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REPOLITICIZING AIRPORT ACTIVISM?

Exploring the discursive struggle of environmental movements & news media in the context of depoliticized eco-politics

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Abstract

In a situation of ecological degradation and rapid climate change, environmental movements aim to create debate and attain political change. Here, news media is an important actor, possessing the power to represent movements and their cause in ways that legitimize or disqualify their voice in public debate. This study explores environmental movements and news media as participants in *discursive struggle*, where both may shape eco-political debate to either reinforce or challenge prevailing political narratives and ideas. The study analyzes a case of Extinction Rebellion (XR) airport actions in Sweden on Oct 31, 2021, where their acts of civil disobedience created significant coverage in Swedish press.

Within research on eco-political discourse, theorizations of *post-politics* and depoliticization have been important, and regard the shift where consensus- and technocratic approaches have displaced discourse that acknowledges ideology and conflict. In depoliticized discourse, ideology is replaced by rational or moral arguments of right and wrong, good and evil, turning legitimate adversaries into delegitimized opponents – thereby hindering political debate.

Against the context of depoliticized eco-politics, the study explores how XR and news media contributed to *depoliticizing* (closing) and *politicizing* (opening) debate around the XR airport actions, using a framework for critical discourse analysis. The data includes press releases and social media posts from XR, as well as news articles and opinion pieces published in three of Sweden's largest newspapers. The analysis contains a particular focus on how the discursive strategies of positioning and (de)legitimization are used to steer and create boundaries for debate in politicizing and depoliticizing ways.

The analysis found that whereas XR mainly used politicizing strategies to initiate political debate, challenge the status quo, and expand boundaries for debate, the news media material mainly showed signs of depoliticizing discourse. By focusing on apolitical themes such as law enforcement and airport safety, debate was dismissed. XR were repeatedly delegitimized as a political actor, and the eco-political issues raised in the actions were largely overlooked. When debate occurred, it regarded XR's use of civil disobedience, but not eco-politics. The results can be explained in terms of a closed discursive opportunity structure for movements, meaning they are delegitimized and marginalized as participants in political discourse. The attempt from XR to initiate debate can be described as an aim to *repoliticize* an area that has been characterized by post-political tendencies. However, this study shows that news media have significant power to steer and limit debate in ways that may hinder environmental movements attempting to repoliticize eco-political discourse in the public sphere.

Keywords: Environmental movements, activism, news media, discursive struggle, post-politics, depoliticization, political debate, eco-politics

Preface

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Introduction

In a situation with increasingly urgent ecological degradation and climate change, environmental movements aim to spur action and attain political change. In recent years, the world has seen the rise of mass mobilizations on a global scale through movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future (Auge, 2021; Han & Ahn, 2020). Through tactics such as demonstrations, strikes, and blockades, environmental activists have tried to put the environment on public and political agendas (O'Hare, 2021; Taylor, 2020). Social movements can be defined as formations in resistance or opposition to existing social orders (Cassegård et al., 2017, p. 9). This definition points toward a potential for social movements to challenge the status quo and advance alternative political ideas. For environmental movements, these ideas concern the transition toward sustainable and just societies.

One tool for attaining political change is to draw attention to political issues and create debate in the public sphere. Here, news media coverage plays an important role. Indeed, in addition to using their own communication channels, news media representation is an important way for social movements to spread their message to the public and stakeholders (Koopmans, 2004; Mattoni & Treré, 2014). The difference between using direct communication, such as social media, and indirect, mediated communication is a loss of control over how the movement and its cause are portrayed. News media outlets have the power to frame social movements in ways that legitimize or disqualify their voice in public debate (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021; Koopmans, 2004; Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020), and thereby plays an important part in the context of movements. The relationship between social movements and news media can be understood in terms of *discursive struggle*. This implies that there is a contestation over meaning and the boundaries for political debate (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 6-7). Movements and news media respectively may challenge or reinforce prevailing social orders and dominating political narratives and ideas.

When it comes to environmental movements and eco-politics, there is an ongoing discussion within research on how political debate has been constrained in favor of consensus-based approaches. Critique has been raised that that eco-politics have been subject to mainstreaming and co-optation into a status quo, laissez-faire approach, and that substantial change therefore is lacking (Kenis & Lievens, 2014). This has been called a *post-political* or *depoliticized* condition where consensus and cooperation are dominating environmental discourse, limiting the space for political alternatives and opposition (Blühdorn, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2010). For example, eco-politics may be reduced to technological issues solvable only through expert knowledge and science-based assessments. Also, climate change may be understood in terms of 'humanity vs CO2', reducing it to a moral issue. Both approaches turn eco-political debate to a question of morally or rationally right and wrong, thereby hiding the ideological foundations for political decision making concerning the environment. Further, the existence of conflict between interests and ideological standpoints is hidden. In this way, depoliticization closes the room for political debate (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014, pp. 220-221).

Against the background of depoliticized eco-politics, it is interesting to explore how environmental movements engage in debate and promote alternative political ideas. A movement that has not hesitated to display political dissent and demand radical change is Extinction Rebellion (XR). The movement has made itself known for using confrontational, non-violent tactics as well as dramatic messaging to spread their views (Auge, 2021, pp. 1-2; Friberg, 2021, pp. 52-54; Molek-Kozakowska, 2021, pp. 721, 727). Starting in the UK in 2018, XR quickly spread internationally and emerged in Sweden in November 2018. Using similar tactics as its UK roots, Swedish XR protests and actions of civil disobedience have attracted media attention and controversy (see Gustavsson, 2021; Nekham & TT, 2021; Olsson, 2021). On October 31, 2021, XR activists performed a coordinated action against several Swedish airports. Using tactics such as entering runways, activists managed to blockade several flights, leading to delays in air traffic (Dahl & Holmgren, 2021; Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d; Rosell & Bränström, 2021). The event became one of the most covered XR actions in Swedish press, with articles in most of the largest newspapers.

This Study

The case of XR airport actions in 2021 is an example of how environmental movements attempt to create public debate on an eco-political issue. In a context of depoliticized eco-political discourse, it is interesting to explore how an environmental movement like XR may challenge the status quo, oppose the consensus-oriented discourse, and open the room for political debate. Indeed, recent climate activism including XR have been raised within research as a potential force for expanding eco-political discourse (de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021, p. 325). Current research further points toward the importance of contextual factors for how environmental movements navigate (and are being perceived in) depoliticization of eco-politics (see Bowman, 2020; de Moor, 2020; de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014b; MacGregor, 2021). In this study, news media is included as a key actor in the context of environmental movements. In the case of the XR airport action, the following debate can be seen as a discursive struggle where XR and news media constitute central participants, shaping the room for political debate. There is potential for both reinforcing or challenging the depoliticization of eco-political discourse – or in other words opening or closing the room for debate.

Against the context of depoliticized eco-politics, the aim of this study is to explore environmental movements and news media actors as participants of discursive struggle. The case of XR airport actions on October 31, 2021, is chosen as an empirical delimitation. Specifically, the study explores the following research questions:

RQ 1: How were the airport actions and the following debate constructed in XR's communication and in news media respectively?

RQ 2: In what ways did XR's communication and news media contribute to depoliticizing (closing) and politicizing (opening) debate?

The study's specific contribution to existing research is to include both an environmental movement and the news media, which allowed for an exploration on not only how movements engage in public discourse in a post-political context, but the role of news media in shaping the room for debate. The analysis found that while XR's actions can be seen as an attempt to repoliticize eco-political debate, the news media displayed power to steer and restrict debate in ways that limited the movement's opportunity to open political discourse in the public sphere.

Relevance for Media & Communication Studies

The study explores the interdisciplinary issues of environmental movements, news media and eco-political debate. This section develops on the relevance for the study within the field of media and communication as well as the relationship between social movements and the news media.

Social movements are important communicators within the public sphere, participating in public political debate. They strive for societal and political change, and are therefore relevant to understand political decision making, public opinion and agenda setting (Boykoff, 2011, pp. 12-15; Cox, 2013, pp. 26-28, 39-53). Communication practices are vital for social movements to attain their aims. This regards for example how far their message reaches, how they are portrayed by the media and in turn how they are perceived by the public and other stakeholders (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021; Koopmans, 2004; Luxon, 2019; Soneryd & Cassegård, 2017; von Zabern & Tulloch, 2021). Therefore, perspectives such as rhetoric, framing and discourse analysis are relevant to use in order to scrutinize *how* movements communicate and participate in larger processes of meaning making (Cox, 2013, pp. 39-40; Lindeskilde, 2014).

Media attention is important for social movements to mobilize, gain legitimacy and (indirect) access to legislators. The movement-media dynamic is not equal, and movements adapt to and manage media practices and logics to gain attention and influence how they are portrayed (Boykoff, 2006; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Koopmans, 2004; Mattoni & Treré, 2014). "The movement-media transaction is characterized by a struggle over framing", as Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993, p. 118) put it. Media logics include news media's tendency to pay attention to event centered, visually strong news where conflict and contestation is present (Cox, 2013, p. 151). Media frames can have a mobilizing effect on societal issues, which Kenis and Barratt (2021) show is especially true for agonistic frames. At the same time, with citizen journalism and social media, movements also have some power to challenge the framing of news media (Cox, 2013, pp. 192-194; Muncie, 2020, p. 478).

In sum, these studies point toward news media being an important actor in the discursive context of social movements, as well as a relationship between movements and media that can be understood in terms of discursive struggle over meaning. Before going deeper into discourse theory however, a background of XR and existing research on the movement are outlined.

Background: Extinction Rebellion

Extinction Rebellion was founded in the UK by a few activists previously engaged in environmental and social justice issues, with Gail Bradbrook and Roger Hallam being two of the public figures. The movement emerged publicly on October 31st in 2018 with a “Declaration of Rebellion” (see Farrell et al., 2019, pp. 1-2) outside the Houses of Parliament in London (Taylor, 2020). A month later, the first larger action took place. According to the movement, six thousand activists participated, creating blockades on five bridges over the Thames in central London (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2022). It was described in the Guardian as “one of the biggest acts of peaceful civil disobedience in the UK in decades” (Taylor, 2020). They presented XR’s core demands: for institutions to tell the truth about the ecological crisis, act now to reduce emissions to net zero by 2025, and create a citizens assembly to guide the transition (Taylor & Gayle, 2018). In their “April Rebellion” in London 2019, XR groups around the world joined with local demonstrations, blockades, and other forms of protest. In the UK it led to the parliament declaring a climate emergency (Taylor, 2020). The movement has grown globally since its emergence, consisting of 1200 groups in over 80 countries (Extinction Rebellion Global Support, n.d.-c).

Typical characteristics of XR actions include peaceful and nonviolent protest, civil disobedience in the form of blockades, occupations etc., and using mass arrests as a tactic. Causing civil and economic disruption is believed to make governments more inclined to act than by using law-abiding types of activism (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2022). The movement is decentralized, which means the network is built by small autonomous groups using a ‘self-organizing system’. Anyone can create an XR group if they adhere to XR’s 10 Principles and Values (see appendix 1) as well as center around the three core demands (Extinction Rebellion Global Support, n.d.-b). The exact demands may vary slightly between countries, but these are the three demands as stated on the XR Global website:

1. Tell the truth: Governments must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.
2. Act now: Governments must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.
3. Go beyond politics: Governments must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens’ Assembly on climate and ecological justice.

(Extinction Rebellion Global Support, n.d.-a)

XR illustrate a movement with unified and strategically chosen visuals and communication, characterized by bright and playful colors and a black/white capitalized font. Their messaging aims to be clear and provoking, with a circled hourglass as their symbol (Farrell et al., 2019, pp. 120-124; Molek-Kozakowska, 2021, p. 727). In the XR handbook, a strategic media campaign is described (Farrell et al., 2019, pp. 126-130), which focuses on creating

relationships with journalists and direct contact with them during actions. The aim is to influence media framing: “[...] it’s about ensuring clarity of message, and about building solid and authentic relationships with journalists, one by one, in order that they gain a thorough understanding of the common danger we face” (Farrell et al., 2019, p. 127). News media is hence an important tool in XR’s tactics.

Since its emergence XR has faced criticism and controversy, for example after they performed a direct action against the UK media industry, accusing it for not reporting on the climate crisis. It created disturbances in newspaper distribution, and therefore sparked criticism. Prime minister Boris Johnson condemned the movement, and the home secretary Priti Patel described it as an “attack on our free press, society and democracy” (Slawson & Waterson, 2020). XR has also been included in anti-radicalization resource material from UK counter-terrorism police. Listed alongside neo-Nazi and Islamist terrorist groups, XR was described as spreading extremist ideology. However, after it was disclosed and criticized in media, representatives from counter-terrorism police claimed that including XR was a mistake (Dodd & Grierson, 2020).

Criticism has also emerged from other parts of the environmental movement. When XR emerged in the UK, discussions started on the accessibility for marginalized groups to join, because of the movement’s tactics and rhetoric. Participating in civil disobedience and mass arrests entail higher risk for people of color, working class, or people with disabilities. Also, marginalized groups questioned the ‘apocalyptic’ rhetoric, claiming it lacks awareness of ecological injustices and that many communities have felt the impact of environmental degradation for a long time (Gayle, 2019; Wretched of the Earth, 2019). However, it should also be noted that XR has received much support, including from influential actors. A few days before the first ‘declaration of rebellion’ in 2018, an open letter was published in support of XR, signed by 94 prestigious academics (Green et al., 2018). The movement has also been endorsed by many celebrities and public figures (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2019).

Extinction Rebellion in Sweden

A few weeks after the first rebellion in the UK, Swedish XR groups were formed in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gothenburg, and Malmö (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2018b). The first action was held on November 17, 2018, in support of the London bridge blockade action mentioned above. In Stockholm, activists blocked the traffic on a busy intersection on and off for nearly two hours (Canoilas, 2018; Karlsson, 2018). In Gothenburg, a central intersection was blocked while activists painted the XR logo on the street (Andersson, 2018; Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2018a).

Since then, Swedish XR groups have performed a number of acts of civil disobedience, with a few attracting hundreds of participants (see Mikkelsen, 2019; Ritzén & Falkirk, 2019). Swedish XR activists use similar tactics as in the UK, such as road blockades, activists gluing themselves

to buildings, demonstrations and hunger strikes (see Spolander et al., 2021). In April 2019, actions were performed in Stockholm and Gothenburg demanding officials to declare climate emergency. Around a hundred activists participated in a ‘die in’ outside the parliament, blocking the building by ‘playing dead’ on the ground (Ritzén & Falkirk, 2019). In Gothenburg, a central road was blocked by around 50 activists (Karlsson, 2019). Since their emergence in Sweden, the movement’s activity has also been restricted and reduced during some periods due to the pandemic.

The movement lacks formal membership, and therefore the size of XR is difficult to assess. The Swedish network consists of local groups across the country, mainly around the bigger university cities. In addition to local groups, there are national teams focusing on specific tasks or share characteristics as activists – for example youths or medical professionals (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021a). Regarding the aim of XR Sweden, the overarching demands mirror the ones of XR UK: Tell the truth! Act now! Strengthen democracy! [Tala klarspråk! Agera nu! Stärk demokratin!] (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021m). Like the UK movement, XR Sweden have a media strategy and a national team working exclusively with media work. As described in a guide from the team, the publicity goals of XR actions are to reach the news media and to make sure the aim and demands are communicated clearly (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, n.d.). Also, XR Sweden uses the same confrontative communication and colorful graphic profile as in the UK (Andersson, 2018; see Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021m).

Airport Actions

On October 31, 2021, Swedish XR activists performed a coordinated action against several airports. According to a press release from the movement, actions were performed on eight airports: Malmö, Bromma, Arlanda, Landvetter, Halmstad, Kalmar, Ängelholm and Växjö (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021h). At some locations, activists entered airport runways to create delays. Air traffic was also hindered due to activists refusing to sit down in airplanes ready for departure, as well as activists gluing their hands onto an airplane and runways (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021h; Rasper et al., 2021). Support actions were also performed at some of the airports. For example, at Landvetter airport activists performed a “climate anxiety clinic” in the waiting hall (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021i).

During the actions, XR published three press releases on their website. They also used social media during and after the actions to spread their message, share mentions in news media and live stream directly from the airports (see Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d; 2021f, 2021i). The actions were protesting continued flying in a situation of climate crisis. In particular, they raised the issue of aviation subsidies, which were increased during the years of pandemic and almost ceased flying (Munther, 2020). These were the three demands:

- Stop subsidizing aviation!
- Spare the forests! Biofuels are a dead end that does not reduce CO2 emissions.

- Stop burning fossil fuels and immediately begin transitioning society.
(Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

A total of 16 activists were arrested and criminal investigations were initiated. Most of the activists were suspected of aviation offenses (Tanaka & Olsson, 2021). The airport actions received attention in national and local news media and created some debate in the press (see Gustavsson, 2021; Nekham & TT, 2021; Olsson, 2021). Using *Mediearkivet Retriever* to assess mentions of Extinction Rebellion in Swedish press, a peak was found to occur around the time of these airport actions, similar in size to the media coverage of the when XR first emerged.

Existing Research on Extinction Rebellion

Since their emergence in 2018, XR grew to quickly become an important actor within the environmental movement. They have therefore been of interest for researchers. This section briefly outlines what the existing research on XR has been concerned with.

Firstly, there is some research on the characteristics of XR as a movement, such as the decentralized organizational model (Fotaki & Froughi, 2021) and the ‘regenerative culture’ ideal (Westwell & Bunting, 2020), both pointing toward internal tensions within the movement and its values. Zantvoort (2021) explored internal ‘pedagogies’ of XR, showing that a sense of urgency tends to reproduce ‘learning of hegemonic forms of life’, but that the covid pandemic may pose new possibilities for pedagogies that center justice and equality. Saunders et al. (2020, pp. 3-4) conducted a survey study at XR protests in 2019, showing a mostly middle-class and well-educated demographic, however also a significant share of previously unexperienced activists (see also de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021).

Secondly, experiences, motivations, and values of individual XR activists have been studied (Luna & Mearman, 2020; Smyth & Walters, 2020). Using qualitative interviews, research findings include young activists describing a kind and nonviolent radical activism (Pickard et al., 2020) and ‘radical hope’ as their motivation (Stuart, 2020). Further, Stuart (2022) shows how activists navigate (external) expectations of individual sustainable lifestyles on the one hand, and their belief in the necessity of systemic change on the other.

Thirdly, research on XR has explored messaging and discourse, showing for example how the movement uses catastrophism, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic frames (Auge, 2021; de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021; Friberg, 2021). This leads us to the question of how XR positions themselves politically - are they radically challenging ‘business as usual’ or reinforcing depoliticized eco-politics? This will be further discussed on page 17.

Theoretical Foundations: ‘The Political’ & Post-Politics

In this section, the theoretical foundations of the thesis are described and discussed: *discourse theory* and the theory of *post-politics*. The breadth and nuances of these theoretical fields cannot be presented here but only a selection of perspectives most relevant for this study. The aim of this section is to show the relevance of using these theories for understanding constructions of eco-political debate by social movements and news media.

Point of Departure: Discourse Theory

The field of discourse analysis (as theory and method) is broad and includes different perspectives and approaches. Since they share ontological and epistemological assumptions, in practice, concepts and analytical tools from different discourse traditions can be combined to serve the case in focus (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 4-6, 138). In this paper, the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory will serve as a theoretical point of departure. Their approach is also closely linked to theories of post-politics that is central to this study. In the analysis, however, a framework inspired by critical discourse analysis will be used, which is described in the methods chapter. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) presentation of discourse theory has been a key source, which in turn mainly builds on *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Laclau and Mouffe (2008).

Within discourse theory, the connection between language and reality is not seen as an objective mirroring but rather as organized in discursive patterns bound to context (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 12). To Laclau & Mouffe, discourse is “the fixation of meaning within a particular domain” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 26). Meaning is *constructed* through the relationship between the signs in the discourse and the differentiation between them. Important to note is that “fixation” here does not mean *actually* fixed. The closure of meaning is only temporary and *struggle* over meaning always present (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 26-29; Laclau & Mouffe, 2008, pp. 166-169). The fixation of meaning in a particular discursive context always excludes other possible meanings and is therefore a *political* process that entails power. When discourse becomes sedimented, naturalized, and alternative meanings suppressed, it becomes hegemonic. As fixations of meaning, all social orders are hegemonic but can be challenged in order to create a new hegemony (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 26-29, 36-37; Laclau & Mouffe, 2008, pp. 166-170). The possible implications for this process on ‘the political’ are further discussed in the section on post-politics below.

Theory of Post-Politics

This study draws from post-foundational political theory and its implications for understanding eco-politics, environmental movements, and mediated discourse. Theorists such as Mouffe

(2005), Swyngedouw (2010) and Blühdorn (2013) are influential thinkers, where this study uses the works of Mouffe as a point of departure. Post-foundational political theory builds on a differentiation between politics and '*the political*'. Politics regard the institutional, practical processes of politics in practice, such as elections and policy making. 'The political', on the other hand, regards the conflictual dimension of politics (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 3-4, 8-9). Kenis (2019) describes it as a discursive or symbolic dimension, "a kind of logic of acting and thinking, which recognises the reality of power, dissensus and decision and which gives a place to conflict and debate on different ways to conceive of current and future society" (p. 834). Conflict is an inevitable feature of politics. Democracy is built on division, the drawn lines for who is a part of 'the people' and who is not, and decision making is inherently a choice between contradicting alternatives. Conflict is thereby inescapable in democracy (Mouffe, 2013, pp. 43-50).

According to this perspective, since conflict is inherent to politics it should not be concealed. *Post-politics* refers to a condition where the conflictual elements are hidden, where consensus is sought and conflict denied. The term *depoliticization* refers to processes leading to this condition. According to Mouffe, liberal democracy's emphasis on rationality and individualism leads to this false consensus and denial of conflicting interests between groups, and thereby post-political condition. This has become the hegemonic order, under which political alternatives have become unthinkable. Post-politics thereby conceals the *contingency* of discourse (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8-19).

In contrast, Mouffe argues conflict should be acknowledged. Here, Mouffe differentiates between types of conflict: *antagonism* and *agonism*. Division is inevitable, but where antagonism seeks to eliminate an *enemy*, agonism is possible when conflict between *adversaries* is recognized and opposing views are seen as legitimate. Mouffe emphasizes the role of collective identities in politics (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 19-25; 2013, pp. 45-50). One characteristic of depoliticization is the relationship between us/them positions being defined in moralist or rational terms rather than political: "This displaces the agonistic struggle between 'left and right' to a struggle between 'right and wrong', either in terms of 'rational versus irrational' or 'good versus evil'" (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020, p. 1597), turning agonism into antagonism. In other words, in an open (agonistic) debate, several standpoints may participate as equally legitimate opponents - they can 'agree to disagree'. When the room for debate is closed, only one or limited standpoints are deemed legitimate and may participate, while alternative positions (antagonists) are deemed as 'wrong'.

Eco-Politics

To further describe 'the political' and depoliticization, eco-politics can be used as an example. It can be argued that processes of depoliticization have been especially evident within eco-politics. This is illustrated in co-optation of eco-politics into 'mainstream' discourse. Issues such as climate change have become important topics on agendas of international assemblies,

recognized as important for all sectors in society and for all people. At the same time, environmental concerns are seen as manageable in harmony with dominating societal and economic values (i.e., consumer capitalism) (Cassegård & Thörn, 2018; Friberg, 2021; Swyngedouw, 2010). Blühdorn (2013) argues a sense of acute environmental degradation is combined with ‘the management of unsustainability’ where the existing system is sought to be sustained. “Rather than trying to suspend or even reverse the prevailing logic of unsustainability, its main pre-occupation is to promote societal adaptation and resilience to sustained unsustainability.” (Blühdorn, 2013, pp. 20-21)

This can be further described by looking at two characteristics of depoliticized eco-politics: universalization and technocracy. Firstly, since environmental issues in some way affect all humans (and all humans have an impact on nature), eco-politics provides a favorable basis for a universalized, ‘all together’ approach. Environmental issues such as climate change are often described as overarching, urgent, and all-encompassing, easily leading to an ‘we are all in this together’ approach that draws on moral imperatives (Kenis & Lievens, 2014, p. 539). ‘The people’ (humanity) becomes a universal victim rather than composed by heterogeneous political subjects (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 221). The rhetoric of ‘all in this together’ hides the massive inequalities in responsibility for, and vulnerability of, the crisis (Cassegård & Thörn, 2018, p. 567; Kenis & Lievens, 2014, pp. 539-540). This rhetoric also implies that humanity together must reach collaboration and consensus in order to solve the environmental issues at hand, delegitimizing alternative views on how the problems should be tackled (Swyngedouw, 2010). It favors cooperation across politico-ideological camps, and in turn limits the space for debating deeper societal change. By denying political contestation and favoring consensus, universalization reproduces processes of depoliticization.

Secondly, eco-politics are easily subjected to technocratic approaches and rationalization. The increasing role of expertise in society is evident in the significance of scientific knowledge within eco-politics (Blühdorn, 2013, pp. 22-24; Swyngedouw, 2010, pp. 225-226; Ylönen et al., 2017, p. 263). There is an emphasis on rational consensus and technological solutions, leaving eco-politics for experts to ‘manage’ rather than seeing them as political issues for debate and contestation. This rationality perspective is inherently depoliticizing since it uses “objective” arguments that leave one legitimate solution only, denying the political and ideological dimensions of politics. Indeed, both approaches turn eco-political debate to a question of morally or rationally right and wrong, hiding the ideological foundations for all decision making. This shows how depoliticization may unfold in the realm of eco-politics (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014, pp. 220-221).

Environmental Movements

As the discussion above shows, the theory of post-politics is useful and relevant for understanding eco-political discourse. Social movements are often defined by resistance and opposition towards existing social orders, which points towards a *politicizing*, or opening,

potential in movements. Then, how can the theory of post-politics be used in analyses of environmental movements in particular? Here, a few approaches are described and discussed in relation to this study. A description of empirical research around post-politics and environmental movements can be found in the literature review on page 15.

To begin, Kenis (2019, pp. 834, 845) makes an important distinction regarding the study of post-politics and social movements, emphasizing that (de)politicization is a discursive process. Social movements themselves cannot *be* ‘post-political’, but they may contribute to depoliticized *discourse*. In line with this conclusion, this study is focusing on discursive processes. Another conclusion raised by Kenis is that the existence of multiple perspectives does not inherently contribute to politicization. Pluralism is not enough, but how the perspectives are represented is also important - multiple voices can exist but the *political nature* of them may not be acknowledged (see also Kenis & Lievens, 2014). Acknowledgement of one’s own political position, the contingency of discourse and legitimacy of the other is needed (Kenis, 2019).

de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) have made important contributions to research on post-politics and environmental movements. Here, they describe depoliticization as a closing of the ‘discursive opportunity structure’ of movements, in other words a limitation of their potential to diffuse their political ideas and be seen as legitimate in public debate (see Koopmans & Statham, 1999). The authors suggest a multi-dimensional analysis of ‘the political’ in order to grasp the tension between radical ideas and pragmatic considerations that environmental movements face, and thereby advance the discussion further than labeling movements as either depoliticized or not. The authors’ *first* dimension of the political concerns whether movements advance ideas that challenge the existing order. This includes promoting anti-capitalist ideas, degrowth or climate justice. However, radical ideas can be proposed in a depoliticized manner - i.e., not acknowledging the political nature of one’s own opinion or the existence of legitimate, opposing views. This issue is the focus of the *second* dimension, which regards activists’ relation to agonism. Is agonism embraced or rejected? Are environmental issues presented as ‘above politics’? The *third* dimension regards activists’ direct engagements in conflict through contentious action. According to de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021, p. 316), in the context of a “mostly closed” space for movements to participate in eco-political debate, the use of contentious action has become an important tool to challenge dominating discourse. Non-violent direct action and civil disobedience are examples of contentious actions. The three dimensions by de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) should not be seen as a ‘checklist’ or conditions that must be met in order to consider a movement politicized. They are a way to nuance the understanding of depoliticization and movements, and may point toward ambiguities such as the tension between ideas and pragmatism (de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021, pp. 315-316).

The theoretical contributions outlined above have been important for informing and inspiring the theoretical framework used in this study. However, their research aims differ from this one, since they focus solely on environmental movements as actors in depoliticized contexts. In this study, the juxtaposition of XR *and news media* is central. The definition and operationalization

of (de)politicization is hence constructed to serve this purpose, and due to limitations, it will not be able to grasp all the nuances presented by these authors. The implications for this will be further discussed in the methods chapter, on page 22.

Problematization & Critique

Theories around post-politics have faced criticism and problematization (see Anshelm & Haikola, 2018 for a review). It has been argued that theory of post-politics itself contribute to a pessimism that hinders imagining the political alternatives it promotes (Meyer, 2020, pp. 419-420). Also, since the first theorizing on post-politics emerged, the political context (in the West) has changed. It seems that there is a space for ‘alternative worldviews’ that did not exist previously. The implications of these shifts for eco-politics and environmental movements have not yet been studied (Kenis, 2021, p. 137). Mentioning examples such as US right wing populism, pandemic restriction protests and rising climate mobilizations, Blühdorn and Deflorian (2021) discuss these shifts as *ambiguous* repoliticizations. “[...] rather than suspending the era of post-politics many of them also seem to be perpetuating the agenda of depoliticisation and post-democracy” (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021, p. 260), for example through polarization, antagonism and lack of trust in democratic institutions. This further illustrates the nuances, and potential difficulties, of the theory of post-politics and how it can be used.

Lastly, it has further been argued that environmental issues in fact are potential spaces for *repoliticization*, contesting the notion that eco-politics is especially vulnerable to post-politics (Anshelm & Haikola, 2018; Kenis & Lievens, 2014). In contrast, it can be argued that since environmental issues affect everyone, and therefore are ‘available’ for anyone to connect to and construct meaning around – eco-politics should be a fruitful ground for political plurality and conflict (Kenis & Lievens, 2014, p. 545).

These discussions are reminders that a theory such as post-politics should not be seen as all-encompassing, be taken without question or critique. In this study, the theory is instead used as a tool to disclose how environmental movements and news media relate to each other as participants in discursive struggles. It is seen as a relevant approach but should not be considered the only or primary one.

Literature Review

News Media & Political Discourse

As described in the introduction, the media plays an important part in the work of social movements. The media can create awareness of political issues, information about social movements as well as provide a platform for opinion pieces and debate. How the media portrays social movements influence how they are perceived by the public (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021; Koopmans, 2004; Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020). This can be said about political issues in general as well - media frames constitute one piece of how political discourse is shaped (Cox, 2013, pp. 143-169). Carvalho (2007, pp. 162, 170-171) argues that news media's selection, interpretation and presentation of societal issues can be traced to the ideological cultures of media outlets. There is a politico-ideological dimension to news media reporting, which implies that news media itself can be treated as part of public political discourse. This leads us to theories on post-politics and a closing space for political debate.

As mentioned, theories on post-politics and depoliticization highlight how eco-political issues are often 'mainstreamed' into the status quo, and political debate lacking. In what way then, may news media contribute to shaping eco-political discourse? Pepermans and Maesele (2014) criticizes previous research on climate reporting in the news media. They argue research has been concerned with mainly two issues, 1) the question of whether *scientific consensus* is accurately communicated by the media, and 2) whether the media contributes to *social consensus* on climate change by encouraging 'rational' dialogue. The authors argue both questions assume that eco-political debate should be avoided or overcome. Consensus and cooperation are seen as the only ways to achieve environmental progress, and therefore the news media should contribute to creating this type of dialogue. The authors criticize these notions, arguing "both assumptions act as exclusionary mechanisms discriminating between who/what is recognized as legitimate and who/what is recognized as illegitimate, which is problematic from the perspective from democratic debate" (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014, p. 219).

Pepermans and Maesele (2014) build their argumentation on post-foundational political theory, which holds agonistic debate between adversaries as the ideal. This perspective is further developed in Pepermans and Maesele (2016) and holds that journalism ideals of neutrality and objectivity serve to impose a 'false consensus' and hide ideology, instead of acknowledging the ideological nature of any worldview or viewpoint. The critical approach of Pepermans & Maesele can be contrasted with what they describe as a more traditional perspective. There are core differences in how the 'traditional' and more critical perspectives understand the problems, solutions, and goals for climate reporting – seeking consensus versus agonism (Pepermans & Maesele, 2016, pp. 479-481). In line with the argumentation of Pepermans and Maesele (2014) described above, they claim that the consensus-approach has dominated media studies on environmental journalism (see Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015). Drawing from these arguments and conclusions, Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020) suggests

an alternative framework that can grasp ideology and processes of (de)politicization within mediated discourse. Describing mainstream news media as “echo chambers of establishment ideas and elite voices” (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020, p. 1594), their framework aims to explore how mediated discourse shape the room for political debate in ways that enable/disable alternative views to the status quo. They suggest using critical discourse analysis of the scope and form of news media content, with a particular focus on how discursive strategies construct the room for political debate.

There has yet been little empirical research conducted on news media, eco-politics and (de)politicization. Still, there are examples of studies showing how news media contribute to shaping the space for eco-political debate. Here, some important research findings are described.

In the case of mediated discourse on nuclear power in Finland, Ylönen et al. (2017) show how pro- and anti-nuclear camps used depoliticizing and politicizing strategies to steer and shape political debate. Politicization of debate was more often found within anti-nuclear argumentations, which is discussed as linked to the power positions associated with the two camps, where the pro-nuclear position is connected to Finnish elite, governmental and technological institutions. Maesele et al. (2017) show how news media reporting on a direct action against a GM potato field trial limited the space for political debate, for example by framing the issue in technocratic and economic terms. It is stressed that (de)politicizing tendencies are not tied to ideologies or news outlets but can only be disclosed in specific cases and texts. (See also Maesele, 2013; Pepermans & Maesele, 2014)

Mediated discourse can also influence how citizens engage with and understand eco-political issues. Pepermans (2015) dissertation compares mediated and citizen discourse, finding the ability to envision and engage with alternative sustainable futures was related to using politicizing discourse on eco-politics. In contrast, using depoliticizing discourse was connected to expressions of alienation from eco-political engagement and instead resorting to ‘apolitical lifestyle changes’ (Pepermans, 2015, p. 191). Also, in their study on news media reporting on air pollution in London, Kenis and Barratt (2021) found that the type of reporting influenced public engagement in societal issues. They argue that mediated discourse that introduced conflict and contestation had been key for opening the space for political public debate on air pollution.

In sum, the existing research outlined here points toward the importance of news media in shaping public eco-political discourse as well as the relevance of using discourse analysis to explore processes of (de)politicization.

Environmental Movements & (De)politicization

As shown, theories of depoliticization and post-politics have been of interest for understanding eco-politics, which makes them relevant theoretical tools for studying environmental movements. In this section, research is outlined showing how environmental movements may reinforce or challenge depoliticization of eco-political discourse.

Reinforcing Depoliticization?

Environmental movements position themselves vis-a-vis the depoliticization of eco-politics in different ways. In this section, I will give examples of how they may *reinforce* depoliticization of eco-politics. Smiles and Edwards (2021) illustrate how northern environmental groups have tended to understand environmental issues through ‘climate actions’ frames, which advocate for robust action, albeit within existing socio-economic systems and using market and technological solutions. Within this approach, an ‘apolitical’ approach is used which emphasizes cooperation. The authors describe these types of environmental movements as more or less in line with mainstream eco-political discourse, thereby pointing toward a tendency for many northern organizations to reinforce depoliticizing tendencies (Smiles & Edwards, 2021, p. 1448). Regarding the Swedish context, Thörn and Svenberg (2016) show how *institutionalization* of environmental movements has gone hand in hand with depoliticization, together with a shift of responsibility of environmental issues from the government to civil society organizations and corporations. They show an ambivalence within movements on topics such as sustainable consumption and direct cooperation with state agencies, since if and how they engage with them may affect their ability to challenge status quo eco-politics. The authors point toward complex adaptations of movements in a depoliticized context, with movements navigating using both confrontational tactics and consensual cooperation in different situations. One example is Greenpeace engaging with dialogue with the corporations they target in their direct actions, trying both to push for change and support progressive forces within the corporations (Thörn & Svenberg, 2016, pp. 601, 603-605).

Also, research has pointed toward depoliticized tendencies in the *apocalyptic rhetoric* of environmental movements. Within for example climate movements, the rhetoric of apocalypse and urgency is highly evident. It tends to go hand in hand with a universalization and homogenization of both the crisis itself (as a singular apocalypse) and its victims (humanity). The language of urgency tends to promote cooperation and consensus approaches, such as illustrated in this quote by sociologist Anthony Giddens:

Climate change should be lifted out of a right–left context, where it has no place [...] there has to be agreement that the issue is so important and all-encompassing that the usual party conflicts should be suspended or muted. (Giddens, 2009, p. 114)

By ignoring and thereby hiding ideological foundations for eco-politics, as well as conflict between social and political groups, this rhetoric contributes to a depoliticization of eco-

political discourse (Cassegård & Thörn, 2018, p. 567; Kenis & Lievens, 2014, pp. 539-540). Or, as Blühdorn (2013) argues, it may even be seen as “sustaining unsustainability”. Language of urgency and risk is used to shift focus from substantially changing societies and lifestyles, to maintaining existing systems by adaptation. Movements using this rhetoric can be interpreted as contributing to the reproduction of depoliticization of eco-politics.

Challenging Depoliticization?

In recent years, research has been concerned with how emerging movements may instead *challenge* post-political tendencies. Case studies have been especially concerned with three branches of environmental movements: school strike movements, environmental alternative action organizations (EAAOs), and environmental justice movements.

School Strikers

The quick expansion and gained influence of the *school strike for climate movement* (including Fridays for Future and Greta Thunberg) has made it an interesting topic for researchers. There have been discussions on the messaging of the school strikes, especially their demand to ‘listen to the science’ and its potential as a political message. It has been interpreted as a depoliticized approach, an effort to gain broad support by keeping the demands empty or undefined (de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021; Han & Ahn, 2020; Kenis, 2021). Others find these movements challenge ‘business as usual’ by directly criticizing growth capitalism (Friberg, 2021; Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020). Kenis (2021) differentiates between method and message, arguing the *tactic* of striking is politicized but the *message* risks neutralization. These findings point toward the need for a multi-dimensional analysis of environmental movements and depoliticization. Lastly, research shows the importance of context. Bowman (2020) argues that academia (and society in general) tends to simplify youth political action. He claims the strikers’ message is *reduced* to ‘listen to the science’, with the result that the multifaceted character of their rhetoric is hidden - especially the more politicized themes of climate justice and equality (Bowman, 2020).

EAAOs

Environmental alternative action organizations (EAAOs) are movements with a particular focus on imagining alternative futures and realizing steps toward that vision in the present. By reimagining existing societies, these movements hold potential to challenge post-political tendencies. EAAO initiatives include community gardens, local currencies, clothes swaps and other alternative material and energy flows (de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021, p. 213). There is a discussion within research on how these kinds of movements may challenge or reinforce (de)politicization. Optimistic scholars point toward how EAAOs create “sustainable materialism” as alternatives to status quo, whereas others describe them as “mere coping”, co-optation, and in contrast to political resistance (de Moor, 2020; MacGregor, 2021, pp. 329-330). This research hence points toward ambiguities on the local level for how clear cut the large theories of post-politics actually are, including the importance of geographic characteristics,

which make several researchers call for a more nuanced analysis (de Moor, 2020; de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014b; MacGregor, 2021).

de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) attempt to nuance the analysis by using the three-dimensional framework of (de)politicization within environmental movements described above in the theoretical background. They show that radical ideas of EAAOs may be difficult to realize because of resource restraints and limited opportunity structures. Also, the studied movements choose to focus on “positive goods” instead of “negative bads” to gain support and momentum, since they felt that was more difficult to achieve using oppositional and conflictual approaches. They thereby show how EAAOs may navigate a depoliticized political context in strategic ways, avoiding the simplistic analysis that EAAOs fall victim to post-political conditions (de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021, pp. 324-325).

Environmental Justice Movements

During the last decades, *environmental justice movements* have come to form a significant branch within the larger environmental movement (Cassegård & Thörn, 2018, pp. 567-568). Environmental justice regards the injustices between countries (and social groups) most responsible for emissions and ones that disproportionately experience the negative impact from climate change, which is linked to colonial and postcolonial histories (Cassegård & Thörn, 2018). These movements have impacted the environmental movement at large. For example, justice is an important issue for school strikers, especially intergenerational justice, which concerns how previous generations are responsible for emissions and inaction but today’s youth and future generations will bear the graver consequences (de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021; Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020). Addressing conflictual lines between social groups like this distributes responsibility and blame, and constructs political subjects (such as youth or indigenous people), which can be a tool for challenging depoliticized eco-politics and its consensus approach (see Bowman, 2020; Friberg, 2021; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a). (For a deeper discussion on the politicizing potential of climate justice, see Russell (2012)). In sum, environmental justice has been discussed as a potentially politicizing tactic for movements.

In conclusion, much of the research on environmental movements and post-politics finds ambiguous tendencies. Empirical studies find that environmental movements both challenge and reinforce processes of depoliticization, as well as adapt and negotiate post-political contexts. This points toward the importance of context and how it affects movements, but also how context shapes how movements and their message are perceived in public discourse, as for example raised by Bowman (2020) in the case of young school strikers.

Extinction Rebellion & ‘The Political’

Lastly, what has previous research found regarding XR and ‘the political’? There are various conclusions drawn from existing research regarding XR’s political ‘stance’. Especially when

XR emerged, it was discussed whether or not the movement posed a challenge to depoliticizing environmentalism.

Compared to preceding environmental movements that mainly targeted individuals and corporations, XR is more focused on the state. They usually target governments and use a rather neutral political framing where the oppositional line is not as clearly defined as in most previous environmental movements (de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021, pp. 621-622). Their explicit ‘beyond politics’ rhetoric is aimed to gather support across political divisions (Farrell et al., 2019, p. 22; Stuart, 2022, p. 11; Taylor, 2020), but have been criticized as merely illustrating ‘ideological denial’ (Stuart, 2022). Further, their use of alarmism and call for urgent action may privilege “moral action over political analysis”, as put by Doherty et al. (2018). The emphasis on urgency can be seen as moralization, which assumes a singular humanity fighting against climate change. It is an approach that hides social injustices, colonial histories, and conflicts of interest, thereby depoliticizing eco-politics (Zantvoort, 2021). Along the same line, Smiles and Edwards (2021) found that among XR activists in Norwich, radical climate justice frames were not as prominent as more ‘mainstream’ frames, potentially a result of aiming for broad public support. These elements have thus been discussed as potentially depoliticizing.

The possibility of creating radical change with XR’s approach has also been questioned. XR’s demands are not as distinct as in many previous campaigns targeting specific policies or corporations (de Moor, De Vydt, et al., 2021, p. 622), which is seen as hindering XR’s strive toward change (Smiles & Edwards, 2021; Stuart, 2022). The most practical demand among the three overarching ones is the need for citizen assemblies. This has been questioned as a feasible way to attain change on a systemic level, since the majority of citizens presumably are hesitant to supporting radical societal shifts (Stuart, 2022, p. 2). XR have also been criticized for not clearly enough questioning economic growth, thereby losing their radical potential: “[...] XRs three demands – aiming to be ‘beyond politics’ – fail to identify economic growth and the capitalist system that demands this growth as problematic. Thus, they also fail to demand the necessary system changes” (Stuart, 2022, p. 11). In sum, using an apolitical and moralizing rhetoric, as well as keeping demands vague have been seen as depoliticizing tendencies in XR.

On the other hand, some researchers highlight ways that XR do challenge status quo. Drawing on a discourse analysis of XR and other recent climate movements, Friberg (2021) argues that they represent ‘a non-postpolitical discourse’. Firstly, the author argues that XR do present important critique of economic growth and the status quo. Secondly, that they construct heterogenous subjects, thereby rejecting the moralizing notion of a singular humanity and instead introducing conflict between groups. This is shown through an awareness of the diverse social realities within the movement, as well as when describing societal systems as made up by intersecting toxic structures (such as racism, Eurocentrism, and sexism) (Friberg, 2021, pp. 5-8). Also using discourse analysis, Molek-Kozakowska (2021) shows how XR constructs a dissenting citizen identity that enables disruptive and non-violent rebellion. In this way, challenging ‘mainstream’ eco-politics.

There seems to exist different views on how XR should be understood as a political movement, and their potential for creating radical change. Beyond the stances described here, some researchers propose a more ‘neutral’ or ambiguous conclusion, a position seen in Slaven and Heydon (2020) and Stuart et al. (2020). Overall, this brief review finds inconsistent conclusions around how XR relates to ‘the political’, rather pointing toward complexities and ambiguities than either/or answers. Also, in this review only one study was found that included both movement and media material, in the case of Stuart’s (2022) analysis of hypocrisy accusations toward XR activists, where news media is used to exemplify these accusations. This thesis then, may contribute to understanding XR in context. Instead of trying to ‘evaluate’ the political stance of XR, focus is put on discursive struggle and the role of news media as part of the discursive context of XR.

Summary

This literature review has shown that movements are discursive actors with potential to challenge or reinforce a (de)politicization of eco-political discourse. Within the existing research on XR, various conclusions are found regarding how to understand their approach to ‘the political’ and how they challenge or reinforce processes of depoliticization. Hence, the movement remains an interesting actor to study when exploring issues of (de)politicization of eco-political discourse.

Further, news media can be seen as a significant actor in the discursive context of environmental movements. Both environmental movements and news media participate in the shaping of eco-political discourse and the room for debate. News media may also influence the opportunity for environmental movements to engage in eco-political debate – for example, how movements are represented affect how they are perceived by the public. We have seen that discourse analysis has been used to explore how movements and the media engage in discursive processes, and in relation to (de)politicization specifically.

However, there are some gaps within existing research. To my knowledge, there are very few studies that includes both discourse analyses of environmental movements and news media to explore processes of (de)politicization. Questions remain on how news media may shape the room for movements to influence eco-political debate, and if media constructions of movements and their messages reinforce a depoliticization of eco-politics. Therefore, this study explores both environmental movements and news media as participants in discursive struggles, looking at how they use discursive strategies that in turn open or close the space for eco-political debate.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative stance, and a discourse perspective specifically. The aim of the study is to explore XR and news media as participants in discursive struggle. Using a discourse perspective allows for studying processes of meaning making and constructions of political debate. Further, its critical stance is suitable for understanding issues tightly connected to processes of power, political influence, and in turn political decision making, especially the resisting nature of social movements and their relationship to the political status quo. Further, qualitative methods are superior to understanding issues where interpretation, meaning, and nuance are central (Marshall, 2016, pp. 15-17, 21-26).

The study is designed as a case study. Its main delimitations are drawn from the case of XR Sweden's coordinated airport actions on October 31, 2021. This allows for a deep rather than broad analysis and enables a juxtaposition of XR's communication and news media material. Selecting a small case favors 'thick descriptions' of the topic, in addition to a well-grounded and multifaceted analysis (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Since discourse analysis is concerned with language and meaning making, focusing on texts is suitable for this study. This allows for interpretation, comparison, and analysis that both looks at details (such as word use) as well as overall patterns (such as themes or ideology) (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 68; Marshall, 2016, pp. 164-166). It should therefore be noted that the action itself (entering runways and stopping air traffic in different ways) is not treated as part of the discourse in this case but rather a tool for XR to create debate. The communicative practices by XR and news media that followed the actions is in focus in this analysis.

Data Collection & Sampling

Two types of data will be needed in this study, text material from XR's communication and news media articles from Swedish press. In this study, the term 'text material' also includes any images connected to the texts. When studying XR, background information will be collected from the XR UK and international websites, as well as the book *This is Not a Drill* (Farrell et al., 2019). The Swedish website, including texts describing their aim and values, will also provide important insight to the movement. These texts form background material to understanding XR as a movement but is not part of the analysis.

The data for analysis is focused on the selected case, i.e., the airport actions on Oct 31, 2021. Firstly, this includes three press releases published on XR Sweden's website, which will provide a view of how XR aims to portray their action in relation to news media. Secondly, Facebook posts from the page Extinction Rebellion Sverige is included to explore XR's direct communication with the public. The social media sampling draws from posts between Oct 31 – Nov 30, 2021, and will only include the posts and images, not comments and engagements.

Posts with a minimal amount of text, such as ones sharing video-material will not be included since texts are the focus in this analysis. Some of the speeches made in videos are also published in text form on other posts, so it is assessed that important information will not be lost. This sampling resulted in 30 posts. The Facebook page was selected since it has the by far highest number of followers compared to Instagram and Twitter, and when comparing Facebook and Instagram content within this time span there was significant overlap. The social media material is treated as complimentary to the press releases.

The news media material includes editorials, opinion pieces and news articles specifically concerning the airport actions on Oct 31. A part of the aim of the study is to understand news media as a participant in discursive struggle. The data collection focused on the largest newspapers in Sweden, since it can be argued that these constitute influential discursive actors within the media landscape. The database *Mediearkivet Retrifer* was used to find the articles, searching for pieces between Oct 31 and Nov 30, 2021, published in the seven largest news outlets (MPRT, 2021). The search revealed that the three largest morning newspapers stood for the main reporting. This therefore formed the delimitation for media material, which includes Dagens Nyheter (DN), Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) and Göteborgs-Posten (GP). The articles were found using the search term “extinction rebellion” AND (flygplats OR flygplan) [airport OR airplane]. Including additional similar keywords (such as “flyg”) was not found to expand the search results, thereby these are seen as sufficient. After accounting for any duplicates between newspaper and web publishing, this sampling resulted in ten news articles and four opinion pieces, found in table 1 below. All text excerpts from the data that are presented in the results have been translated from Swedish to English.

XR Data	
Press releases	Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021d) Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021e) Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021h)
Social media	Facebook: Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 30 posts
Media Data	
Dagens Nyheter (DN)	Oct 31 Tanaka et al. (2021) Oct 31 Dahl and Holmgren (2021) Nov 1 Olsson (2021) Nov 1 Tanaka and Olsson (2021)
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)	Oct 31 Rosell and Bränström (2021) Oct 31 Gunér and TT (2021) Nov 1 Nekham and TT (2021) Nov 2 Palm (2021) Nov 2 Svensson (2021) - <i>opinion piece (editorial)</i>
Göteborgs-Posten (GP)	Oct 31 Rasper et al. (2021) Nov 1 TT (2021) Nov 3 Pihl (2021) - <i>opinion piece (editorial)</i> Nov 20 Gustavsson (2021) - <i>opinion piece</i> Nov 23 Paxling (2021) - <i>opinion piece</i>

Table 1. Data Collection

Analytical Framework

To explore the research questions of this study, critical discourse analysis is used. Here, I draw from a framework by Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020), which allows for a particular focus on how discursive strategies contribute to opening/closing political debate. They, in turn, are inspired by the work by Carvalho (2007) which has been a source for deeper understanding and reflection in this study as well.

The aim of Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020, p. 1598) analysis is to “draw conclusions on the extent of agonistic pluralism in a specific media landscape”, in other words focusing on the room for political debate and contestation within media landscapes (in line with Mouffe’s definition of agonism). Here, they use the concept of *discursive strategies* to understand processes that open/close the room for political debate – in other words, reinforce or challenge depoliticization of debate. Discursive strategies are described by Carvalho as “forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169). They are ways that actors (consciously or not) intervene in discourse, for example by framing a news event. Discursive strategies are further described in the analytical framework below.

Maesele and Ræijmaekers (2020) framework have been used in empirical studies on GMO discourses (Maesele et al., 2017) as well as a climate movement campaign and media reporting of it (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014) (cf Carvalho, 2007). Media material has been in focus, but also some campaign material. In this paper, the framework is used to analyze both XR and news media material. It should be noted that I only use the first part of Maesele and Ræijmaekers (2020) larger framework, the one which is concerned with the level of texts and particular outlets ('selected media discourses'). This is because the subsequent parts of the framework concern media landscapes more broadly. Also, I have made a few minor changes to better fit the aim for this paper. The framework and how it is used is described below.

The text analysis of this study is conducted in two parts. All texts from the data collection are included in the first, more overarching part, but only a selected sample in the second, deeper analysis. The analysis is divided in this way to gain a good overview of the material and its content, but at the same time provide time to conduct a deeper analysis of a smaller sample. This is due to time and scope limitations.

Part One: Thematic Analysis

Maesele and Ræijmaekers (2020) critical discourse analysis is built of six steps or inquiries, divided in the categories *scope* and *form* (see table 2 below). The steps should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather informing one another in interconnected ways. The first three regard the scope of the material. (1) What objects or topics are introduced, (2) What social actors, institutions and whose perspectives are represented, and (3) What viewpoints and political standpoints are introduced. Together, the first three steps are similar to a thematic analysis, and mainly corresponds to the first research question of this study, regarding how the actions and the following debate was constructed. Analyzing all the material thematically provides an overview of the content and guides the sampling for the next step of analysis (described below). The material included in the thematic analysis is hence:

XR	3 press releases 30 Facebook posts
News Media	10 news articles 4 opinion pieces

Part Two: Discursive Strategies Analysis

The second category (form) looks at *how* the scope (the results of part one) is presented. Discursive strategies are the most important focus here. It concerns selection and composition, i.e., how objects, actors and viewpoints are framed and argued for. In line with Maesele and Ræijmaekers' (2020, p. 1600) suggestion, the steps (4) layout and (5) linguistic strategies are secondary in the analysis, used mainly to inform and illustrate the analysis of (6) discursive strategies. 'Layout' asks questions about "surface elements", such as images and text genre.

‘Linguistic strategies’ asks what writing style, key concepts and persuasive devices are used. These elements together form discursive strategies. Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020) suggest two important discursive strategies linked to (de)politicization of discourse: positioning and (de)legitimization. These correspond to the second research question and are further described below.

Regarding the material included in this part of analysis, the sampling was drawn from the ‘richest’ material in step one, meaning the texts with developed reasoning and room for opinion, as well as an interest in covering all the prominent themes found in the thematic analysis. Then, of the XR material, all three press releases were included. From the Facebook posts, ones that either complemented the press releases thematically or developed further on prominent themes were selected. Also, the posts concerning media coverage of the action were included since media reporting is of interest in this study. This resulted in eight posts. Among the news articles, the thematic analysis showed a few recurring themes, and at least one article representing each theme was selected, resulting in six articles. All four opinion pieces were included as well. Hence, the material sampled for the ‘discursive strategies’ analysis includes:

XR	3 press releases
	8 Facebook posts
News Media	6 news articles
	4 opinion pieces

	Steps of CDA	Description
RQ 1 Scope	1. Objects	Topics
	2. Social actors	Individuals & institutions - Whose perspective
	3. Viewpoints	Opinions - Politico-ideological standpoints
RQ 2 Form	4. Layout	Images - Genre - Quotes
	5. Linguistic strategies	Key concepts - Writing style - Persuasive devices
	6. Discursive strategies	Positioning - (De)legitimization

Table 2. Critical discourse analysis framework

Discursive Strategies Definitions

The second research question regards the room for political debate, i.e. (de)politicization of debate. Here, the study focuses on two strategies suggested by Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020, pp. 1601-1602) as important for processes of (de)politicization: (1) *positioning*, i.e.,

steering debate, and (2) *(de)legitimization*, i.e. limiting debate. In other words, the analysis regards the position (focus) and boundaries (allowed opinions) for political debate. By viewing how the strategies are used within XR's communication and in the media material, the analysis may disclose what role the news media have in the discursive context of environmental movements and their opportunity to create and participate in eco-political debate. The following sections will outline these strategies and how they relate to (de)politicization. It should be noted that the strategies sometimes overlap, for example a certain positioning may serve to also favor or legitimize a presented argument. The strategies should hence not be seen as mutually exclusive but interacting processes.

Positioning

Positioning is a discursive strategy that steers debate. In this study, this concept is used to explore how the identity of the subject (topic) is constructed. It regards the angles, and selected aspects of the subject used, similar to the process of 'framing'. However, it puts more emphasis on how concepts, contexts and actors are constructed in relation to each other, for example through comparisons or dichotomies. Positioning essentially asks the question *what the debate is about*. It also asks how these constructions make certain opinions or actions preferable (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020, pp. 1601-1602).

The strategy of positioning is connected to processes of (de)politicization. In this study, this connection is operationalized as the question of whether the positioning enables political debate. Whether positioning enables political debate is mainly seen in what kind of context key concepts are put into. Debate is enabled when the subject is put in a socio-political context, for example by introducing policy or societal issues relevant for politics, whereas putting it in an 'objective' or apolitical context hinders debate (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020, p. 1602). For the news media and environmental movements, positioning can be used in various ways. By selecting and framing concepts and events, news media contribute to steering debate and focus, to either socio-political contexts or apolitical ones, such as by constructing the climate crisis solely as a scientific or technological issue. For environmental movements, positioning can be a way to put issues into a socio-political context where alternative ideas can be debated, for example by constructing consumer-related emissions not as a lifestyle issue but a question for policy, legislation, or corporate responsibility.

(De)legitimization

(De)legitimization is a discursive strategy that concerns the boundaries of the debate and the perspectives and opinions that are justified to be part of it. Here, this study will also look at two specific forms of (de)legitimization: *rationalizing* and *moralizing*. These can be used to disqualify alternative views from participating in debate, by deeming them irrational or immoral. Political discussion about legitimate alternative futures is transformed into black and

white questions of good versus evil and rational versus irrational. Rationalization and moralization thereby construct issues as apolitical and hides ‘the political’ dimension.

These discursive strategies narrow the space for ideological conflict in three ways: (1) by setting the limits between what is possible and impossible, (2) by differentiating the legitimate from the illegitimate, and (3) by concealing underlying values, interests, and assumptions. (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014, p. 223)

(De)legitimization is hence directly connected to processes of (de)politicization. In this study, this connection is operationalized into two questions. Firstly, it asks whether challenging or alternative views to the status quo are legitimized or delegitimized. If alternative views are treated as legitimate, this shows that dissent and agonism are allowed in the space for debate. As described in the theory chapter, agonism is understood as the presence of conflict between adversaries that are seen as *legitimate* in debate. Antagonism on the contrary concerns conflict between enemies where *delegitimized* actors or standpoints are kept out of the space for political debate. Secondly, the analysis asks whether ‘the political’ (the contingent and conflictual nature of politics) is denied through rationalization and moralization, or if it is acknowledged. In other words, this can be described as whether the proposed viewpoint is constructed as the only (inevitable) option. When moralization and rationalization are used to legitimize a certain claim, alternatives become rationally or morally unthinkable, which in turn closes political debate (Maesele & Raeijmaekers, 2020, pp. 1597, 1602). Both environmental movements and news media can open/close political debate through (de)legitimizing strategies: by including or excluding alternative views, acknowledging politico-ideological foundations, or using rational/moral arguments that reinforces depoliticized consensus.

Discursive Strategy	Operationalization
Positioning	Steering debate: What is the focus of debate?
	(De)politicization: i) Does the positioning enable political debate?
(De)legitimization	Boundaries for debate: What opinions are allowed within debate?
	(De)politicization: i) Are challenging views to the status quo legitimized or delegitimized? ii) Is ‘the political’ denied through rationalization and moralization, or is it acknowledged?

Table 3. Discursive strategies operationalization

Considerations: Genres & Actors

In the analysis, the types of texts as well as the actors behind them should be considered. There are differences between news articles, opinion pieces, editorials, press releases and social media posts, for example in their discursive ‘weight’. In the case of XR, the press releases are directed towards media outlets and aims to influence media frames of the actions, whereas Facebook posts are aimed toward the broader public and may not be as elaborative (as texts) or worked through collectively. In the news material, opinion pieces stand out since they provide opportunities for actors to take a stand on current issues. The data includes both opinion pieces written by ‘external’ actors and editorials where newspaper representatives express their views.

There are also general differences between the two main types of text material: XR’s communication and media articles. These constitute two different types of actors and genres. Thörn (1997) argues that social movement texts constitute their own genre, a particular form of political text. They are characterized by the collective recognition of them as representing the movement, and they therefore manifest collective identities. Movement texts call for action and are oriented toward unambiguity - a shared story of the past, present and future which constructs the “we” (Thörn, 1997, pp. 170-185). Movement texts also serve to persuade the reader and mobilize support.

News media articles, on the other hand, are not in the same way symbolic representations of collective identities, nor do they share the aim for unambiguity of movement texts. Norms for journalism rather emphasize the need to represent different perspectives and outlooks on current events, aiming to uphold the values of *objectivity* and *balance* (Cox, 2013, p. 155), though it should be repeated that news reporting is also shaped by norms such as personalization, dramatization, novelty, as well as ideological, economic, and cultural factors (Boykoff, 2011, pp. 99-109; Cox, 2013, pp. 149-158). In sum, the analyses requires that the actors behind the different types of texts is considered.

Lastly, a note on the choice of analytical framework in relation to the theory of post-politics. Previous research on environmental movements and depoliticization points toward a nuanced and ambiguous relationship between the two, where for example de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) call for a multidimensional analysis to grasp these complexities. The framework used in this study does not provide such a rigid examination of XR. However, this study is not concerned with understanding XR as a movement, or how they ‘manage’ post-political eco-politics. Instead, it focuses on XR *and news media* as discursive actors, thereby putting the juxtaposition between the two at the center of the study. The analytical framework is chosen since it could be applied to different types of material. The operationalization of (de)politicization is built on Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020) framework and is adjusted in a way to serve both movement and media material, as well as to consider the scope of the thesis. For example, a third discursive strategy suggested by the authors is incorporated into the other two, namely naturalization which regards whether debate is dismissed completely. The other strategies answer similar

questions of whether debate is enabled as well as the presence of dissent and agonism, and this approach was found to better suit analyzing the selected text material.

Theoretical Sufficiency, Delimitations & Contributions

Within qualitative research there is the question of when the analysis is satisfactory, or, as suggested by Marshall (2016, p. 229), when *theoretical sufficiency* is attained. Here, balancing different approaches can be useful. Firstly, a comprehensive understanding of conclusions drawn by previous research and theory should be balanced by a critical interrogation of one's own interpretations and conclusions. This can be done by "searching for alternative understandings" (Marshall, 2016, p. 229). For example, in this study, conclusions and interpretations are compared with previous research using similar analytical approaches (see Maesele et al., 2017; Pepermans & Maesele, 2014).

Secondly, finding "saturated", repeated patterns and consistencies should be balanced by paying attention to inconsistency or ambiguity (Alvesson, 2018, pp. 287, 289; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 172). This is a question of interpretation. For a discourse analysis to be convincing it should be well grounded and coherent. In this study, intertextuality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 7-8) and hermeneutics (Alvesson, 2018, pp. 130-131) are fruitful analytical tools. Both concepts concern the process of putting parts of the data (e.g., utterances or texts) in relation to other texts or the material as a whole, successively building the interpretation to grasp the discursive structure. It should be noted, however, that in line with the theoretical foundation of discourse theory, all patterns of meanings should be considered temporary, not fixed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 28-29).

Furthermore, theoretical sufficiency is a question of appropriate delimitations. The most important delimitation in this study is the selected case. By delimiting the study to only one case, the coordinated airport actions on Swedish airports, a focused and deep analysis is enabled, rather than a broader or more general one. This delimitation is suitable for the exploration of discursive strategies and (de)politicization since this requires rather detailed analysis. Also, this delimitation enables including XR's communication as well as news media material from several outlets within the scope of the thesis.

In-depth explorations of theoretical concepts and processes in a particular case may benefit theoretical understanding, application, and development. This will be useful for further research of similar phenomena, e.g., in other contexts. However, causal patterns cannot be found. In this type of study then, *generalizability* is not considered in the meaning of causal explanations but in theoretical testing, modification, and development (Alvesson, 2018, pp. 26-27). Further, in line with the argumentation by Alvesson (2018, pp. 369-370), the empirical data and results should not be seen as *proof* but as *arguments* for understanding phenomena in a certain way. For example, in the case of mediated discourse about XR, this study will not be able to provide evidence of general patterns, but the analysis of a small case may provide insights and

arguments for how theoretical concepts and processes may be understood. It may also add nuances to, or find gaps within, theory and how it previously has been applied.

Ethics & Reflexivity

Ethics and reflexivity are central traits within qualitative research. Ethical considerations include how research is conducted, how data and any participants are treated, and how the research can be used when finished. When conducting interpretive research, the principle of charity should be used, meaning assuming a rationality behind the texts (Gilje, 2007, pp. 234-237). I find this linked to ethics, since it concerns treating the material with respect for the authors, rather than making hasty or biased interpretations. This is not, however, at odds with a critical stance.

On reflexivity, I acknowledge my position as personally active in the environmental movement, however not in XR. This gives me insight in the context of XR in the wider environmental movement but should not hinder a critical analysis. Indeed, a personal interest further drives me to explore the subject. It should also be acknowledged that research in itself contributes to discursive processes. Just as the words and practices studied have implications for discourse and power, conducting this research means that I will participate in forming the discourse around eco-politics, media constructions, environmental movements, and of course XR specifically. Researchers should remain aware of this power position. (Alvesson, 2018, pp. 10-15; Marshall, 2016, pp. 117-118)

Results: Critical Discourse Analysis

This chapter outlines the results from the critical discourse analysis. Firstly, the results from the thematic analysis are described, divided into sections according to the type of material. This is followed by a summary and comparison. Secondly, the results from the discursive strategies analysis are presented, also according to text types. Here, each section also includes a discussion on how the strategies show (de)politicizing tendencies. The chapter ends with a comparative discussion of the discursive strategies in the different materials.

Part One: Thematic Analysis

In this section, the results from steps 1-3 in the CDA are presented, which forms a thematic analysis. This is not a quantitative study, but to gain an overview of what themes (objects, actors, and viewpoints) are recurring, a compilation has been made of the themes and the *number of texts* where it has been used. This provides a sense of what characterizes XR communication, news media and opinion pieces regarding this action respectively. The analysis of XR's communication will be presented first, which include press releases and Facebook posts.

XR's Communication

Press Releases

On the day of the airport actions (Oct 31, 2021), XR Sweden published three press releases on their website (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d, 2021e, 2021h). The texts follow the common form of press releases, directed toward media actors and including the most important information, quotes from activists, contact information as well as links to live-streams and images. In line with the movement text genre, the texts are characterized by a clear argumentation for the movement's standpoints. The actions are briefly described, with a list of used safety measures. Large segments are repeated in more than one of the texts, such as the action's three demands:

- Stop subsidizing aviation!
- Spare the forests! Biofuels are a dead end that does not reduce CO2 emissions.
- Stop burning fossil fuels and immediately begin a transition of society.

(Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

These demands are backed up by a narrative which includes the first three steps of the CDA. *Objects* include: the action itself; safety measures; aviation/airports; current politics/aviation subsidies; the climate crisis/future consequences; solutions/emission reductions/transition to

sustainability; science/facts; technical solutions/biofuels; the fossil industry; biosphere/nature. Safety measures around the actions are given a prominent place in the texts and are thereby interpreted as a specific theme separated from the actions themselves.

Mentioned social *actors* and institutions include: activists/XR; politicians/political institutions; ‘we’/Swedish public; police/security staff; passengers; aviation industry/personnel; ‘we’/humanity; scientists; people affected by climate crisis/younger generations. Here, the activists/XR provide the dominating perspective, mainly through the focus on personal experiences of activists as well as a consistent highlighting of the action’s aim.



Figure 1. Press release, Oct 31 (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

The narrative is entirely controlled by the activists and their aims, which is also personalized through quotes from activists that participated in the actions. The text takes clear stance, with the important *viewpoints*: political dissent; civil disobedience activism motivated/justified; ending aviation subsidies; no to biofuels/technological solutions; demand for transition/emissions reduction.

Facebook Posts

On the Facebook page of Extinction Rebellion Sverige, the movement can communicate directly with supporters and the public. All themes from the press releases are found in the Facebook posts, however there is more room to further elaborate on specific topics and introduce additional angles. Here, the recurring findings are presented, and objects, actors and viewpoints only mentioned in one or two of the posts are not covered.

The most recurring *objects* (used in 12-29 posts) follow the same pattern as the press releases and include: the action itself; aviation/airports; current politics/aviation subsidies; the climate crisis/future consequences; solutions/emission reductions/transition to sustainability. Objects used 4-7 times: science/facts; technical solutions/biofuels; the fossil industry; media reporting; arrests/legal consequences; Paris agreement/climate goals.

The most recurring (8-29 times) *actors* are: activists/XR; politicians/political institutions; ‘we’/Swedish public; police/safety staff. Actors mentioned 4-7 times: passengers; people affected by climate crisis/younger generations; scientists; ‘we’/humanity; the media. Recurring *viewpoints* follow the pattern of the press releases: political dissent; civil disobedience activism motivated/justified; ending aviation subsidies; no to biofuels/technological solutions; demand for transition/emissions reduction. An additional viewpoint, used three times, is critique of how the media portrayed the actions and commenting on critique that occurred in the media.



Figure 2. Facebook post, Oct 31 (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021g)

This is an example of a Facebook post from the day of the actions, which also repeats some sentences from the press releases, where several of the common themes are used.

Peaceful activists have today stopped several planes from departing from Bromma and Arlanda airports. The actions are protesting that taxpayers’ money going to the aviation industry that contributes to the escalating climate crisis [...]

- How can a government allow and even subsidize climate damaging activities such as aviation, when they are claiming they want to act against the climate crisis? [...] I’m

terrified of a future in chaos and uncertainty, with unimaginable suffering, says Ester, one of the activists. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021g)

News Articles

This section firstly outlines the overall tendencies in news media reporting that was found in all three sources. After that, central differences and nuances between the outlets are described.

A few *objects* dominate the reporting across the three outlets: the action itself/law breaking; aviation/airports; arrests/matters of law enforcement; delays/consequences of actions; safety/risks. Recurring *actors* and institutions include: activists/XR; police/law enforcement; passengers; aviation industry/personnel. Dominating perspectives are mainly police, aviation personnel and to some extent passengers. Activists are usually unnamed and even though they are occasionally quoted (directly or indirectly from their press releases), their perspective is not seen through other parts of the articles. One SvD article stands out by inviting voices from other environmental groups and researchers to give their thoughts on the action (Palm, 2021). The only explicit *viewpoint* appearing in all newspapers (however not as recurring as the beforementioned objects and actors) is: political dissent.

There are some interesting differences between what themes the three newspapers cover. The articles mention the purpose of the action in various ways and to a varying extent. Among DN's four articles, one describes the aim as "showing dissent toward the aviation industry and the government's subsidies of it" (Olsson, 2021). This is the only article specifically mentioning subsidies of all the news articles analyzed. The other three DN articles do not describe the purpose any further than using the term "climate" or "environmental" action or activists. This is also the extent to which they cover the topic of climate.



Figure 3. News article, Dagens Nyheter, Oct 31 (Tanaka et al., 2021)

GP briefly notes the aim of the actions in the two articles analyzed. SvD gives more nuance to the purpose of the actions by including both XR as well as other voices on the actions. They include quotes from the XR press release and a statement from the press spokesperson Mathilda von Schantz. These cover the purpose of the actions but also the aim of their activism and civil disobedience in general. “According to Mathilda von Schantz, the purpose is to spread the group’s message. – We want people to start talking about the need to act more urgently on the climate crisis [...] We think [entering airport sites] is an effective method.” (Rosell & Bränström, 2021)

Connected to this, SvD give room for different voices on XR’s methods and aims in general, for example how effective and legitimate they are to attain change around the climate issue (Palm, 2021). Here, the actions are covered as political acts rather than just criminal acts. This is an exception from the rest of the material. A deeper analysis of the reporting is found below.

Lastly, as mentioned the DN articles hardly mentioned the topic of climate change. In SvD and GP this is more recurring, however not discussed in depth.

Opinion pieces

Three of the four opinion pieces analyzed represent a critical stance toward the action and XR’s methods (Gustavsson, 2021; Pihl, 2021; Svensson, 2021). The remaining one is a response article from one of the participating XR activists (Paxling, 2021). This section will first outline the main findings from the three critical texts and then the defending one, since they differ in perspective and focus.

In the critical opinion pieces, important *objects* are: the action itself/law breaking/sabotage; risk/danger; aviation/airports; civil disobedience as method; consequences of actions; climate change; democracy; violence/extremism/terrorism. Recurring *actors*: activists/XR; passengers; aviation industry/personnel; ‘ordinary people’/‘we’/Swedish public; politicians/political institutions. Of course, to the question of whose perspective dominates the texts, the authors’ opinion is the driving force (in line with the genre). Apart from that, privileged perspectives in the texts include the ones of passengers, aviation personnel and ‘ordinary people’.

The texts are characterized by its argumentation for different *viewpoints*. Here, general themes include: action was violent/dangerous; critique of XR methods/civil disobedience; conventional tools for influencing politics should be used instead.

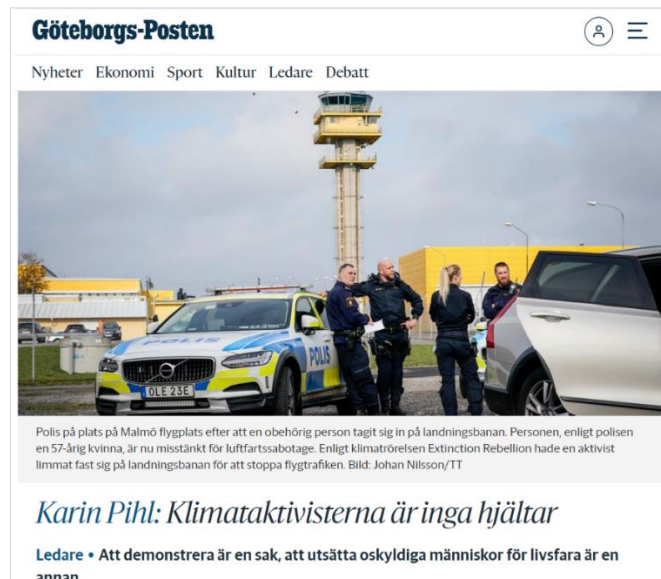


Figure 4. Opinion piece (editorial), Göteborgs-Posten, Nov 3 (Pihl, 2021)

The opinion piece in support of the actions includes the following *objects*: the action itself; safety measures; civil disobedience as method/peaceful; aviation/ effects on climate; climate crisis/climate justice/danger; current politics/subsidies. *Actors* include: activists/XR; Swedish public; passengers; victims of climate crisis; aviation personnel. The activists/XR hold the dominating perspective in the text, but also victims of the climate crisis. The main *viewpoints* are: political dissent; climate crisis calls for activism/disobedience; end aviation subsidies.

Summary & Comparison

The thematic analysis has shown that XR and news material introduce slightly different *objects*. XR communication focuses on the action itself, the motivations for it and its demands. The climate crisis and current politics (mainly aviation subsidies) are important themes here. The news articles also focus on the action but mainly as a criminal act. Safety, law enforcement and consequences for passengers and airports are also prominent themes. The critical opinion pieces include similar themes of crime, safety, and action consequences. Also, civil disobedience, climate and democracy are visible topics. The supporting opinion piece is characterized by a focus on the climate crisis, activism, and current politics, as well as safety measures taken in the action.

When comparing the different type of texts, silences become evident regarding what perspectives are covered. For example, in XR's communication, consequences for passengers, airports and airlines are sometimes briefly mentioned but it is not as prominent as in the news material. Within the news articles, there is a lack of focus on current politics, aviation subsidies or aviation's impact on the climate crisis. The motivations for the action and its demands are seldom explained.

There are also differences in what *actors* are recurring, and whose perspective is dominating the texts. In XR communication, the perspective of the activists is dominating, as expected from movement texts. They also briefly raise the perspective of people affected by climate change, such as younger generations, however this perspective is not personalized through quotes or exemplification, as with the activist perspective. In the news articles, activists are mentioned but their perspective is hardly represented, neither victims of the climate crisis. Here, it is police, security staff, personnel from the aviation industry and passengers that are given a voice. The police perspective is dominating a majority of the articles. The news articles hardly mention politicians or political institutions. However, these are given some room in the opinion pieces.

Regarding *viewpoints*, XR's communication stand out since it is driven by explicit viewpoints - the demands to end aviation subsidies, spare the forest and start transition now. Similarly, the opinion pieces also focus on viewpoints, where the main ones concern critique of XR's methods (dangerous, counter-productive, anti-democratic), or as in the supporting article, the urgency of the climate crisis and need for political action. The news articles give little room for viewpoints, but the activists' political dissent is mentioned, and sometimes activist's motivations. A few articles include critical voices toward XR's methods.

In sum, the thematic analysis shows differences in what themes are given room and weight in the texts. Some of the important themes in XR's communication are hardly present in the news articles, such as the climate crisis, current politics, and the action's demands. The recurring theme of crime and law enforcement are not as prominent in the XR material as in the media. There are differences in what themes are present but also *how* they are introduced. The question of how themes are constructed in the texts will be further explored in the next section, which provides the results from steps 4-6 of the CDA.

Part Two: Discursive Strategies Analysis

This section outlines the results from the discursive strategies analysis, with a focus on *positioning* and *(de)legitimization*. Positioning regards the how the focus and subject of debate is steered, for example by drawing on different contexts and constructing concepts in particular relations to each other. (De)legitimization concerns the way boundaries for debate are constructed, how certain actors or viewpoints are included or excluded from participating in political debate, through for example *rationalization* and *moralization*. Attention is also paid to how the discursive strategies are evident in elements of layout and linguistic strategies, such as writing style and key concepts. As described in the methods chapter (page 23), the discursive strategies analysis (steps 4-6 of the CDA) is conducted on the XR press releases, eight of the Facebook posts, and of the media material six news articles and all four opinion pieces.

The chapter is divided into subsections according to the type of material: XR's communication, news articles, opinion pieces, and lastly a comparing discussion of the different results. Within each material type, the results are presented following the different 'positionings' that are found

within the texts. Strategies of (de)legitimization are also presented within these subheadings, showing how viewpoints and perspectives connected to each positioning are argued for using (de)legitimization. Each subsection also includes a discussion on how the discursive strategies in each material type contribute to politicization and depoliticization of debate.

XR's Communication

Two key concepts are found in the texts from XR: aviation and the airport action. These are tightly linked to each other, and within the material they are hard to separate. Here, they are therefore written as aviation/airport actions. The analysis looks at how aviation/actions are positioned in relation to other concepts and contexts. From there, three main 'positionings' were found: climate crisis, current politics, and activism and democracy. Comparing with the thematic analysis, we see that they roughly correspond with the most salient objects. These should in fact not be understood as individual positionings but one, forming a construction where the concepts are put in certain relationships to each other (as shown in figure 5). In line with the movement text genre, XR's communication provides a coherent story to mobilize understanding and support for the action. It should further be mentioned that overall, this story is positioned in a political context – aviation is not constructed as an issue for the individual or consumer, but as a socio-political concern. Below, these positionings and the (de)legitimizing strategies used connected to each are presented.

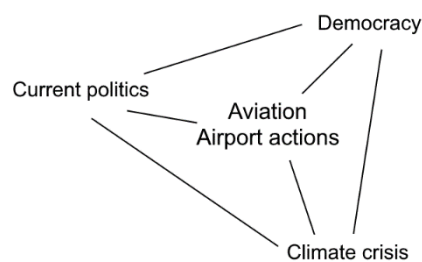


Figure 5. XR's communication positionings.

Climate Crisis

Firstly, aviation/actions are positioned in relation to the context of the *climate crisis*.

IPCC's latest report shows that the climate crisis is more urgent than ever [...] - The scientists warn ever louder. CO2 emissions must cease – not in 2045, but now [...]

This hypocrisy [political inaction] is killing us. And I am terrified of a future in chaos, uncertainty characterized by inconceivable suffering, says Helen Wahlgren [...]

It is madness that flying to Stockholm is even an option amid an escalating climate crisis, and even worse that it can be the cheaper alternative, says Ellen Casey, who also participates in the action at Malmö Airport. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

The state of the environment and the climate becomes the foundation for how XR construct the key topics aviation and the airport action. In the quotes, the notion of urgency, seriousness, danger and even death is evident. In another example from a Facebook post, Nov 11, the crisis is described as “the ever more acute threat against our survival” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021c). In relation to this understanding, continued flying (domestic, to a low price) is deemed almost unthinkable. The climate crisis is mainly constructed from a structural and political perspective. For example, the activist Ellen Casey questions the existence, economics, and availability of domestic flights, rather than directing her critique to individual passengers or consumer choices. Positioning aviation in the context of climate crisis hence leads to a critique of current politics. This theme is further discussed in the next section.

In relation to the climate crisis positioning, (de)legitimization strategies are used to further argue for XR’s viewpoint. Rationalization is used when referring to climate science: “IPPC’s latest report”, “The scientists warn ever louder”. These references are used to support the urgency argument that XR is making. Climate science is referred to in a way that leaves only limited (legitimate) options for societal development, as stated in the quote above: “emissions must cease [...] now”. Also, aviation’s role in the crisis is described in rationalizing terms:

Aviation makes up 4-5 percent of global emissions [...] But in 2018, only 11 percent of the world’s population air travelled. One flight alone can emit more than one person’s yearly sustainable emissions. If everyone in the world made a yearly trip equivalent to one between Sweden and Thailand, the world’s total emissions would increase by nearly 40 percent. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

Here, aviation is put in the context of climate crisis in a rationalizing way, using statistics and comparisons to show the impact of flying and in turn the need for decreased flying. The quote also shows the climate justice theme (“if everyone in the world [...]”), which can be interpreted as a moralizing strategy, presenting decreased flying as an act of solidarity and global equality. Indeed, the climate crisis is used in moralizing ways to legitimize the action’s aim. When connecting the climate crisis to risk, danger, and urgency, it is portrayed as a common evil. It becomes an enemy that must be combated for our and future generation’s survival: “the world is on the brink of climate hell”, “this [...] is killing us”, “future of chaos”, “inconceivable suffering”, “life-threatening situation”. This is connected to the emphasis on climate science, and together, these strategies construct ‘objective’, ‘uncontested’ scientific knowledge that only leads to limited possible (legitimate) ways forward.

Current Politics

Current politics is the next main positioning which aviation/actions are put in relation to. This includes policy decisions, aviation subsidies, eco-political inaction, and ‘mainstream’, technocentric climate solutions such as biofuels. A strong sense of political dissent is presented, and political inaction is heavily criticized.

- I’m not only sitting on the runway to stop the air traffic. I’m sitting here to stop the politicians from more madness. Because the politics are lunacy personified since

everything keeps going as usual, even though the world is standing on the brink of climate hell, says Helen Wahlgren [...] During the pandemic, the government supported the aviation industry with 16 billion crowns in subsidies. There was no demand for increased sustainability. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

Current politics is understood as a laissez-faire approach leading to climate danger (“everything keeps going as usual”). In the context of climate crisis, aviation subsidies become a major step in the wrong direction. This quote exemplifies how XR steers debate toward current political decision making. Both the government and municipalities are mentioned. As put on Facebook, Nov 1: “Our tax money must go to societal transition, not to exacerbate the climate catastrophe” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021j). The focus on policy is also found in the action’s three demands: stop aviation subsidies, no to biofuels, and stop burning fossil fuels.

This political dissent is legitimized in a few ways. Rationalization is used to delegitimize current politics and legitimize XR’s critique. Politicians are portrayed as irrational, and current politics (i.e., aviation subsidies) as “madness”, “lunacy” and “lameness”, as also seen in the quote above.

Scientists warn ever louder [...] At the same time, politicians are debating trivialities. Their lameness to act in a life-threatening situation is more than scandalous [...] How can a government subsidize fossil industries when they claim to work for a climate neutral society? This hypocrisy is killing us. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d)

Politicians are made to look foolish, not grasping the seriousness of the situation and instead “debating trivialities”. They are also put in contrast to climate scientists and scientific knowledge, which further portrays them as irrational. Current politics is argued to stand in the way of sustainability, which portrays them as hypocrites, but also as putting people in danger. This is a moralizing strategy.

Within this positioning, XR also presents a critique of mainstream climate solutions and relying on technological advancements. Biofuels are described as “a dead end”, “distractions”, “false climate solutions” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021n), thereby positioning them in contrast to sustainability. Instead, sustainable eco-political solutions are equated with decreased flying and ceased emissions. “The aviation industry likes to highlight possible technological developments and biofuels as an alternative to decreased flying. [...] We cannot raise future potential solutions to get out of making vital emission cuts today” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d). Here, rationalization is used when XR stress that sustainable aviation fuels are not yet reality, and biofuels are not a sustainable option: “Biofuels cause the same amount of emissions as fossil fuels on the time scale relevant for the Paris agreement” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021n). Techno-optimism is portrayed as the easy way out, almost lazy: “We cannot raise future potential solutions to get out of making vital emission cuts today” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d). This could be interpreted as moralizing as well, since it portrays the techno-optimist stance as morally weak and not ready to make sacrifices for a greater good.

In contrast to current politics and aviation subsidies, XR demand that tax money support societal transition. Here, an example of how positioning and (de)politicization overlap is found. Positioned against the message of climate crisis, the demands to end subsidies are portrayed as sensible and therefore legitimate. Their stance is also legitimized by using a persuasive language: “We have to end emissions where avoidable” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021e), “[d]eferred emissions is the only thing that counts” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021h). These quotes can be understood as both rationalizing and moralizing, since the sentences in themselves do not motivate the statements but rather draw from the overall message in XR’s communication – where, as shown, both rationalizing and moralizing arguments are found.

Democracy

Thirdly, aviation/actions are positioned in relation to *democracy*, where XR’s actions and methods are portrayed as necessary and legitimate. This positioning is not as prominent as the other two, but tightly connected to them since the climate crisis and lack of political action is part of how XR argues for their use of activism. The lack of rapid and substantial change is seen as a call for a “deepening” of democracy with greater citizen influence. Civil disobedience is seen as a tool for this.

In a Facebook post, one activist said “[participating in the action] was incredibly scary [...] but those with power have ignored all other democratic methods for change. Civil disobedience has previously played a big part in expanding and strengthening democracy” (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021f). Here, debate is steered toward democracy and its ‘limits’ to combating climate change. As mentioned, current (eco)politics is contrasted with sustainability, but these statements also point toward ‘ordinary’ methods for democratic participation as insufficient for attaining sustainable politics. The argumentation is hence rather ambiguous: on the one hand, activism and civil disobedience is portrayed as necessary means for a healthy democracy, and on the other, as a last resort where conventional means have failed.

Within this positioning, XR argues for and legitimizes their choice of methods through rationalizing strategies. Firstly, XR’s communication portray their civil disobedience as sensible and well thought-through. The press releases all include a section dedicated to safety measures, such as contact with police and airport personnel. XR probably anticipated a risk of criticism regarding safety, and clearly describing safety measures in concise bullet points is a way to make the actions seem serious, well-planned and risk aware. Secondly, there is an emphasis on the actions being peaceful and calm. Activists describe themselves as “peaceful and really nice [görsnälla]”, using a local expression that gives humorous and harmless connotations, as seen in figure 6 below. Thirdly, the way the climate crisis is portrayed (urgent, dangerous, escalating), and current politics (madness, hypocrisy), make the action seem proportional and called-for, thereby rationalizing it.



Figure 6. Facebook post, Nov 1 (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021b)

This Facebook post from Nov 1 is another example of how XR legitimize their actions and standpoints. Here, the legitimization goes hand in hand with a critique of media reporting on the actions. They claim the media did not represent the perspectives of activists and only featuring the views of police, airport personnel and passengers.

Practically no one has made the effort to find out why we performed these protests. As if the climate crisis didn't exist [...] A "safety expert" gets to, unfoundedly, claim that our actions risk human lives. But, come on, it's the climate crisis that's killing people, not our peaceful actions. (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021b)

The text exemplifies how the legitimacy of the airport action to a large extent depends on it being put in relation to the climate crisis and the action's aim. 'Reminding' the reader of XR's intentions and motivations for the action is then a form of rationalization. In the post, XR also give suggestions to how news media could report in a better way: "gather facts on how much the government and municipalities are subsidizing aviation, maybe even ask a scientist about how the aviation industry contribute to and exacerbate the climate crisis" (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021b). The suggestions are presented as reasonable ways that the news media could have made the reporting more nuanced, and thereby works to delegitimize the news reporting and make XR's action look rational and competent. This is another example of how positioning is used to persuade the audience, in this case through contrasting the activists with the media. The media is criticized for one-sided reporting in several Facebook posts (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021b, 2021f, 2021k).

(De)politicization in XR's Communication

Then, how can the use of discursive strategies in XR's communication be understood in terms of politicization (opening) and depoliticization (closing) of debate? Regarding the positioning used in XR's communication, the question becomes *whether it enables political debate*. In this case, debate is enabled through constructing aviation/actions as political issues, as well as by allowing for dissensus to exist. The issues in focus are clearly put in a socio-political context, for example by putting aviation in relation to sustainability as a societal goal, the societal risks of environmental degradation, as well as current political decisions such as aviation subsidies. There is a focus on 'everyday politics' such as policy making and how tax money is used. The entire message is constructed as a concern and responsibility for *society* – for citizens, politicians and for future generations. Aviation is portrayed as a political issue that will have consequences for all people. Also, the actions in themselves are constructed as political. They are motivated as political actions with the aim to affect decision making as well as a sense of citizen responsibility, again putting focus on society and policy.

In addition to placing the focus of debate in a political context, the positioning used allows for dissensus to exist by *legitimizing alternative views to the status quo*. XR challenges current politics and 'mainstream' eco-politics in a few ways. They display political dissent, both against aviation subsidy policies, and toward current politics in general: "[...] the politics are lunacy personified since everything keeps going as usual" (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d). Further, they show skepticism toward biofuels and technological development as a reliable direction. Techno-optimism is a common characteristic of mainstream, laissez-faire eco-politics. When XR demands decreased flying instead of increased use of biofuels, this is a clear example of challenging the status quo and thereby also politicizing debate. XR's demands (and methods) are constructed as legitimate, thereby attempting to opening the space for eco-political debate. In turn, the status quo is *delegitimized* through rationalizing and moralizing arguments, such as referring to climate science, portraying politicians as hypocrites and biofuels as a distraction from sustainable transition. By challenging status quo, raising political dissent, and suggesting alternative paths, XR's message is an attempt to broaden the space for what ideas exist in political debate. Consensus is thereby denied, and conflict introduced.

Hence, XR's communication politicize debate by putting key issues in a political context and challenging the status quo. However, on the other hand XR also draw on 'objective' perspectives that may *imply consensus and deny 'the political'* – i.e., the conflictual and contingent dimension of politics. This is especially evident in the emphasis on the climate crisis and climate science, which is constructed as an 'objective' reality (scientific consensus, definitive statements): "The scientists warn ever louder. CO2 emissions must cease", "the world is standing on the brink of climate hell", "vital emission cuts" (Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 2021d). Here, we also see how this is reinforced by rationalization ('facts') and moralization (threat, danger). This type of messaging portrays XR's standpoints almost as inevitable steps to take in the crisis and does not allow for different interpretations or conclusions drawn from the

climate science. This therefore shows how positioning and (de)legitimization is also used in a way that denies ‘the political’ and thereby contribute to depoliticizing debate.

News Articles

Within the news articles included in the second part of analysis, three main positionings were found (see figure 7). These are not as interconnected as the positionings found in XR’s communication, but still have some connections and overall do not contradict each other. Here, the key issue in focus is the airport actions, which is positioned in relation to the contexts: law enforcement and crime; activism methods; and risks and consequences. These overlap for example when the legitimacy of XR’s methods is discussed from a risk perspective. The articles overall center around one of these perspectives or positionings. (De)legitimizing strategies are found connected to each of them and display how the boundaries for debate are constructed.

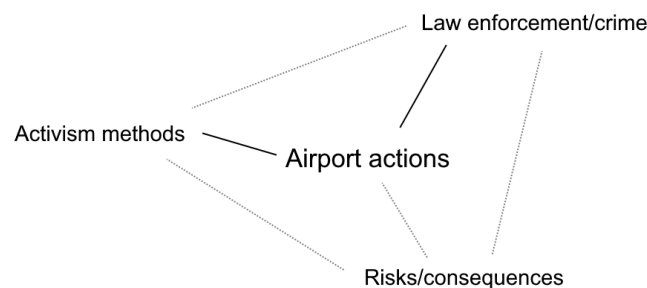


Figure 7. News articles positionings.

Law Enforcement & Crime

As mentioned in the results of the thematic analysis, crime, law enforcement and police were recurring objects and actors in the news material. Indeed, these themes point toward a positioning of the actions into the context of *law enforcement and crime*.

An article from GP, Oct 31, exemplifies this positioning (Rasper et al., 2021; for another example, see TT, 2021). The article is a detailed description of which airports were affected, how the police work was carried out, how many activists were arrested and which offenses they are suspected of. Images are included showing police and activists at a runway, with the faces blurred. None of the activists are named or interviewed. Statements from four spokespersons from the police in different regions are included.

- Initially we got reports that some kind of action was occurring at airports in Malmö and Stockholm. Then our officer in charge decided to reinforce our presence at Landvetter [airport] preventively. What we are doing is to maintain public order at the site, says Hans-Jörgen Ostler, press spokesman at the region West police. (Rasper et al., 2021)



Figure 8. News article, Göteborgs-Posten, Oct 31 (Rasper et al., 2021)

This type of reporting can be described as crime journalism. Here, it is difficult to disclose debate (especially political debate) at all. The actions are positioned merely as potentially criminal acts, and eco-politics is hardly mentioned. Here, positioning and (de)legitimization strategies are overlapping. The positioning of law enforcement and crime can be interpreted as introducing an *underlying* standpoint of status quo preservation or maintaining public order. When the action is described, it is done from a perspective of law enforcement, which is especially evident in the use of quotes. This perspective is therefore introduced as legitimate. Even though the actions are not constructed as *political* disturbances, the focus on maintaining public order works to also maintain the political order – since any potential (rational or moral) legitimacy of the actions remains undiscussed. No alternative views on the actions are introduced. This may therefore be seen as a delegitimization of XR’s standpoints and legitimization of the status quo.

Activism Methods

The second main positioning found in the news articles steers debate toward the *methods* used by the activists. In two articles from SvD, Oct 31 and Nov 2, civil disobedience and direct action are the focus for discussion. On Oct 31, two opposing voices on this are interviewed:

Why is entering airport sites the best way for you to spread your message? – We think this is an effective way. We also look at history and how many times things have changed because of contributions from peaceful civil disobedience where people take direct action, says [XR press spokesperson] Mathilda von Schantz.

Aviation analyst Jan Ohlsson calls the stunt [tilltaget] ‘reprehensible’ because it affects third part, especially a major day for travel such as the Sunday before the autumn break.

[...] - I detest this kind of placard politics, running around with silly slogans without acquainting oneself to what reality one is working with. (Rosell & Bränström, 2021)

This quote shows how positioning steers debate toward the legitimacy of activism and civil disobedience, both in the choice of interviewees, quotes and the questions asked. The action is related to things such as its effectiveness ('history', 'placard politics'), how it affects bystanders ('major day for travel') and the need for activism in the first place ('without acquainting oneself with [...] reality'). On Nov 2, SvD published an article following up on this discussion, inviting additional voices. Here, the debate is more clearly positioned in the context of activism in general and the wider environmental movement (Palm, 2021).

Two opposing views are presented in the two articles, in favor and critical of XR's methods. In the first article, the *supporting voice* is represented by activist Mathilda von Schantz. She raises a need for urgent action against the climate crisis, whereupon the reporter questions the choice of method to spread this message. Overall, von Schantz is given a more defensive position in the text than the critical voice. After defending XR's methods, the activist answers to the critique that the action afflicted bystanders. Rationalizing arguments are used to legitimize their standpoint: referring to historical use of civil disobedience; and pointing toward 'sensible' considerations made by activists (informing bystanders, peaceful approach). Conveying a sense of urgency ("we want to be an alarm bell") can be seen as moralizing since it uses emotional appeal and draws on a notion of a universal battle against fossil emissions. It also puts XR in a 'savior' position or as acting on behalf of a moral high ground (seeing the bigger cause). (Rosell & Bränström, 2021) Activism is further legitimized by other actors in the second article, for example by representatives from environmental organizations. Similar arguments are used (climate crisis, importance of civil disobedience for democracy, historical examples).

On the *opposing side*, Jan Ohlsson raises a critical view towards the action in the article from Oct 31. Described as an 'aviation analyst', Ohlsson is put in an expert position. Rationalization is used to delegitimize XR as well as legitimize a position in favor of aviation. Ohlsson uses a colorful language which becomes a rhetorical device to portray XR as naïve. "- This is just clownery, foolery [narrspel] to gain attention. [...] This is not a game. We cannot have activists taking the law in their own hands. We have a democracy in our country" (Rosell & Bränström, 2021). Associating XR with "clownery", "games", "running around" delegitimizes their stance, making them look childish or incompetent. Their action is also contrasted with democracy, which positions Ohlsson on the 'sensible', 'democratic', 'rational' (legitimate) side and XR on the 'foolish' and even 'undemocratic' (delegitimized) side. Ohlsson also questions the need for the actions. As mentioned in a quote above, Ohlsson claims the industry is working hard to decrease emissions and states that aviation is not a large contributor to climate change. These statements are unquestioned by the journalists and no statistics are included to prove the claims. Nor is XR given an opportunity to comment on this. When it comes to moralization, Ohlsson uses emotional appeals such as emphasizing the inconvenience for passengers and it being a major day for travel, portraying the action as impacting 'innocent' 'ordinary people'. (Rosell & Bränström, 2021)

In the second article, we also find representatives from environmental organizations and academia. A representative from WWF state they do not collaborate with XR since they believe in other means for change: “We believe in dialogue with both business actors and with politics” (Palm, 2021). Here, XR and their methods are put in contrast to using dialogue. This could be interpreted as a rationalizing strategy, implying that dialogue is a more fruitful or sensible than civil disobedience. The efficiency concern is further raised by researcher Alf Hornborg, who claims direct actions like this one fail to create systemic change and risk turning public opinion against the climate movement (Palm, 2021). This rationalization works to delegitimize XR and their action.

An interesting theme in the article is mentions of violence and sabotage in the environmental movement (Palm, 2021). Firstly, it is raised as a criterion for actors that the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation refrain from collaborating with. Secondly, researcher Andreas Malm is mentioned as an example of a voice on environmental activism within academia.

There are people who says sabotage and violence is OK. If one starts talking about those things, you’re on a slippery slope. [...]

Andreas Malm, human ecology lecturer at Lunds University has made a name of himself for promoting tougher methods when the softer ones have no effect. In an interview with SvD, he advocated for ‘sabotage and destruction of property’ but ‘never violence against persons. (Palm, 2021)

XR is never connected with violence or sabotage, however violence is still raised as a relevant topic within the discussion on XR’s methods. Hornborg makes a connection with larger actions of civil disobedience and *indirect* harm, claiming that major disturbances of societal systems can harm vulnerable groups (“the world’s poorest”). Making these associations can be seen as moralizing strategies which delegitimizes XR indirectly or at least questions them, by letting XR stand side by side with discussions on violence.

Risks & Consequences

In the news article, the action is also positioned in context of airports and safety, putting focus on *risks and consequences*. This is done in a few ways, by focusing on: safety measures at airports; potential dangers for bystanders; and how air traffic disturbances were managed. (De)legitimization strategies are mainly found in the privileged voices of ‘experts’ and ‘ordinary people’, and a recurring silencing of XR activists.

Firstly, there is a question of how easy it is to enter airport areas and runways. A TT article published by GP on Nov 1, mainly focuses on the event as a potentially criminal act and subsequently discusses airport safety. Pieces from an interview with the CEO of Swedish Regional Airports [Svenska Regionala Flygplatser AB] are included, positioning the event in the context of the aviation and airport regulations.

TT: How can it be so easy to enter the airports in this way? - I don't know if it's easy really, but I understand your question. [...] My current impression is that the safety routines have worked properly, he says. (TT, 2021)

XR's aim is also described in the article, but instantly, the focus is recentered around how airports manage these types of situations. The debate is hence not focused on how eco-politics and aviation should be managed, but activism "incidents" at airports:

The actions were carried out by the climate organization Extinction Rebellion to 'convey the message that the climate crisis is urgent and demands political decision making that reflects the severity of the crisis'. The event will be followed up, says Peter Larsson, CEO of Swedish Regional Airports AB [...] – That is the routine, every incident is followed up. (TT, 2021)

This text is comparable with the GP article focusing on law enforcement/crime positioning in that it introduces a 'neutral' text with no clear debate positions. (De)legitimization strategies are mainly found in how voices on airport safety are constructed as experts, and therefore legitimized through rationalization. The activist perspective is briefly raised in a short quote from the press releases, but their views or experiences cannot be found in other parts of the text. In this way, the stance of XR (and the action's three aims) are almost silenced, which can be interpreted as it not receiving the same legitimacy that the safety perspectives received.



Figure 9. News article, Dagens Nyheter, Nov 1 (Olsson, 2021)

Secondly, there is the question of risk of endangering passengers, aviation personnel and activists. On Nov 1, DN reports that the action at Bromma airport resulted in a redirection of an ambulance airplane to land at Arlanda airport instead (see figure 9). It caused a delay for the patient but no health complications.

- One can have opinions about the environment. I have that too. But acting like this can have enormous consequences. One must understand that societal services must function, says Agneta Karlfeld [air ambulance personnel].

- [...] this is an attack. It's not good. One should be able to raise their opinion without creating these kinds of risks, says Johan Emmoth [CEO, air ambulance company]. (Olsson, 2021)

This positioning puts XR in a relationship to 'ordinary people' (such as air ambulance patients) which is characterized by potential harm, thereby in itself questioning the legitimacy of the actions. Two representatives from air ambulance companies are interviewed and raise concern. In the end of the article, an XR activist is given the opportunity to respond. She clarifies that XR actions never intend to disturb emergency vehicles. "What is your view on that an ambulance airplane still had to be redirected? - If that occurred, we're sorry. That is unfortunate, says [activist] Karin Lundberg" (Olsson, 2021)

The activist then describes safety measures taken during the action and is hence given a chance to defend their stance. The fact that activists were given a voice enhances their legitimacy in the text, however their perspective is positioned in the *context* of 'expert' voices and the 'objective' context of an air ambulance delay. Overall, debate is clearly steered toward risks of activism and activists potentially harming bystanders. The air ambulance personnel are given an expert position on risks and safety. Their perspective dominates the text and directs the focus of the reporting - especially evident in the questions asked to the activists. The experts are quoted throughout the text, and their statements are overall unquestioned. Therefore, I find the text legitimizes the skeptic voice of 'experts' and delegitimizes XR and their message. It should however be noted that the expert voices do not criticize XR's cause but only their methods – rather some statements from them could be interpreted as legitimizing XR's cause ("I have [opinions about the environment] too"). Still, *the text overall* does not discuss XR's aim or the issues in focus of the actions. The action is only put in relation to consequences/risks at the airports, not for example the consequences/risks of continued flying and CO2 emissions. Including this perspective could have created a more nuanced discussion on the legitimacy of XR and its action.

Thirdly, there is a question of how the following disturbances and delays were managed by airlines and airports. Here, the actions are put in context of passenger, or consumer, experience. In DN, Oct 31, passengers and people waiting for travelling family members are interviewed.

Two women at Bromma airport had both their children on different planes, that should have departed at noon but were hindered due to the action. One of the children, who was going away over the autumn break that occurs the coming week, saw how an activist was trying to glue themselves onto the plane, states the mother. - She seems rather calm, but had a few questions about what an activist is and so on, says the woman. [...]

Several persons that DN have spoken to in the departure hall says they have gotten little or no information on the event from airline or airport. (Dahl & Holmgren, 2021)

The quotes exemplify how the action is positioned not in a political context but in the context of consumer inconvenience and experiences of people at the airports. It is also found in the choice of images: the airport; a phone with a text message from an airline; and police at the site. Personalization is found in the focus on passengers and their relatives. Centering around the experience of children and mentioning the autumn break further enhances the emotional appeal to the reader, that then may more easily connect to the ‘ordinary people’ on the airports. The perspective defends personal preferences and consumer satisfaction (e.g., avoiding delays). Since the article gives room for this standpoint (without questioning it), it is interpreted as being legitimized.

In comparison, the perspective of activists is almost completely concealed in this article. The child’s question what an activist is, is included in the text but the news article itself does not provide an answer. The activists are mentioned through the eyes of other actors: “she [a passenger] saw the activists from the plane”; “[a passenger] saw an activist trying to glue themselves to the plane”; “Police [...] describes it as a peaceful action” (Dahl & Holmgren, 2021). The following section shows that political debate was silenced, and that the position of the activists was not seen as relevant or legitimate enough to include.

The group located in the departure hall accompanied the police after a verbal order. One of them says they were there to spread information about what they claim is the aim of the action. The group was taken from the scene in a police vehicle. (Dahl & Holmgren, 2021)

An activist has evidently been interviewed here, but the actions’ aim, or their view of eco-politics, subsidies or aviation is not mentioned. Also, the phrase “what they claim is the aim of the action” could be seen as carrying a questioning of there even being a legitimate aim behind it. The activists’ perspective is consistently silenced, they are not given the opportunity to moralize or rationalize around their standpoint, but other positions are. The amount of space each perspective is given is indicating how important they are considered, which is interpreted as indicating of the level of legitimization as well.

(De)politicization in News Articles

Then, how can the use of discursive strategies in the news articles be understood in terms of politicization (opening) and depoliticization (closing) of debate?

The discursive strategy of positioning is used in these articles to put focus on certain perspectives and hence steer debate towards those directions. The three main positionings found directs focus towards a) law enforcement and crime, b) activism methods and c) consequences and risks. These positionings, and the (de)legitimization strategies used connected to them, relate to (de)politicization in different ways. The first and third are the clearest examples of positioning the action *away from political debate*. Here, the event is not described as a political

act but a criminal act, safety concern or inconvenience for passengers and airports. Even though the aim of the action is sometimes mentioned, XR's focus on aviation politics, subsidies and the climate crisis are not found elsewhere in the texts. In contrast to describing recent policy decisions on aviation and subsidies, or interviewing climate scientists or eco-political spokespersons, the articles steer debate toward airport security, consumer experience and law enforcement. The reader is given little to no contextual understanding of the stance of XR, apart from mentions of climate change. Rationalization and moralization, when used, *reinforce the status quo* and silences XR's challenging of it. Continued aviation and government subsidies of the industry remain unquestioned in these articles. Comments from activists are overall directed in other directions than eco-politics (such as action safety measures), which results in few opportunities for activists to legitimize their standpoint. By not allowing for debate or the action to be understood as a challenge of the political order, these discursive strategies may be interpreted as depoliticizing.



Figure 10. News article, Svenska Dagbladet, Nov 2 (Palm, 2021)

The positioning focused on activism methods is more nuanced. In SvD Nov 2, political debate is in part enabled around the issue of activism and civil disobedience in general (see figure 10). Greenpeace represents the clearest voice that shows support for and *legitimizes* XR and their action. Rationalization is used, for example by drawing upon UN reports and previous civil disobedience campaigns. Here, activism is also put in context of the climate crisis, thereby drawing on *a political context*. Critical voices towards the actions are also given room, using rationalizing and moralizing strategies. Dialogue is raised as a more rational and effective method, and the risks of actions causing harm are lifted as moral concerns. One of the critical voices also *legitimizes alternative positions*: “[Hornborg] understands those who ‘feel panic’ and believe in sabotage as method” (Palm, 2021). I interpret this as a construction of a relatively open space for political debate where *several legitimized voices* are allowed to participate.

In SvD Oct 31, the activism methods positioning also connects XR's action with policy making and eco-politics:

According to [aviation analyst] Jan Ohlsson, the aviation industry does work hard to attain changes toward zero emissions of CO₂. In Sweden, aviation accounts for a few thousandths of the total emissions, he says, and domestic flights emits the least of all types of aviation. – We have a climate change and enormous problems with emissions, but not in this area. Aviation has become a symbol. (Rosell & Bränström, 2021)

Here, the focus is on aviation itself and its emissions, and the solutions needed to address climate change. This can be seen as politicizing since it puts focus on aviation as a societal issue. At the same time however, it reinforces consensus around the status quo. Ohlsson uses rationalization and moralization to *legitimize existing aviation politics* and dismisses challenging views. The article *does not acknowledge the political nature* of these opinions, and there is no sign that the reporters questioned or challenged his statements. For example, alternative views on this are not raised, not from XR, official statistics or climate scientists. Ohlsson's is the only opinion on aviation emissions that is included. (Rosell & Bränström, 2021)

XR is given a voice and legitimizes their actions by referring to the efficacy of civil disobedience and the urgency of the climate crisis. However, they are not allowed to comment on anything apart from their methods. If XR were seen as a legitimate political voice, it may be that their *message* would be given more attention by the newspaper – which in turn would legitimize XR in the text to a larger extent than the article now does. In all, this article leans toward legitimizing the status quo, and even though XR is given a voice they are not treated as a *legitimate voice on eco-politics*. Further, Ohlsson is given the last word: “- This is not a game. We cannot have activists taking the law in their own hands. We have a democracy in our country” (Rosell & Bränström, 2021). Therefore, I interpret these tendencies as representing a move toward politicized debate on activism methods, however a closing of space for eco-political debate. The status quo is unchallenged and *constructed as apolitical*.

In all, the news material shows predominantly depoliticizing discursive strategies. In most articles, apolitical positionings dominate, steering focus away from political issues and dismissing debate. The actions are rarely constructed as political events and the issues raised by activists are hardly represented. Debate occurs on the topic of activism methods, where several voices are given legitimate space. Here, (de)legitimizing strategies are mainly aimed at XR *as an actor* or political voice. The discussion does not get further into XR's *message*. Eco-politics, and aviation specifically, are not given room for debate.

Opinion Pieces

Four opinion pieces are analyzed, where three display critique toward the action and one shows support. Since the discursive strategies of the critical pieces are conveyed in such different ways

compared to the supporting article, the results will be presented in separate sections. In the critical articles, debate is centered around the legitimacy of XR and their action, by focusing on two issues: safety/risks and XR’s methods. There are some connections or overlap between the two. The supporting piece positions the actions as political acts and steers debate toward aviation and eco-politics.

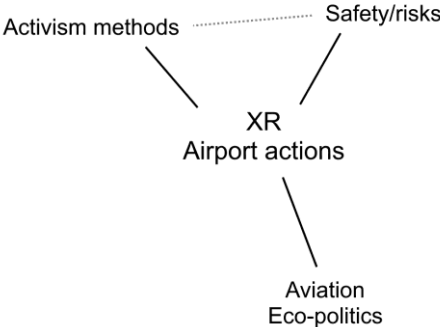


Figure 11. Opinion pieces positionings.

Critical Pieces

Lars Gustavsson comments on XR’s actions in GP Nov 20 as an aviation technician, and clearly expresses the safety/risk positioning. XR’s action is put in the context of airport safety regulations and practices, and portrays it as a dangerous, grave criminal act: “What they don’t understand is the consequences a sudden delay can cause” (Gustavsson, 2021). As ‘aviation technician’ Gustavsson speaks from a position of expertise. Large sections in the article describe safety routines and practices, which works to delegitimize the airport action as reckless and the activists as unknowledgeable and unaware of the risks. Gustavsson goes on to exemplify with an aviation accident in 1977 with hundreds of casualties. In this way, the airport action is positioned within a context of serious risks and even danger for life. These rationalization strategies (expertise, historical comparison, ‘facts’ about airport safety) legitimizes Gustavsson’s opinion that activism like this must be stopped (Gustavsson, 2021).

XR is described as a “democratically disputed and now violent [våldsbenägna] organization” (Gustavsson, 2021). The author continuously calls XR “anarchists” and not activists. The word has connotations to lawlessness and perhaps also recklessness, which in combination with the author’s focus on safety/risks further portrays the activists as dangerous to the public and public order. In a couple of instances, Gustavsson directly addresses the activists. For example, after describing the historical aviation accident: “It is this consequence you have to visualize when you think you’re only stopping a plane from departing” (Gustavsson, 2021). Here, Gustavsson reinforces his position as expert and XR as naïve or reckless. Mislabeling XR as anarchists and ‘talking down’ to the activists works as rhetorical devices which delegitimizes XR as an actor. The message XR introduced is dismissed.

Mattias Svensson's editorial in SvD, Nov 2, also portrays XR as dangerous but are more concerned with implications for democracy. The article is given the topic headline 'extremism'. XR's methods are in focus, both the ones used at the airport action and in other campaigns. XR and their action is positioned in the context of democratic processes:

Extinction rebellion is an anti-democratic movement, which on several occasions disturbed and stopped meetings in Swedish municipalities and regions with demands from their own agenda. [...] The ambition to take over meetings for democratically elected assemblies is also significant. Extinction rebellion is hardly representative of a considerable portion of the citizenry. (Svensson, 2021)

XR is claimed to "use sabotage to take power", and the author also makes politico-ideological associations: "There are also inspirations to the movement that wants to go even further, such as the human ecologist Andreas Malm", whose approach is described with terms such as "revolutionary", "state coercive power", "ecological Leninism" and "classic Marxism". Svensson's text thereby positions the airport action and XR in the context of political movements and methods, and connects them with extremism, sabotage, and anti-democracy. Vague references to (potential) violence delegitimizes XR as morally questionable: "there are inspirations to the movement [...] urging to resort to violence", "extremism" (Svensson, 2021). The author advocates for a reformist approach to sustainability: "Climate transitioning is therefore about [...] developing better products and services that at the same time cause significantly less emissions" (Svensson, 2021).



Figure 12. Opinion piece (editorial), Svenska Dagbladet (Svensson, 2021)

The alternative standpoint of XR is delegitimized, mainly by criticizing their methods and XR overall as a movement. They are portrayed as dangerous, as in standing outside 'acceptable' ideologies, but also irrational 'hippie' types, as shown in this quote below. Their eco-political ideas are also delegitimized when XR's demand to declare climate emergency is dismissed as counterproductive: "[XR] only represents empty gestures and counterproductive measures, about what you can expect given that the movement was founded by a leftist activist after a trip on heavy psychedelic drugs" (Svensson, 2021).

Karin Pihl's editorial in GP Nov 3, discusses both safety/risks and XR's methods. The author positions XR and the airport action in context of civil disobedience in general, its history and principles. The headline reads "The climate activists are no heroes", which is argued for by comparing XR to previous movements and prominent movement leaders. This comparison is used to delegitimize XR's action through rationalization: "In retrospect, the works of Gandhi, King and Parks are considered heroic. Will the same thing happen to today's climate activists, who blocks roads and airplanes? [...] Probably not." (Pihl, 2021).

The comparison with historical figures also leads to the question of why activists in Sweden today do not use "ordinary" means to voice their opinions. Here, she uses the phrase "The question people ask themselves [...]", portraying it as 'common sense' to refrain from civil disobedience. This constructs XR's actions as unnecessary, irrational, and in turn illegitimate. Further, their methods are understood as counterproductive, and causing risks to innocent people. Regarding the risks, Pihl refers to an aviation safety expert which legitimizes her standpoint through rationalization (expertise). "[...] the consequences of road blockades and airport sabotage can be life threatening. When blockading roads for several days, ambulances and fire trucks are hindered, which in worst case can lead to people dying" (Pihl, 2021)

In the quote, Pihl makes associations to the large road blockades that XR UK have performed in London. This shows that the article positions the debate on a more general level than only the airport action. It also exemplifies how Pihl positions the debate around safety and risks. She argues that XR is compromising with the principle of non-violence because of the risks for life, and further makes associations to terrorism: "These potential consequences are blurring the line between activism and terrorism". Like Svensson's text, this positioning is putting XR in context of extremism, anti-democracy and even violence. This is also a clear example of moralization used to legitimize her argument and delegitimize XR.

Supporting Piece

The XR activist Björn Paxling's opinion piece in GP Nov 23 is centered on the motivations for the airport action. The text first answers to Gustavsson's accusations that XR are anarchists: "The fact that we through civil disobedience break laws does not make us anarchists, just as the average speeder" (Paxling, 2021). Also, XR's commitment to non-violence is stressed, and safety measures during the action are mentioned. In this way, positioning in this text is used to counter accusations made in the previous article. The most important way that this is done is to 'reposition' the action in the context of climate crisis. For example, when answering to Gustavsson's critique that XR caused grave danger to bystanders, the health risks and mortality caused by the climate crisis is described: "Internationally, aviation makes up 4-5 percent of climate impact. The UN estimates that 150 000 persons already dies every year because of climate change, while a study published in June this year estimates five million" (Paxling, 2021). Paxling then positions XR on the side of the public, standing up for human safety. The airport action is portrayed as in proportion to the severity of the climate crisis.

The airport actions by XR were not performed ‘in pure devilry’ as Gustavsson want to assert, but to show the absurdity that billions in tax money is subsidizing an industry that in jet speed is driving development toward an uninhabitable planet. (Paxling, 2021)



Figure 13. Opinion piece, Göteborgs-Posten, Nov 23 (Paxling, 2021)

Rationalization arguments used by Paxling to legitimize XR’s actions and demands include referring to research and institutions with legitimacy (the UN), and directly connect their action to statistics about climate change consequences. Aviation subsidies in the context of the climate crisis is described as “unreasonable”. The action is also legitimized by portraying XR as well prepared, risk aware and taking appropriate safety measures. Paxling denies Gustavsson’s accusations of XR being violent, in a way that delegitimizes Gustavsson’s position: “Gustavsson’s claim [...] must be backed up in some way, otherwise Gustavsson is the one doing violence to the truth” (Paxling, 2021). Moralization is also used in relation to the climate crisis. Answering to Gustavsson’s request that activists visualize aviation accident victims, Paxling raises research on the deadly consequences of climate change, and writes:

So, I promise to learn more about the accident in 1977 and visualize it in my continued work for the climate, while Gustavsson at every flight and work task gets to visualize how aviation causes between 6750 and 225 000 deaths each year. (Paxling, 2021)

Linked to this, Paxling also raises concerns around climate justice and who the most affected victims are of climate change, thereby legitimizing and arguing for decreased flying for the sake of other, more vulnerable people. I interpret this as an argument that does appeal to moral, however not necessarily in a moralizing way since it does not draw on notions of universalism (one humanity against climate change), but rather acknowledges *agonism* between groups. Political values are not concealed but rather made explicit by advancing climate justice ideas.

(De)politicization in Opinion Pieces

Then, how can the use of discursive strategies in the opinion pieces be understood in terms of politicization (opening) and depoliticization (closing) of debate?

Gustavsson's opinion piece is the one with least politicizing tendencies. It is concerned with airport safety and does not steer the debate in a direction that *enables political debate*. It does not recognize socio-political issues such as the climate crisis, aviation subsidies or the topic of democratic means for political influence. The event is solely constructed as a safety issue and criminal act. By steering debate away from politics or societal issues, the text works to *preserve the status quo*. Only 'objective' context is acknowledged (airport safety). (De)legitimization is used to reinforce this apolitical perspective and *foreclose XR's standpoint from political debate*. This text therefore depoliticizes, or closes, the space for political debate.

Svensson's editorial serves as an interesting example in relation to (de)politicization. The article steers focus toward ideology and democracy. It makes clear connections to political processes, mentions political proposals and previous decision making, with some parts directly discussing aviation and climate. This can be interpreted as steering debate toward a political context, but I find many of these references still draw on 'objective' notions of politics. This includes principles such as representation (and XR not being a big enough movement) and elections (XR are accused of using "sabotage to take power"), which then does not necessarily acknowledge 'the political' but rather the formalities of politics. Further, the article positions XR and their action as 'outsiders' to the political sphere, by labeling them as anti-democratic extremists. The actions' standpoints and demands are not mentioned. Instead XR are dismissed as anti-democratic, and their ideas are thereby not introduced as possible political alternatives. "A movement aimed at stopping, demonstrating, and posing is not part of the solution [...] Neither pranks or slogans produce new transportation or climate friendly meat substitutes" (Svensson, 2021). This can be interpreted as diminishing XR's demands from political viewpoints to silly tricks, which leads to Svensson constructing XR as simultaneously dangerous and childish. In this way, *consensus is preserved*, and *challenging views are completely dismissed*, which therefore closes the space for political debate. Lastly, the status quo is explicitly defended by advancing mainstream, techno-optimistic eco-politics:

Climate transitioning is therefore about [...] developing better products and services that at the same time cause significantly less emissions. Not about cease flying, but to decrease the emissions from aviation. The improvement work is already happening, including experiments with new fuels. (Svensson, 2021)

Pihl's editorial positions debate around safety/risks and XR's methods. The ingress follows "To demonstrate is one thing, to expose innocent people to danger of life is another" (Pihl, 2021). This is the conclusion of Pihl's text, the danger of activism, where the author also makes associations to terrorism. This positioning does not *enable political debate* since it steers focus away from socio-political issues to safety/risks. It also *delegitimizes the alternative views* of XR through moralization (violence) and rationalization (safety expertise). Further, when debate

is positioned in context of activism methods and civil disobedience (which can be seen as political topics), this is done by comparing to historical ‘facts’. It hence does *not acknowledge ‘the political’* and delegitimizes XR with rationalizing strategies. No eco-political connections are made, and no viewpoints are introduced that challenge the status quo. Therefore, the text is interpreted as depoliticizing debate.

Paxling’s opinion piece defends the legitimacy of XR’s action. The text challenges current politics in the form of aviation subsidies and problematizes aviation in general by putting it in context of the climate crisis. Thereby the article uses a positioning that *enables political debate*. The focus on safety in Gustavsson’s text is turned upon its head by raising health consequences of the climate crisis. By criticizing current politics, the *status quo is challenged and dissensus introduced*. Rationalization and moralization are used to legitimize this alternative standpoint, for example my drawing on climate justice arguments. These are politicizing tendencies. However, the author also falls into the use of ‘objective’ contexts and sometimes concealing ‘the political’. The climate crisis is portrayed as an objective truth, and its consequences for human life becomes the context in which XR’s demands are argued for. For example, aviation is described as an industry that “in jet speed is driving development toward an uninhabitable planet”. This can be interpreted as both rationalizing (objective consensus) and moralizing (urgency, threat to humanity) strategies, which in turn *hides ‘the political’ dimension* of XR’s stance and portrays it as *the only option*. The article thereby positions debate in a way that both contribute to politicizing and, in some ways, depoliticizing debate.

Discursive Strategies Analysis: Comparative Discussion

Here, the results from the discursive strategies analysis are compared with each other, to deepen the exploration of how the strategies are used within the different types of material to open and close debate. The section is divided to first focus on positioning and then (de)legitimization.

Positioning: Enabling of Debate

Looking at the different types of material, how is positioning used and what implications does it have for enabling or disabling political debate?

In the communication by XR, debate is clearly kept within a political context. The actions are constructed as political acts, with a political aim, and demands directed at political institutions. Current politics and aviation subsidies are raised as issues of concern, as well as techno-optimism. It is notable how this focus is almost completely missing from the news reporting as well as in the opinion pieces (except from the one written by an XR activist). Apart from labeling the events as ‘climate actions’, the climate and eco-politics are hardly mentioned. Aviation subsidies are mentioned in one article only, and is not explained or discussed further (Olsson, 2021). In fact, much of the media material was characterized by positionings that did not enable political debate at all, mainly the law enforcement/crime and risks/consequences positionings. These focuses characterized a significant scope of the media material. One way

that it manifests is in the choice of interviewees and commentators in the news articles: airport personnel and safety experts, airline representatives, passengers and other bystanders, ambulance air representatives, etc. Including these types of actors puts focus on topics such as safety routines, delays, and consumer experience – issues aimed at corporations (e.g., airlines) or individuals rather than society at large or political decision making. When activists are interviewed, there is still a big focus on these issues. In turn, this does not open a space for political debate. Using these types of apolitical positionings leads to XR's political focus becoming hardly visible to the media audience. In a context where environmentalism to a large extent is understood as individual lifestyle choices, it may be assumed that XR aimed to directly reduce flying or influence consumer choices, where they in fact aimed to affect policy.

Regarding positionings, it is also interesting to note how similar themes may be positioned in ways that either disable or enable political debate. For example, the focus on safety and risks is recurring in the media material. In the news articles and most opinion pieces, safety and risks regards XR's actions and how they may cause harm. To some extent economic consequences for airlines and airports can also be included here. However, safety and risks are salient themes in XR's communication as well. In their communication as well as in Paxling's opinion piece, safety and risk regards the climate crisis and its implications for human health and security. In this way, safety and risks become socio-political issues – thereby enabling political debate to a larger extent.

The analysis thus found that debate is not very present in the news media material. Where debate does occur, it concerns the legitimacy of the methods used (civil disobedience) and XR as a movement, not eco-politics. The theme of activism methods is recurring in news articles, opinion pieces as well as in XR's communication. However, this topic is positioned in different ways, which leaves different conclusions, opinions, and actions preferable. On the one hand, when positioned in context of the climate crisis and political dissent, XR's action are constructed as needed (and legitimate). This is only found in XR's communication material and in one news article where supporting environmental organizations are included. On the other hand, the action and the methods used are also constructed in a delegitimizing way. In the opinion pieces, XR's activism is positioned in relation to extremism, severe risks and violence, anti-democracy and even terrorism, leaving their action a grave criminal act, safety risk, and a threat to both climate work (by being counterproductive) and democracy itself.

The debate around activism methods is interesting from the perspective of (de)politicization. In the case of XR's airport action, it is clear that when explicit debate occurs in the media (in both opinion pieces and news articles), it is centered around XR's methods and not the issue they were trying to raise. At most, climate politics in general is mentioned, but it is only a central topic in the XR activist Paxling's opinion piece. Indeed, debating the role of civil disobedience in democracies or what is the best way for movements to gain public support and attain policy change, are political issues in some sense. It regards politics and how politics should be conducted. However, it is rather a meta issue, still steering focus away from the policy issue that XR is aiming to forward.

(De)legitimization: Legitimate Alternatives or Consensus

Regarding the boundaries for debate, how do the different texts discursively delimit the space for legitimate views? Are alternative ideas delegitimized or legitimized? Is ‘the political’, i.e., conflict, dissent, and contingency acknowledged or is rationalization and moralization used to hide it?

XR introduces alternative opinions to the status quo and mainstream eco-politics, for example they advocate for decreased flying and staying away from biofuels in aviation. Their communication serves to legitimize and argue for this standpoint. In this way, XR contributes to politicizing debate. Comparing with the media material, it becomes evident that XR’s alternative views are not represented to a large extent. As noted above, the aim and demands of the actions are seldom mentioned. Overall, XR and their actions are repeatedly delegitimized. Exceptions include when supporting environmental organizations comment as well as in the critique from professor Hornborg who still treats XR as a legitimate voice (Palm, 2021). Looking at the opinion pieces, only the one written by an XR activist treats XR’s political ideas as legitimate. In the other three, XR and their views are treated with suspicion - they are not only criticized but dismissed as political actors. Word choices such as “extremists”, “anti-democratic”, “violent”, and “clownery” all reject XR as a legitimate participant in political debate. Hence, alternative views are to a large extent not legitimized in the media material, and further, mainstream eco-politics *is* legitimized and defended in a way that reinforces consensus. The most explicit example of this is in the editorial by Svensson (2021), where techno-optimist and ‘business as usual’ approaches are defended.

Rationalization and moralization strategies are found in all the material, usually in a way that conceals ‘the political’ nature of arguments and ideas. For example, XR draws from a notion of climate emergency, danger and existential threat in a way that makes their demands seem like the only sensible option. Eco-politics is constructed as questions of morally and rationally good or bad, rather than political options. Within the media material, these strategies are also used but to delegitimize XR’s actions in a way that indirectly preserves the status quo, for example within the risks/consequences positioning. Focus is put on XR’s activism from perspectives of moral and rationale, while eco-political issues are mostly overlooked. Here, it is worth noting the different characters of the text genres. The purpose of XR’s communication is to argue for their political ideas, legitimize their methods and mobilize more people. The press releases and Facebook posts might not be places for nuance, discussion and raising different perspectives, but to tell a convincing story. News articles, on the other hand, are characterized by neutrality norms and ideals within journalism, and it might be argued that the delegitimizing reporting is a way to create a distanced and objective perspective on XR and the actions. The genres might then encourage depoliticized reporting in different ways.

Still, I would argue that much of the news media reporting analyzed here does not necessarily show neutrality or balance but legitimizes the status quo. There is critique of XR but no critique at all on current eco-politics or aviation subsidies, apart from a few comments from other environmental movements in one article (Palm, 2021). On one occasion an ‘aviation technician’

explicitly (and unquestioned) defends mainstream, techno-optimist eco-politics and claims aviation does not make a significant climate impact. In most cases, however, the status quo is *indirectly* reinforced by avoiding political themes and closing debate in a way that favors existing structures. If a critical eye is ideal in journalism, some room could have been given to *also* comment on policy, subsidies, and aviation's climate impact. This type of reporting is done in one of the articles, but regarding civil disobedience and environmental movements (Palm, 2021). Here, several voices are included to create nuance, in a way that to a large extent makes room for political debate.

Lastly, a comment on the genre on opinion pieces. The opinion pieces are interesting because they constitute a chance for newspapers to deviate from neutrality norms and give room for political views. Of the four opinion pieces, two are 'outside' voices and two are editorials, which means the authors as employers are representatives of the newspapers. Notably, the editorials do not contradict the findings from the news articles in the two papers (GP and SvD), but rather take further steps to delegitimize XR and depoliticize debate. Regarding GP's choices of opinion pieces from external authors, a voice generally in line with the preceding editorial, and deepening already used perspectives in the news articles (safety/risks), were published to initiate debate (Gustavsson, 2021). At the same time, an opposing voice, an XR activist, was given room to respond and have the last word (Paxling, 2021). The data in this study is very small, however it is still relevant to point out that the opinion pieces overall support (or do not contradict) perspectives introduced in the news articles of the same newspapers, apart from the piece by activist Paxling in GP.

Conclusions & Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore environmental movements and news media as participants of discursive struggle, against the context of depoliticized eco-politics. Two research questions were used to specify the aim:

RQ 1: How were the airport actions and the following debate constructed in XR's communication and in news media respectively?

RQ 2: In what ways did XR's communication and news media contribute to depoliticizing (closing) and politicizing (opening) debate?

To explore these questions, a critical discourse analysis was conducted of texts from XR and news media, with a particular focus on (de)politicizing discursive strategies. The data included press releases, social media content, news articles, and opinion pieces. The analysis was carried out in two steps, roughly corresponding to the two research questions.

The first step was a thematic analysis of objects, subjects, and viewpoints introduced. This showed that in XR's communication, important themes included aviation, the climate crisis, and critique of current politics. The actions themselves were constructed as political acts, with the most significant viewpoint being the demand to end aviation subsidies. In the news articles, the actions were mainly constructed as acts of law breaking. Recurring themes included aviation and airports, law enforcement, and action consequences. Viewpoints include the activists' political dissent as well as critique towards the actions. The opinion pieces mainly displayed themes of action risks and safety, aviation, civil disobedience, as well as the climate. Three of the opinion pieces expressed critical viewpoints toward the action and XR, while one expressed support and defended the actions.

The second step was an analysis of the discursive strategies positioning and (de)legitimization. This showed that XR overall contributed to politicizing debate through positioning aviation/actions in a socio-political context, delegitimizing the status quo, and introducing legitimized alternative political ideas. However, their communication also used strategies that contributes to hiding 'the political' aspect of their message and instead construct eco-politics as a moral and rational matter, mainly in their messages of climate urgency and danger. In the news articles, strategies were overall used in a way that contributed to depoliticizing debate, for example by positioning the actions in 'objective' contexts of law enforcement or safety risks. Debate occurred in relation to the legitimacy of XR's methods and civil disobedience but were lacking around eco-politics. Apart from in a few exceptions, the status quo was legitimized and the alternative views of XR overlooked or delegitimized. In the opinion pieces, the critical texts contributed to depoliticizing debate, most visibly through rationalization and moralization that completely dismissed XR as a legitimate political actor. None of the articles discussed eco-politics or aviation subsidies in a significant way. The supporting article contributed to politicizing debate through legitimization of alternative views to the status quo, and by positioning the actions in the socio-political context of climate crisis and current politics.

However, the author also used some rationalizing and moralizing arguments which constructed XR's stance as the only legitimate option, thereby concealing 'the political'.

Discussion of Results

Movements & the Potential for Repoliticization

As the conclusions show, the thematic and discursive strategies analyses both point toward the same direction: political themes and politicizing strategies being more prominent in XR's communication, and apolitical themes and depoliticizing strategies being more prominent in the media material. Against the context of depoliticized eco-politics, XR's attempt to open up debate can be understood as a try to *repoliticize* a political field that has been characterized by post-political tendencies (see Kenis & Lievens, 2014). Here, a discursive struggle has been found between the movement and Swedish press. Contrasting meanings *of the actions* were introduced, such as: criminal versus political acts; anti-democratic versus needed for a healthy democracy; counterproductive versus effective for political change. Interestingly though, struggle over the meaning *of eco-politics* looked differently. XR's communication introduced alternative views and delegitimized mainstream eco-politics, however this topic of debate was not taken up in the media. Neither was their demands represented in a specific way, but rather they were overlooked or watered down. I interpret this as an important form of delegitimization from the news media, where XR's political message was largely dismissed. In addition, it should be noted that XR's message also reproduced the apocalyptic, urgency, and danger focused rhetoric prevailing in many environmental movements – an argumentation that closes debate by portraying the movements' stance as the only real alternative.

Then what do these findings say about the state of discursive struggle? It could be explained in terms of a closed discursive opportunity structure for environmental movements resisting mainstream eco-politics, meaning they are marginalized as discursive participants. In line with much of previous research on movements and (de)politicization, context is shown to be key for understanding how movements engage in political debate (see Bowman, 2020; de Moor, 2020; de Moor, Catney, et al., 2021; Stuart, 2022). Contextual factors, such as the news media, have power over movements' opportunities to politicize discourse, and may further water down, alter, or silence movements' political messages. In the airport actions case, the possibility for an opening of the discursive opportunity structure seems limited. Answering to the statement by de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) that movements such as XR may open the discursive opportunity structure for environmental movements, this study did not find any indication of this succeeding, at least in relation to news media.

The discussion around discursive opportunity structures is also connected to the issue of movement strategies, approaches, and activism methods. Here, de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021, p. 325), hold that it seems difficult for movements to combine diffusion approaches (that mobilizes support) with politicizing tactics such as using contentious action and agonistic

approaches. At the same time, movements may resort to contentious action to raise their voices as a result of being kept out of conventional spaces for eco-political discussion. In this case, XR seem to at least in part be motivated by this logic: they argue for the effectiveness of using civil disobedience and hold that “ordinary” means for attaining eco-political change have been unsuccessful. Using confrontative methods in this case worked to get the attention of the news media, with the action becoming one of the most covered XR actions in Swedish press. However, it did not necessarily mean their political *ideas* were advanced to a large extent (through the media), apart from possibly their general focus on climate and societal transition. Instead, focus for debate became the confrontative methods used. Thus, the use of contentious action may not only risk compromising access to political *institutions*, as de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) argue, but also the *discursive* access to eco-political debate, which adds a layer to the authors’ argument (cf. Koopmans & Statham, 1999, p. 248). This observation is also in line with Kenis (2019) who argues that debate around activism methods and the use of confrontational methods *again* takes focus from the eco-political issues - contributing to depoliticization of discourse.

Now as XR Sweden revitalizes post-pandemic, it will be interesting whether the movement continues to grow, and what a continued use of agonistic approaches and contentious action will result in, regarding public support as well as for media representation. This study cannot draw conclusions about whether the airport actions represent a step toward repoliticization of eco-politics in general, however it has shown that news media may pose a hinder for environmental movements to repoliticize eco-political discourse in the public sphere.

News Media, Media Logics & Democracy

What has become evident in the study is that the struggle over meaning is a contestation involving *power*. In the analyzed case, the power of the media to include and exclude opinions, perspectives, and actors have become evident. In comparison with XR, and most other environmental movements, newspapers reach a much larger audience and overall possess legitimacy within the public sphere. In terms of discursive opportunity structures, the news media constitutes an important factor for the construction of them. Thus, the power imbalances between movements and media discussed by researchers have been evident in this case study as well (see Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Koopmans, 2004). The power of news media implies responsibility. From a normative perspective, news media have a responsibility towards democracy and political developments (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015), which in turn raises a few questions for discussion about the results from this study.

A theme that has been mentioned in this study but not explored in depth is the role of media logics in relation to (de)politicization. It can be argued that the media reporting was characterized by neutrality norms. To avoid the risk of showing support for a movement like XR, journalists may have resorted to reporting on apolitical aspects. However, from the perspective of post-foundational political theory, journalism should rather make ideology

explicit than leaving out political elements. Objectivity, balance, and neutrality works to conceal the ideological foundations to any viewpoints or arguments (including the one of the journalists and news outlets) (see Ræijmaekers & Maesele, 2015). Regarding this study, I would argue the media reporting to a large extent did not reflect neutrality but post-political tendencies and a dismissal of alternative political voices. The reporting overall contributed to legitimizing current policy and the status quo but did not disclose any ideological standpoint and instead neutralized underlying positions. This was seen in both news articles and opinion pieces. Even from ‘traditional’ perspectives on neutrality and balance in journalism, it can be argued that the reporting should have provided more political context of the actions, especially on current eco-politics and the climate crisis, to inform the audience.

If the news media aims to be a relevant forum for eco-politics, news cannot only regard the ‘objective’ aspects such as scientific reports or extreme weather events but provide eco-political information and discussion (see Pepermans & Maesele, 2014). Environmental movements and activism can provide opportunities to open the space for democratic eco-political debate in the news media. The studied case of airport actions constituted such an opportunity, but looking at the analyzed media material, it was not taken.

Limitations, Contributions & Further Research

This study has explored environmental movements and news media as participants of discursive struggle, against the context of depoliticized eco-politics. The analysis has shown that news media indeed is a relevant actor to include when studying environmental movements in context, as well as for studying processes of depoliticization of eco-political discourse. The empirical data and analytical framework served to explore the research questions and show how XR and news media constructed the actions and following debate in ways that opened and closed the room for debate.

However, there are important limitations to the study and its results, regarding the data and theory used. Due to limited resources and time, only a narrow news media material could be included, which meant narrowed results in relation to the research questions. Only three news outlets were included, and even though these were the papers that stood for the most reporting about the airport actions, many other outlets participated in the airport actions discourse. For example, adding evening press or public service media would have provided additional dimensions to the results and widened the outlook on news media and (de)politicization. Also, among the opinion pieces, three out of four were published in Göteborgs-Posten (GP). The articles still showed variations in how (de)politicizing strategies were used, but a more even spread between the selected outlets would have been preferred. Then, regarding the scope of empirical data it must be stressed that the results provide *examples* of how (de)politicization is constructed in news media in relation to a specific case of activism – and not proof of how news media treat eco-politics or environmental activism. There are examples from the Swedish press

of longer and more in-depth pieces about XR activists that may show contrasting tendencies in the reporting (see Spolander et al., 2021).

Concerning the theory and analytical framework, the chosen approach overall served to explore the aim and research questions. However, as discussed previously, the framework was developed by researchers with media material in mind, which sometimes raised questions on how to treat the argumentative and mobilizing texts from XR. In the end, the framework did serve to explore some aspects of (de)politicization, however others were not deeply explored. The suggestions from de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) to include how movements strategically navigate post-politics were not accounted for in this analysis. This points to a limitation in research design, were this study only looked at the ‘end products’ of movement communication and news media. It did not account for how activists and journalists resonate, manage, and understand their work themselves. The strategic balancing acts of activists, or everyday professional choices made by journalists and editors are absent. Including this in future research would require using methods such as interviews or participant observation as well as text analysis. This would also enable an exploration of how activists and media workers themselves understand and approach ‘the political’, agonism, consensus and conflict. Nevertheless, I argue that centering around texts was relevant for the aim of this study, because of the following main reasons: (1) looking at XRs own communication provided understanding of their ‘voice’ in the public sphere; (2) it allowed for a juxtaposition with other ‘voices’ *about* XR in this realm, i.e., the media; (3) which in turn helped understand the elements of discursive struggle and context. Still, it must be acknowledged that the choice came with the mentioned limitations.

The study should not be read as an evaluation of how Swedish press construct environmental activism or eco-politics – the scope of data and analytical methods do not hold for such claims. Nor does it examine whether XR as a movement ‘is depoliticized’ or not. Instead, the study’s results should be treated as arguments for *how* (de)politicization can occur in mediated and movement discourse. For example, how silencing by news media can be understood as a form of delegitimizing strategy that steers debate away from eco-politics and in turn closes debate. The study further shows an example of how newspapers may ‘react’ to a specific type of disobedient airport activism, rather than to environmental movements in general.

Suggestions for Further Research

Because of the limited scope of the thesis, further research is needed to understand the role of the media in relation to eco-politics and environmental movements. Here, it would be interesting to conduct studies including several movements, such as both newer ones (XR, Fridays for Future, etc.) and more established organizations, as well as different types of activism methods and focuses. This may provide greater insight to how mediated discourse constructs environmental movements, activism, and eco-political issues. Also, it may show that important characteristics of the case in this study, such as civil disobedience, airport activism, aviation subsidies, and XR as a movement, might be part of the explanation for why the news

media reporting looked the way it did – as opposed to assuming it was (only) due to a post-political context or depoliticized eco-politics.

This study has shown the relevance of research including both social movements and news media, which has barely been seen in research on (de)politicization and post-politics. It has also shown the usefulness of critical perspectives on mediated discourse that build on post-foundational political theory, such as outlined by Pepermans and Maesele (2014), Pepermans and Maesele (2016), and Raeijmaekers and Maesele (2015). For further theoretical testing and development, it would be beneficial to continue explore the intersection between media studies and social movement research regarding depoliticization of eco-political discourse. Important theoretical developments have been done in each field. In addition to the just mentioned research within media studies, de Moor, Catney, et al. (2021) and Kenis (2019) constitute important contributions within social movement research. It would be relevant for both fields, as well as for political communication studies, to continue exploring discursive struggle around eco-politics in a way that combine the two perspectives and build on the theoretical developments made. In a situation of environmental degradation and rapid climate change, understanding the role of news media for enabling or disabling eco-political debate seems more relevant than ever. Environmental movements include key challengers of mainstream, status quo and laissez-faire eco-politics, and the media constructions of them may therefore be important for the direction of eco-political discourse and development, and in turn for the transitioning toward sustainable societies.

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Appendix 1: XR Principles & Values

1. WE HAVE A SHARED VISION OF CHANGE.

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

2. WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY.

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

3. WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE.

Creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable.

4. WE OPENLY CHALLENGE OURSELVES AND THIS TOXIC SYSTEM.

Leaving our comfort zones to take action for 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.

6. WE WELCOME EVERYONE AND EVERY PART OF EVERYONE.

Working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.

7. WE ACTIVELY MITIGATE FOR POWER.

Breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation.

8. WE AVOID BLAMING AND SHAMING.

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

9. WE ARE A NONVIOLENT NETWORK.

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

10. WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION.

We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power.

Source: Extinction Rebellion Global Support (n.d.-a)

Appendix 2: Table 1

XR Data	
Press releases	Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021d) Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021e) Extinction Rebellion Sverige (2021h)
Social media	Facebook: Extinction Rebellion Sverige, 30 posts
Media Data	
Dagens Nyheter (DN)	Oct 31 Tanaka et al. (2021) Oct 31 Dahl and Holmgren (2021) Nov 1 Olsson (2021) Nov 1 Tanaka and Olsson (2021)
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)	Oct 31 Rosell and Bränström (2021) Oct 31 Gunér and TT (2021) Nov 1 Nekham and TT (2021) Nov 2 Palm (2021) Nov 2 Svensson (2021) - <i>opinion piece (editorial)</i>
Göteborgs-Posten (GP)	Oct 31 Rasper et al. (2021) Nov 1 TT (2021) Nov 3 Pihl (2021) - <i>opinion piece (editorial)</i> Nov 20 Gustavsson (2021) - <i>opinion piece</i> Nov 23 Paxling (2021) - <i>opinion piece</i>

Table 1. Data Collection

Appendix 3: Table 2

	Steps of CDA	Description
<i>RQ 1 Scope</i>	1. Objects	Topics
	2. Social actors	Individuals & institutions - Whose perspective
	3. Viewpoints	Opinions - Politico-ideological standpoints
<i>RQ 2 Form</i>	4. Layout	Images - Genre - Quotes
	5. Linguistic strategies	Key concepts - Writing style - Persuasive devices
	6. Discursive strategies	Positioning - (De)legitimization

Table 2. Critical discourse analysis framework

Appendix 4: Table 3

Discursive Strategy	Operationalization
Positioning	Steering debate: What is the focus of debate?
	(De)politicization: ii) Does the positioning enable political debate?
(De)legitimization	Boundaries for debate: What opinions are allowed within debate?
	(De)politicization: iii) Are challenging views to the status quo legitimized or delegitimized? iv) Is 'the political' denied through rationalization and moralization, or is it acknowledged?

Table 3. Discursive strategies operationalization