental issues (Dobson & Bell 2006; Hobson 2013). A focus on ecological consumption may be depoliticising, and even social movements that build on the politicisation of everyday life choices focus increasingly on building collective politics that aim to foster social change through everyday practices (Schlosberg 2019). Besides participating in the FFF movement, young climate activists sign petitions on social media and join campaigns and boycotts that aim to shift the political and economic system away from fossil fuel dependency (O'Brien *et al.* 2018, 1, 5). Their demands are connected to a broader critique of political and economic models that emphasise economic growth (D'Alisa *et al.* 2015; Escobar 2015). Environmental citizens are motivated into action through collective responsibility towards the environment. They act towards the common good, use protest tactics and participate in public debate that crosses territorial borders (Horton 2006, 128; Dobson 2007).

Third, environmental citizenship has been linked to environmental justice demands (Dobson 2007). The term "environmental justice" refers to an approach to environmentalism in which concepts like self-determination, access to resources, autonomy, fairness, and justice are central (Bowman 2020).

Early environmental justice studies mainly focused on communities of colour in the US (Bullard 2000; Kojola & Pellow 2021), as environmental impacts target different communities in different ways. Particular communities, such as people of colour, indigenous groups, people living in developing countries and rural citizens, are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, the lack of clean air and extractive activities (Schlosberg 1999; Holifield 2001; Martinez-Alier 2002; Horton 2006, 128; Bowman 2020). Environmental justice is a question of global inequality and therefore a matter of environmental racism (Holifield 2001; Bowman 2020). It is also about empowerment: communities that are harmed by the impacts of environmental destruction demand an end to the systems that harm them in their quest for profit.

In climate activism, the justice dimension is linked to climate justice (Gardiner 2011; Schlosberg & Collins 2014), with demands to reduce emissions from fossil fuels, support for a just transition to clean energy, demands for climate leadership and promotion of participation. Climate change further exacerbates the deep social, geographical, economic, and intergenerational inequalities that already exist (Walker 2020). Climate change results in structural violence, as it disproportionately affects those who have contributed less to the problem on a global scale (Sanson & Burke 2020). Intergenerational justice becomes an important concept in climate justice, as climate change – with its substantial risks to health, food security, water availability, housing, agriculture, and natural ecosystems – impacts younger generations more than older generations (Albrecht *et al.* 2020; Sanson & Burke 2020). The most severely affected by the impacts of climate change will be children in developing countries and those yet to be born (Sanson & Burke 2020).

Environmental citizenship is thus a question not only of individual lifestyle or political activism, but also of global equality and intergenerational justice. Questions of justice and inequality are also essential in the context of the FFF movement. The climate movement uses school strikes as their form of protest; thus, participation in the movement becomes a question of the privilege of getting an education and therefore being able to miss school – an opportunity of which millions of children around the globe are deprived (Walker 2020).

## Media analysis of the FFF movement in Finland

### *Finland as a case study*

The FFF movement has mobilised people all over the globe. This study takes a single-country approach and focuses on the movement's framings in one country, Finland, to which the climate strike movement spread in the early stages. On October 20, 2018, a climate march was first organised in Helsinki. The event gathered 8,000 participants to listen to the FFF movement's leading figure Greta, Thunberg (Mäkinen 2018), which launched the FFF movement in Finland. In 2019, several climate strikes were held in over 20 cities and municipalities (Koivisto & Nelskylä 2019; Koskinen 2019), the largest demonstrations being the global climate strikes held on March 15 and September 27, 2019. In the analysis, we refer to these large strikes as "Spring" and "Fall".

The FFF movement has been meaningful in Finland from the perspective of youth participation, as it has been capable of mobilising young people into action in a country where the young are typically traditional in their political engagement (Myllyniemi 2014). Additionally, past environmental movements have failed to mobilise a great number of people for demonstrations in Finland, as the existing environmental administration and regulation have arguably reduced the need to protest (Konttinen *et al.* 1999; Albrecht 2018). Therefore, the FFF movement is also meaningful in Finland from the point of view of the environmental movement.

To explore environmental citizenship within the Finnish FFF movement, we use material from newspapers and the social media platform Twitter. With these two sources, we gain a comprehensive picture of how the movement was framed in Finland in 2019. All direct quotes have been translated from Finnish or Swedish. To protect the identity of Twitter users, we do not use direct quotations from Twitter.

The newspaper material was collected from *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, which is a liberally oriented independent daily newspaper with the largest circulation in Finland, and from *Yle*, Finland's national public broadcasting company. The news materials were collected in an online format using the

search word *ilmastolakko* (climate strike). In addition, the search terms *koululakko* (school strike) and *ilmastomielenosoitus* (climate demonstration) were used. The first news items found with the search word *ilmastolakko* were from January 10, and the other search terms made the selection of articles more complete, with articles on the 2018 climate demonstration. The search resulted in 195 articles altogether (66 in *HS* and 129 in *Yle*), of which we selected those that focused on the key events (the two international climate strikes) and persons in the year 2019. The newspaper material used in this article consists of 71 articles in total (27 in *HS* and 44 in *Yle*).

Twitter is a social media platform where people can express their views in 280-character microblogs known as tweets. Through the use of hashtags, which are labels for content that help others find content on the same topic, discussions can be organised around specific topics, which allows Twitter users to contribute to the broader discussions occurring under that tag. Social media has played a significant role as an interactive forum mobilising the young into action (Reis 2020), and people around the globe have made use of several hashtags in relation to the FFF movement, such as #climatestrike and #fridaysforfuture (Boulianne *et al.* 2020). Using such hashtags, the FFF movement has been capable of spreading its message while inviting others to discussions about climate change. Twitter has been criticised as being an elitist social media platform, as it is frequently used by political and business elites (Blank 2017). However, it has been an important platform for many social movements, from Arab Spring to Occupy (Barrons 2012; Wang & Caskey 2016), and continues to be a place where social movements can spread their message, create a community and mobilise people (Wang & Caskey 2016).

In June 2020, we collected tweets carrying the hashtag #ilmastolakko (Finnish, “climate strike” in the majority language) from the two international climate strike days, March 15 and September 27, 2019. The data consist of 3,858 tweets – 2,023 from March 15 and 1,835 from September 27 – all of which were publicly available and original. The analysed material consists only of these tweets and does not include descriptive information of the authors of the tweets. To follow the ethical research guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, TENK, we do not use direct quotations from tweets in the analysis. Twitter data inevitably include personal information, as tweets are often accompanied by a person’s real name, picture or identifiable username. Twitter data is openly available; thus, direct quotations inevitably diminish the subject’s anonymity, the preservation of which is an important principle in research ethics in human sciences.

### *Frame analysis*

This article is based on the method of frame analysis, which was introduced to the social sciences by Goffman (1974) and is used in the analysis of social movements (Johnston 2002). Frames encourage specific interpretive lenses derived from existing narratives and traditions (Allen 2017) and organise information drawn from real experiences (Goffman 1974, 47). The frames identified in the literature of social movements are composed of meanings, metaphors and narratives that are developed for strategic purposes, as they reflect policy positions (Tynkkynen 2010; van Hulst & Yanow 2016). Framing includes naming, selecting, storytelling, sense making and categorising (van Hulst & Yanow 2016). It is an analytic process by which “ordinary people make sense of public issues” (Benford 1994, 1103). We use frame analysis to make sense of how the news media, as well as people on social media, understand, view, and make sense of the school strike movement and the climate strikes.

We draw from the active selection of frames (Entman 1993) used in media studies. In our work, frames support the exploration of environmental citizenship, and we focus our analysis on 1) sustainable lifestyle, 2) active youth and 3) school attendance. These three frames are derived from the literature review and capture three different elements of environmental citizenship. The “sustainable lifestyle” frame captures the individualised lifestyle aspects of environmental citizenship; the “active youth” frame captures the FFF movement’s message on collective action and is built on the active citizenship elements of environmental citizenship; and the “school attendance” frame captures the justifications for striking and the prominent debate on school attendance. In addition, we examine positive and negative reactions towards the movement on Twitter.

## Varying representations of environmental citizenship in the Finnish FFF movement

### *The sustainable lifestyle frame*

The sustainable lifestyle frame was mostly visible on Twitter. In the Spring, the number of tweets focusing on individual lifestyle choices, marking the sustainable lifestyle frame, was smaller than in the Fall (discussed below). In the Spring, individual lifestyle choices for environmental protection were discussed mostly in tweets on the climate strikes that had a negative tone, in which people called on the young strikers to make more concrete ecological lifestyle choices before engaging in strike actions. These ranged from cleaning up after themselves in fast food restaurants to refraining from buying new clothes. In many cases, people were critical, ridiculing the young who participated in the climate strikes for their alleged bad environmental choices, such as driving a moped, contributing to food waste in schools because of the strike, or using a Chinese cell phone, which were seen as unecological lifestyle choices. The tweeters ridiculed the young climate strikers for their climate strike efforts by explaining that the strikers were hypocritical for demanding climate actions while making unecological choices in their everyday lives.

Lifestyle choices were not only seen as a possible way to create political change, but rather as something that the young FFF participants should do if they wanted to affect climate change – or something they should do before they could even have a say in more traditional arenas of politics. The choices were also featured in tweets providing people with guidance on the kinds of lifestyle choices that could and should be made to save the environment. These tweets suggested, for example, taking diet, production of electricity, public transport, food waste, and recycling into consideration. An adult voice was prominent in such tweets, since they were not written to peers or to “us” (e.g. “We should...”), but rather from an outside standpoint and targeted to the young (“The young should...”, “Young people’s best action would be...”, “I listened to the young in the tram and...”).

It appears that the sustainable lifestyle politics aspect of environmental citizenship was more visible in the Finnish news media and Twitter during the climate strike in September. In the news media, the sustainable lifestyle frame was visible in the political demands for a fossil-free and climate-neutral society, but also in young people’s open-mic speeches, in which they encouraged each other to use bicycles, eat vegetarian food, and make green consumer choices (Sirén et al. 2019). In the Fall, the discussions on Twitter were largely focused on the individual elements of environmental protection. On Twitter, the responsibility to perform environmental actions was placed on individuals, as Twitter users provided guidance to others on how to make more sustainable and greener lifestyle choices. However, the tone of the Fall was different from that of the Spring, as instead of being offered with a condescending tone, the guidance on individual lifestyle choices was given in a more positive, encouraging way. In addition, people listed the personal choices they had made in the name of environmental protection. A prominent subcategory of tweets (prominence measured by the number of similar types of tweets that were sent with the hashtag #ilmastolakko on the day) came from people who could not attend the climate strike but listed the ways in which they were participating: by making choices in their everyday life, either permanently or during the climate strike day, to lead a more environmentally conscious life. These types of choices included working remotely, eating a vegetarian lunch, and donating money to environmental organisations.

### *The active youth frame*

The climate strike movement in Finland was often framed as consisting of active young people whose aim was to convince decision-makers of the urgency of climate action. In the news media, young people took an active role in the FFF movement, even when faced with opposition from adults, which was visible in the reactions to the protesters who were not attending school as their form of protest. Even before the international climate strikes, three pupils of a Swedish-speaking upper secondary school in Kauniainen were organising a climate strike in front of the Finnish Parliament on Friday, January 11, 2019 (Vuorio 2019). The active pupils situated the Finnish school strikes as part of the broader FFF movement. “What do we want, climate action. When do we want it, now” and “With Greta!

We stand with Greta!" were the slogans of this January 11 strike (Takala 2019). During the first international climate strike in Finland on March 15, about 3,000 young people participated in the demonstrations in front of the Finnish Parliament (Onali 2019). In addition to the main event in the capital Helsinki, the climate strikes were organised in 27 towns and municipalities across Finland (Koskinen 2019). The newspaper articles covered topics from profiles of the organisers of the demonstrations to young people painting banners at school.

The topic of young people's political participation, active citizenship and political activity were also discussed on Twitter in connection with the climate strike in March. Three broader perspectives regarding youth participation and political engagement could be detected from the discussions in the Spring. First, the strike was seen as an excellent opportunity for children to learn about political participation. People called on schools to take responsibility for encouraging students to participate, to offer them this learning opportunity in democracy and participation. Instead of seeing the young strikers as citizens with political influence and the right to affect their future, these strikers were seen as citizens-to-be – people who should learn about the political system now and then be able to use that knowledge later in life by voting and taking part in other societal activities. Many of the strikers were not only young but actual children, which may explain this reaction, as children's political participation and citizenship are often seen as delayed acts, and the role of school is seen "to provide people for their future participation as citizens" (Wood & Kallio 2019, 14).

The second perspective in the discussion about youth participation was the acknowledgement that the right to strike was a basic right – people were informing others of this notion and supporting the young people who were invoking their constitutional right to strike. This perspective was supported by, for example, the ombudsman for children. In the third perspective, focus and visibility were brought to the fact that the young strikers' means for political influence were restricted, as many of the FFF participants are not only young, but minors without the opportunity to participate in political life as full citizens, as they do not have the right to vote. Therefore, striking was one of their few means to voice their opinions and influence political decision-making. Despite the strong perspectives regarding the role of schools and learning, young people's citizenship and right to affect politics did manifest themselves in the discussions.

In the discussions about youth participation, an adult voice was again present. On Twitter, the discussion was not about young people's voices directly asking for more opportunities for political participation for themselves; rather, people tweeted about the importance of providing young people with this learning experience on democracy and political participation from an outsider's perspective – instead of asking for more opportunities for "us" or "me", the tweets talked about "youth" and "children" as "they". Some examples of these types of tweets are "Let's give the young a change to make a difference", "Encourage the young to participate in political discussions", "Children have a right to strike", and "Today students did what education aims for, let's be proud of them".

In the climate strike on September 27 (Sirén et al. 2019), young people demanded support from adults to convey the message "We have to act now" to decision-makers. "Instead of single choices, it is more important to influence politics", said one of the young strikers interviewed by Sirén (2019). In an interview with *Yle*, a Finnish climate activist stated that the message of the global climate strike is "We, young people, have held enough strikes; now it is time for you adults to demonstrate and tell the policymakers that we have to act now" (Tola 2019). As a response to the young climate strikes, Finnish political leaders invited them to a discussion to show support for the movement. According to Vainio (2019), the minister of education, Li Anderson, stated that the active citizenship of young people is part of the Finnish educational curriculum. However, she said that the timescale of legislative drafting might differ from the young people's expectations regarding their timeline for change.

On Twitter, this active youth frame was not visible in the discussion in the Fall. The topic of the children's right, or lack thereof, to strike and be politically active was relatively absent from the Twitter discussions, with only a couple of tweets on the whole topic being posted. The voices discussing youth participation and young people's role as active citizens diminished, as the discussion had a different focus than in the Spring.

### *The school attendance frame*

From our analysis, it appears that the climate strike movement was framed in the Finnish news media as a discussion about compulsory school attendance. Most schools allowed participation in the protests; however, students under 18 years of age needed written permission from their parents to participate in the strikes. The National Board of Education stated that students have the freedom of speech, but it does not mean that they can freely be absent from school (Ervasti & Rajamäki 2019). An upper secondary school pupil interviewed by Grönholm (2019) said, "I think it is wrong if young people are not allowed to participate". In addition, the young climate strikers interpreted this media debate on school attendance as an attempt to control them and intervene while they were practicing their right to demonstrate (Huotari 2019). Through this debate, the public's attention was distracted from the young people's demand for systemic change and climate action.

Despite the fact that the organisers of the school strikes were the ones who were interviewed by the newspapers, in these media discourses, an adult voice was dominant. Only about one third of the articles (12 (33%) in *Helsingin Sanomat* and 20 (34%) in *Yle* news) had a youth voice. In the news media coverage, the adult voice argued that young people's right to strike had to be weighed against their obligation to participate in compulsory education. Most commonly, a headmaster of an upper secondary school or another expert on educational matters was interviewed. There was less room for the youth voice and young people's views on environmental citizenship in the news media.

Similarly to in the newspaper material, the topic of attending school on the climate strike day also evoked discussion on Twitter. However, the topic was debated only in the Spring, and then mostly in support of the school strike. Only a few voices, making up fewer than twenty tweets, conveyed direct worry and questioned whether missing school was the best way to influence politics. Strike actions were considered to be about influencing politics, not a form of politics themselves. These voices expressed the opinion that children should not have to be striking in the first place, or they were sceptical about whether a school strike actually has any effect. Further, they suggested that the event should have been organised in a different way: instead of a school strike, there should have been, for example, an event for all students at school regarding climate change. The majority of the discussion on school attendance on Twitter consisted of adults defending children's right to strike and miss school for this type of cause. The defence for school strikes was rooted in democracy education, since the ideas that schools should teach children about active citizenship and that strikes are a way to learn about active citizenship were used as justifications.

In the Fall, the topic of attending school was not the subject of intense debate on Twitter, as the strike had become more established; there was no need for discussion surrounding the justification of striking and attending a protest. In the Fall, the topic of school attendance was mentioned by the city of Helsinki, when the city announced that the strike was part of the curriculum. The school attendance frame was therefore less visible on Twitter than in the news media. Instead of discussions on school strikes, different societal actors – such as private companies, churches, foundations, organisations, museums, and theatres – actively participated in the discussions on Twitter in the Fall. The discussions surrounding the strike in the Fall thus had a more commercial tone, and different organisations used the hashtag #ilmastolakko to promote their own activities. Many employees actively highlighted the way their employers handled the climate strike day – offering, for example, a workshop on climate issues for employees.

### *Reactions on Twitter*

In 2019, the climate strikes were framed mostly as a positive phenomenon by the majority of the reactions on Twitter. In the Spring, only 153 (7.56%) of the 2,023 tweets, and in the Fall, only 133 (7.25%) out of 1,835, were interpreted as negative reactions to the climate strikes. The rest of the tweets were interpreted as positive reactions, as they were supportive of climate actions, the movement and its goals. We find that the identification of the scope of positive reactions is important, as the movement is often seen as being largely opposed by adults. The positive reactions were diverse: some shared pictures from the strike with the movements' slogans, some merely stated that



they were participating in the strike, and others sent out more enthusiastically positive tweets, in which they praised and celebrated the people striking.

In the Spring, the majority of the positive tweets enthusiastically encouraged and supported the movement and the climate strike. Declarations such as “Go youth!” and “I support the movement” were common as well as pictures of the strike posted as evidence that the Twitter user had participated in and witnessed the event. Tweets were characterised by excitement and optimism, in which people cheered the young on or used heart emojis. In the Spring, one topic that surfaced was pride – how proud people were of the young climate strikers. This feeling of pride was accompanied by descriptions of emotions, as the tweeters frequently tweeted about what they felt from seeing the strikes and strikers: how the strike made people “tear up”, “gave them chills” or made them “choke up”, and how seeing the young gather in such masses made them feel hopeful about the future. Nostalgia in support of the current FFF strikers was also visibly present: Twitter users both described their own journey in environmentalism in their youth and compared it to the broader climate strike movement of today. Alternatively, they listed the lesser reasons they skipped school (*lintsata*), as they themselves referred to it, in their youth, in defence of the young climate strikers who participated in the strikes despite objections from their school or other adults.

In the Fall, the tone was much more matter-of-fact. People shared information about the strikes, pictures of themselves on strike and calls for action by telling others that there was room for participation and asking other adults to join the strikes. The focus was on adults, as tweets asked adults to join and adults to show support and stated that it was the adults’ turn to do their part. More focus was also placed on specific policy areas and actual policies, such as energy production with the use of peat (a debated form of energy production).

To provide a comprehensive picture of how the climate strikes were framed, we also focused on the negative tweets. However, their meaning should not be overemphasised, as they made up only 7.56 and 7.25% of all tweets. The negative tweets ranged from defiance towards environmentalism (people, for example, declared how much they would be eating red meat and driving their cars as a response to the climate strike) to racism (people wrote, for example, that refugees were the reason for Finland’s environmental issues). In the Spring, a large part of the negative reactions repeated the sentiments that children should not be used in politics (children were seen as being used in the climate strike politics by political forces). In addition, school strikes were seen as the wrong way to influence this political question, as children should not miss school for any reason, or children should first perform actions that are more concrete in order to be eligible to participate in a climate strike. Here, we also identify the school attendance frame in Twitter discussions. In the Fall, similar sentiments were repeated, alongside a new type of negative reaction, which was criticism of politicians, especially of the governing parties – in particular, the Green Party – ignited by their participation in the strike. The discussion focused on the role of politicians and on whether the children participating in the strike were capable of understanding the politicians’ double role when governmental actors were protesting against their own government.

One important notion from the discussion on Twitter was that despite the FFF being a movement for the young, the discussions online were not youth-centred: the voice used in discussions was what we here call an adult voice. The adult voice was present in all types of tweets and reactions. In the negative reactions, the adult voice took the form of a condescending and mocking tone targeted at the young. Some examples of this are “It would be nice to know how many skipping school today actually worry about the climate”, “Wonder how many adults were needed to organise the children’s climate strike”, “the younglings” [*nuorisolaiset*], and “Seems like there is a day off school”. In the positive reactions, examples of the repeated adult voice include “full support for the young”, “The young are not spoiled”, “The future is in the young”, “we adults”, and “our responsibility as adults”.

### **Individualised lifestyle choices and a dominant adult voice**

Our analysis shows that in the Finnish FFF movement, the representations of environmental citizenship vary with focus both on its individual and collective elements, whereas the individual aspects in the form of lifestyle politics are emphasised in the framings of the movement. Exploring the framings of the movement also reveals a dominant adult voice in the discussions.

The frames varied with time and different media as the movement became more established. The news media differed from discussions on Twitter. During the course of the year, the discussions went from debating children's right to strike and the importance of attending school, with strong emotional support from adults for the movement displayed in the Spring, to highlighting the individual choices and actions of different societal actors, including actual policies in the Fall. As the year and movement progressed, there was greater focus on actual solutions, both in the form of actual policies and lifestyle choices embedded in environmental citizenship. The shift in framings can be interpreted as changes in the societal context where the movement operates. This includes both how justified the movement and its actions were perceived to be – and therefore how much debate about the methods used by the movement was needed – and how the movement was able to bring climate change to the forefront of political discussion, transforming the focus in discussions to actual solutions. This is an example of how young people are not only passively learning to become environmental citizens; they are also shaping environmental citizenship through their own activity (e.g. Bowman 2019; Albrecht *et al.* 2020), since their activity affects how environmental issues and responsibilities are perceived.

We revealed that despite the dominance of the discussion on school attendance, especially in the news media, the FFF movement in Finland was framed through sustainable lifestyle choices, especially on Twitter. The movement was also framed through young people's political activism through participation and demands for adults and decision-makers to act now. The activists in the FFF movement are not only young; many of them are minors who lack the right to vote and thus do not have full formal citizenship in a nation state. Lifestyle politics (e.g. Chou 2017; Pickard 2019) are some of the only ways in which they can display their political engagement; thus, it might not be surprising that more focus was put on the forms of participation accessible to the young. Theories also explain that lifestyle choices are made and encouraged out of a belief that such actions have public consequences (Dobson 2003, 2007; Neuteleers 2010).

This guidance and focus on individualised choices may be well intentioned, springing from a desire to encourage sustainable lifestyles to tackle climate crisis. However, when the framings of a movement based specifically on the idea of collective action and demanding action from decision-makers is once again met by focusing on the individual, this might be disappointing to the young participants. If the focus stays on the politicisation of everyday life (Schlosberg 2019), it can take away attention from changes that are needed in actual policies. Theories that focus on more collective elements of environmental citizenship note that individual actions are not sufficient in addressing environmental issues (Dobson & Bell 2006; Hobson 2013); thus, there is a need for collective actions and focus on politics.

The FFF movement has strengthened the image of young people, especially young women, as leaders in ecological politics. Greta Thunberg, the leading figure of the FFF movement, is often portrayed in discussions with global "adult" leaders, and familiarity with Thunberg encourages people to engage in collective action in the fight against climate change (Sabherwal *et al.* 2021). The FFF movement's message has been heavily focused on the collective manner in which the fight against climate change should be carried out, as well as placing the responsibility to act on politicians instead of individual citizens. The movement's complex relationship with politicians, the strikers' profound scepticism about the efficacy of asking politicians to make decisions, and even the movement's activists' calls for systemic, political and social, change have been at the forefront of many studies conducted on the movement (see O'Brien *et al.* 2018; Bowman 2019; Pickard *et al.* 2020). However, in the framings of the Finnish FFF movement, the political demands for systemic change did not take centre stage. Our analysis suggests that this is at least partly due to the dominance of an adult voice.

In addition to exploring the three frames, our major findings are the dominance of positive reactions on Twitter as well as the prevalence of an adult voice in the discussions. Despite the fact that the young have taken the most central role in the climate strikes, their experiences did not take centre stage in the various framings of the movement. This might be due to the adult-centric nature of these media outlets, whereas the young use other channels, such as Instagram or TikTok. The adult voice was mostly positive and encouraging of the strikes, which is an important observation, since in the news media, adults are often represented as being concerned about children not attending school.

The positive reactions are important for the movement, since as Walker (2020) suggests, the environmental activism of young people cannot take place without supportive action from adults, and the young climate strikers call for adults to respond to environmental problems that cannot be solved by the young people's individual capacities. Thus, the dominance of an adult voice can be a response to the movement's desire for more adult participation, and it can support the development of young people's environmental citizenship (Hayward 2021, 6).

However, the dominance of an adult voice in the media coverage of the movement can be disempowering if it undermines the young protesters. One study from Germany (von Zabern & Tulloch 2021) suggested that media coverage tends to reproduce existing power structures by depoliticising the FFF movement's agenda and demands, reducing the protesters' voice to apolitical testimonies and framing the young as exploited by an adult agenda. Through exclusionary social practices of childhood, embedded in innocence (e.g. Garlen 2019), even well-meaning adults may contribute to the undermining of young people's political agency in their attempt to protect the children from adult responsibilities. It is possible that even a largely positive adult voice can depoliticise young people's agendas. The dominance of an adult voice may shift the focus away from the young protesters' demands, and even supportive messages can contribute to the disempowerment of the young: the Finnish climate strikes were often seen as an opportunity for the young to *learn* about politics instead of as political acts in themselves. The effect of the dominance of an adult voice on the political agency of the young, along with the notion that the Finnish FFF activists' demands did not take centre stage in the framings of the FFF movement, provides interesting sources for further studies.

Another source for future studies could be the third dimension of environmental citizenship – environmental justice – which was visible only narrowly through its intergenerational aspects in our material. The FFF movement is globally connected to the environmental justice movement with demands for climate justice and intergenerational justice (Sanson & Burke 2020; Walker 2020; von Zabern & Tulloch 2021), as well as global justice, since climate change will disproportionately harm those who have contributed less to the problem (Sanson & Burke 2020). In a privileged Northern European country like Finland, the discussions surrounding school strikers are most likely to embody a different tone, since all children are provided with the opportunity to attend school, an essential element when the movement uses school strikes as their form of protest, than in other contexts. In future studies on environmental citizenship, a focus on the justice dimension could provide insights into the unbalanced power structures of the FFF movement, as well as deepen our understanding of the role of intergenerational justice within the FFF movement.

## Conclusion

In this article, we explored the representations of the FFF movement as an expression of environmental citizenship. We focused on discussions surrounding the two large climate strikes held in 2019 and explored the discussions both in Finnish news media and on Twitter. We revealed three frames – the sustainable lifestyle, active youth and school attendance frames – and analysed the positive and negative reactions to the movement on Twitter.

Our results suggest that in Finland, the FFF movement is an expression of different aspects of environmental citizenship, as it has been framed in various ways through dimensions focused on the movements' individual elements and on collective political action. Our study is limited to exploring the representations of environmental citizenship in the framing of the FFF movement only in news media and on Twitter in one country.

The young climate activists have shifted the public debate remarkably with their demands that politicians no longer remain silent about the urgency of climate change (Hayward 2021, 3). Our central findings show that to empower the movement and its young activists, young people's voices should be better represented in the news media and Twitter, and they should be heard more in the discussions surrounding the movement. Despite the FFF movement being a youth-centred movement – by the young and for the young – an adult voice is dominant in the discussions surrounding the movement. For the young participants in the FFF movement, this experience has shaped their identity, their emergence as active citizens and their perceptions of active citizenship.

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