Patrick Chang*

Understanding Environmental NGOs' Inclusiveness: A Comparative Analysis of Two Australian Climate Action Groups

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Abstract: It is a perennial challenge for different political organisations, including environmental NGOs (ENGOs), to accommodate diverse social and political groups' interests, opinions, and experiences. Without sufficient inclusiveness, ENGOs struggle to help create social and political change at a much faster pace, with climate action in Australia being a key example. In this regard, this paper argues that inclusiveness needs to encompass three dimensions, diversity, equity, and procedural justice, which are critical to managing internal tensions, disagreements, and conflicts. Evidence from two different ENGOs, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and Extinction Rebellion Australia (XR Aus), shows that despite different types of organisational structures and resource availability, there are different challenges and opportunities for the two ENGOs in trying to establish and maintain higher inclusiveness. While diversity remains challenging to both groups, XR Aus's self-organising and decentralisation have much easier access to decision-making and autonomous participation than ACF. However, it remains to be seen if XR Aus could harass its organising features to establish and maintain a higher level of procedural justice. These findings are relevant not only to issues in climate action problems but also to other collective action problems such as ethnics equality, domestic violence, income disparity, and gun control.

Keywords: diversity; equity; procedural justice; inclusiveness

1 Introduction

It is a perennial challenge for different political organisations, including environmental NGOs (ENGOs), to accommodate different social and political groups' needs and interests to resolve collective action problems such as climate change in

***Corresponding author: Dr. Patrick Chang**, School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, E-mail: senkwong.chang@griffith.edu.au. https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6668-0814

Australia, being a key example (Gergis 2018, 2022; McDonald 2024; Nalau 2024; Ostrom 2014).[1] This research seeks to understand how different ENGOs establish and maintain higher inclusiveness in three dimensions, namely diversity, equity, and procedural justice, to ensure representative participation, including marginalised social and political groups such as children, elderly, sexual minorities, Indigenous peoples, blacks, migrants, workers, or individuals with various types of disabilities.

Nevertheless, in practice, there are various constraints or challenges that could limit ENGOs' inclusiveness. For instance, minority participation does not always guarantee representatives could act in the interests of their constituents (Phillips 1998, 82; Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999). There could also be vastly different voices within a marginalised group or community. Studies from intersectionality literature further show that a person has more than multiple identities, roles, and interests across multiple groups (Crenshaw 1989; Weldon 2011). In this regard, meaningful access to decision-making is needed to ensure members have sufficient opportunities to participate. Moreover, qualitative data shows that inclusiveness is best understood as incorporating a third, additional dimension, procedural justice, to fully capture the ways that organisations manage tensions, disagreements, and conflicts across different ideas, experiences, interests, opinions, and perspectives (Blee 2012; Einwohner et al. 2021; Hustinx 2014; Hustinx et al. 2022; Schroering and Staggenborg 2021; Staggenborg 2020; Thomas 2022; Young 2002).

In the following, Section 1.1 will discuss why inclusiveness matters and Section 2 will present a synthesised theory of organisational inclusiveness. Sections 3 and 4 will discuss case selection, research paradigm and methods. Section 5 will then present the opportunities and challenges faced by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and Extinction Rebellion Australia (XR Aus) in trying to establish and maintain a higher level of inclusiveness, notwithstanding having different organisational structures and resource availability. More importantly, results show that while diversity remains challenging to both ENGOs, XR Aus has much easier access to decision-making than ACF. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if XR Aus could better harass self-organising to establish and maintain a higher level of procedural justice than ACF.

1 Lang (2013) defines NGOs as those that are (1) not related to government, (2) not for profit, (3) voluntary, and (4) pursue activities for the common good instead of just for their members. Ross (2022) further points out advocacy refers to actors' systematic efforts to achieve specific policy goals (Prakash and Gugerty 2010) while activism refers to individuals' diverse actions ranging from signing petitions, donating, organising campaigns, trying to lobby policymakers (Séguin, Pelletier, and Hunsley 1998). ENGOs often engage in both advocacy and activism, albeit with different levels of attention).

1.1 Why Inclusiveness Matters?

Higher inclusiveness helps to achieve more robust and representative advocacy. This is particularly important when climate change is affecting individuals' physical and mental health, incomes, and many other different aspects (Boeckmann and Zeeb 2016; Gergis et al. 2023; Verlie 2022a). While scholars and activists often have different understandings and meanings towards climate justice, Mikulewicz et al. (2023) and other scholars have highlighted climate justice recognises the disproportional negative impacts climate change have on poor and marginalised communities. Strategies are needed to dismantle structural exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression towards these social and political groups (Jafry, Mikulewicz, and Helwig 2018; Meikle, Wilson, and Jafry 2016).

However, Australian climate politics are more divided and volatile than ever (McDonald 2016, 1,060; Turner and Skarbek 2023). Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, mainstream national ENGOs have been regarded as 'insiders' willing to work closely with political parties (particularly the Australian Labor Party [ALP] and the Greens), government departments and business groups (McDonald 2016; Warhurst 1994). These established ENGOs have relatively sufficient donations and revenues to sustain advocacy. Some scholars indirectly argue that bureaucracy and professionalisation help ENGOs to utilise resources effectively and efficiently, thus further sustaining volunteers' participation (Staggenborg 1988, 2020). However, to appeal to state actors or major financial donors, these ENGOs also seem to become increasingly disconnected from grassroots public support.

In the last two decades, more recently established groups such as Extinction Rebellion Australia, GetUp!, School Strike for Climate, Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC), 350.org, Change.org, Move Beyond Coal, Lock the Gate, are seemingly more aggressive, radical, visible, and persistent in mobilising large number of activities to create changes than mainstream large ENGOs (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Westwell and Bunting 2020). Their organising structures are less hierarchical and bureaucratic (Rosewarne, Goodman, and Pearse 2014).

In addition, while civil disobedience, nonviolent disruptive action and grassroots organising are not entirely new (Alinsky 1971), these ENGOs try to be more responsive to participants' interests and feedback by using digital technologies and novel communication mechanisms (Karpf 2017; Vromen, Vaughan, and Halpin 2021). However, evidence remains unclear regarding the extent to which different types of organisational structures could enhance their appeal to different social and political backgrounds (Hustinx 2014, 108).

However, these recently established ENGOs struggle to gather the required resources and support (Berny and Rootes 2018; Rosewarne, Goodman, and Pearse 2014,

38). In responding to broader societal and political changes, many ENGOs adopt a seemingly 'leaderless' or egalitarian, horizontal organising approach. Any individual can freely participate in the decision-making processes. Fewer external concerns about partisanship and donors' interests allow organisations to pursue more diverse repertoires (Staggenborg 2020). However, less resourceful and structured organising could unintentionally exclude minority social and political groups (Castells 2015; Hermes 2020).

Furthermore, civil society actors and organisations often struggle to maintain cohesion and work together under tremendous political pressure, attacks, division, or polarisation (Alexander 1953).[2] Also, if ENGOs are out of touch or out of step with grassroots communities, other groups may also misconstrue constituents' sentiments. A failure to properly represent affected social interests may mean that some political groups' grievances are not adequately addressed by ENGOs' advocacy and, in turn, by governments' responses. When members (including major stakeholders) and the public become dissatisfied with advocacy performance (Andrews et al. 2010), then members' recruitment (Herman and Renz 1997), but also its very existence may be threatened (Blee 2012; Hirschman 1970).

Therefore, presence of minority groups helps to establish and maintain higher inclusiveness, and thereby, pressure for policy changes. In fact, studies show that descriptive representation, formal selection/election, or direct participation could help diverse and marginalised individuals to be 'making presence again', and allow their voices to be heard (Guo and Musso 2007; Pitkin 1967, 8). Nevertheless, fair representation cannot be guaranteed in advance by delivering pre-agreed programmes and ideas. Diversity of presence needs to enable participants with greater autonomy instead of simply aggregating preferences and interests (Phillips 1998, 159–160).

In this regard, ENGOs need to provide members with ease of access to decision-making. Such mechanisms could help to create shared identities, empathy, solidarity, common views, or even consensus (Phillips 1998). Not only that, but studies have shown that higher equity allows NGOs to better operate as transmission belts, listening to members and talk to policymakers (Albareda 2018).

Still, it is not guaranteed that representatives could always 'act in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (Phillips 1998; Phillips and Hans 2023; Pitkin 1967, 209). Here, this paper argues that inclusiveness is best understood

2 For instance, renewable energies such as windfarm projects have led to divisions and conflicts within many local communities, or even within conservation groups. Recent investigations find that local community groups could be against renewable projects due to environmental concerns, nonetheless, seemingly associated with fossil fuel industries (Grigg, Fallon, and King 2024; McArthur 2024).

to incorporate procedural justice as a third dimension to strengthen ENGOs' capacity to manage internal tensions, disagreements and conflicts. Such mechanisms or platforms are essential to provide safe, open, respectful, and regenerative space and time for ENGOs' participants to acknowledge, recognise and discuss their concerns or differences. To do so, higher inclusiveness could help ENGOs to better sustain minority groups' participation and help to maintain greater public support, organisational sustainability, and policy deliberation outcomes (Bächtiger et al. 2018; Dryzek and Lo 2015; Perkins 2018).

2 Synthesising a Theory of Organisational Inclusiveness

Following from the above, it begs the question to understand how different types of ENGOs could establish and maintain higher inclusiveness.

2.1 Diversity

In this regard, seminal studies critically discuss, in democratic settings, the importance of including diverse, marginalised, or minority social and political groups (Dahl 1961; Truman 1951). Nevertheless, diversity in numbers is insufficient to fully consider diverse interests in collective action, as minority groups' representation could become symbolic (Guo and Musso 2007; Pitkin 1967; Strolovitch 2007; Weldon 2011). Some scholars argue persuasively that even mechanisms or quotas for proportional representation could lead to unequal or discriminative outcomes, either intentionally or unintentionally (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008).

Matters could be more complicated as different groups could have conflicting interests among each other. For instance, a black working-class woman has overlapping identities in female, ethnic, and lower socio-economic groups (Crenshaw 1989). Due to limited resources, advocacy groups might overlook subgroups' interests within minority groups. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the tension that exists between different values, ideas and even the physical presence of multiple constituents (Phillips 1998, 25; Phillips and Hans 2023). Without sufficient attention and management, such tension could hinder ENGOs' capacity to establish and maintain higher inclusiveness.

In this regard, an intersectional understanding is essential to 'amplify historically excluded voices, and to approach environmental education, policy, and activism' (Thomas 2022, 40). Perhaps, to achieve that, it would be useful to adopt a

dynamic, relational, and thicker approach that considers the interconnections across minorities' presence, identities, ideas, and different institutional environments (Evers and von Essen 2024; Mackay 2008; Saward 2010; Tarrow 2013). Because of that, inclusiveness also needs to encompass equity and procedural justice.

2.2 Equity

Equity is defined as ease of access to decision-making process. Such mechanisms allow individuals' values, beliefs, preferences, ideas, rhetoric, and narratives to engage with others and develop mutual understanding and collective decisions (Dryzek 2010; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006). Here, it is important to know while diversity allows ENGOs to encompass different groups' ideas and interests, they might be inadequate to capture individuals' experiences, which could differ vastly within their groups. In addition, minorities' interests and needs are often uncrystallised on complex, uncertain, emerging issues (Mansbridge 1999). In this regard, higher equity allows the 'vigorous pursuit' of other 'possibilities so far silenced and ideas one had to struggle to express' (Phillips 1998, 70). Such participation assumes that actors allow themselves to be persuaded by others, using ideational elements, reasoning, and arguments (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016; Dryzek 2010, 329; Schmidt 2017).

However, without genuine contestation or debates of ideas, discussions could be limited to like-minded individuals, groups with similar worldviews, or the so-called 'tyranny of the majority' or even 'tyranny of consensus' (Vráblíková 2016). Sometimes, deliberation might even result in awkward silence, extensive but perceivably unproductive meetings, frustration, or burnout. *Nevertheless,* that should not preclude the usefulness of 'enclave deliberation' that allows smaller groups to develop their ideas, positions and arguments before joining large groups (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 15–16). Ultimately, ENGOs could establish and maintain higher equity when organisations allow members to participate in decision-making process directly, which helps to sustain the relationship between organisations and participants with appropriate authorisation or accountability (Phillips 1998; Young 2002).

2.3 Procedural Justice

In addition, equitable mechanisms need to allow different voices to be heard and resolve potential disagreements (de Moor 2018). Here, this research uses the term 'procedural justice' to capture the ways that organisations manage disagreements, divisions, conflicts and the perceived sense of fairness. Different contexts could lead to different interpretations of activism strategies, communication practices, and advocacy directions. Tensions emerge not just between leadership, staff,

and volunteers but also across different social and political groups and urban/rural communities (Blee 2012; Castells 2015; Hustinx 2014; Hustinx et al. 2022; Lichterman 2006; Schroering and Staggenborg 2021; Staggenborg 1988, 2020).

Therefore, mechanisms to manage disagreements and tensions among activists and volunteers could be crucial. As Young (2002, 110) suggests, fairness involves coordinating diverse interests rather than coming up with a definitive conclusion. Moreover, confrontation of multiple perspectives, interests, and cultural meanings helps to correct individuals' biases and shifts in policy preference. She further highlights the use of narrative and storytelling to convey the history behind marginalised social and political groups, while other scholars also point out that rhetoric, such as analogy or parallel cases, is useful to bridge diverse worldviews (Dryzek and Lo 2015).

3 Case Selection

Then, following the above, a different/diverse case approach helps to examine and extrapolate the relevant organising mechanisms that could impact the ways that ENGOs could establish higher inclusiveness. In this regard, ACF is highly established with more resources (financial, human, professional, etc.) than XR Aus, which is loosely structured with minimal resources (financial, human, professional, etc.) (George and Bennett 2005; Kessler and Bach 2014; Yin 2014).

More specifically, both ENGOs formally recruit activists from all walks of life, operate across national and local levels, and have their involvement in social and political movements. This selection decision is also further based on a sampling from the membership base of the Climate Action Network in Australia (CAN), with 139 climate action groups and organisations as the sampling population (Appendix 1). Of the 139 groups, there were 82 national groups, and 44 of these national groups openly recruited members from all walks of life. Nevertheless, only 14 national groups are also present at the grassroots levels in various ways such as local chapters at the state level or community groups in local suburban areas. Further narrowing that down, nine of those groups have a diverse membership. Eight of them had a clear and targeted focus on Australian climate action, and two (ACF and XR Aus) directly involved in social and political mobilisation.

3.1 Case Backgrounds: Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and Extinction Rebellion Australia (XR Aus)

ACF is the oldest ENGO in Australia since the 1950s, with a clear goal to advocate for strong climate action, including carbon reduction and sustainable renewable

energies. Its membership grew significantly since the 1990s, with more than 700,000 supporters as of today (ACF 2021; Warhurst 1994). During the research period, ACF has 43 local community groups in Australia. Nonetheless, it is relatively conservative in its strategies and tactics for achieving said goals (Burgmann and Baer 2012; McDonald 2016).

In contrast, started in 2018, Extinction Rebellion Australia (XR Aus) is part of an international movement Extinction Rebellion (XR). During the research period, 63 local groups across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, ACT, and the Northern Territory were listed on its official website (XR Aus 2023c). There were also 110 groups setting up Facebook pages. XR International and XR Aus are more aggressive and radical in terms of strategies and tactics. It strives in helping to achieve very strong climate action targets, including declaring climate and ecological emergency and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2025. Compared with ACF, XR Aus is vastly different in that it has loose organising structures without central leaders.

4 Research Paradigm and Methods

Based on Einwohner et al. (2021), Kaijser and Kronsell (2014) suggestions, this research uses semi-structured interviews supplemented with content analysis of secondary documents to enrich the understanding of inclusiveness. This abductive and retroductive process allows empirical evidence to refine existing theories (Ackroyd and Karlsson 2014). Such approach is also useful to understand the difficulties and challenges interviewees face in their situated group or organisational environment (Hedström and Wennberg 2017; Kessler and Bach 2014, 173; Winker and Degele 2011).

4.1 Data Collection and Coding

In total, this research utilised 22 interviews with 20 interviewees (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, interview results could be subjective or imbalanced due to a relatively small sampling size. There is also a lack of representative statistical figures provided by the two ENGOs to comprehensively assess the levels of diversity in ENGOs. Prior desktop research and content analysis help to mitigate these limitations by identifying and consolidating up to 120 keywords or phrases about inclusiveness, emergency, climate change, energy, fossil fuel, government and so forth (see Appendix 3 to 6). In terms of coding, this research adopted a reflexive and interpretative approach

to tease out meanings in the data instead of simply using NVivo to auto-code the data mechanically (Braun and Clarke 2006) (Appendix 7).

More specifically, the data collection period lasted from 01 January 2018 to 15 September 2022 (including both semi-structured interviews and archival data). After an initial discussion, an ACF representative helped to refer and contact five more staff to be interviewed. Two are leaders (including the representative) at the managerial level, and three are leaders at the community organising level. At the latter stage, the interviewer also successfully contacted and interviewed another ACF community volunteer through LinkedIn.

In terms of XR Aus, this research was able to contact and interview 13 XR activists in all states and territories except Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory using snowball sampling. More than one interview was conducted with some interviewees to gather more information. Nevertheless, this research stopped interviewing other activists when keywords reached saturation level; that is, at the latter stage of the data collection process, interviewees began to repeat similar keywords or experiences.

4.2 Measuring Organisational Inclusiveness

In terms of measurement, this paper assesses diversity from descriptive to formal and substantial representation. ENGOs could be regarded as less diverse when there is limited descriptive representation of marginalised groups and without sufficient mirroring of the population's demographics. Formal electoral/selection mechanisms could help to improve diversity when these mechanisms facilitate the presence and voices of marginalised groups *and* result in more inclusive advocacy agendas. ENGOs could then become highly diverse when there is substantial representation and vigorous advocacy for marginalised voices through designated groups, caucuses, or spaces. More specifically, this research asked interviewees: 'how representative do you think your organisation has been to local represented communities, in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, ideology etc.? Why?' etc.

Nevertheless, inclusiveness is fluid, dynamic and relational (Phillips and Hans 2023, 84). This paper measured the levels of equity based on the ease of access to decision-making, ranging from nonparticipation, tokenism, and participatory (Arnstein 1969). Correspondingly, a low level of equity means that participants do not have any access or voices in the decision-making process. ENGOs become moderately equitable when participants are being consulted with some veto powers. ENGOs become highly equitable when participants have ease of access independently and autonomously. Questions include: '(h)ow does the organisation ensure diverse

representation in leadership across multiple groups?', '(h)ave there been any complaints about equity and accessibility in the organisation?'.

In parallel, ENGOs require procedural justice to ensure other two mechanisms are effective. Procedural justice is low when there are no mechanisms to accommodate disagreements or feedback. Organisations could become moderately just procedurally when there are some formal mechanisms to accommodate disagreements or internal disputes. Such mechanisms become highly useful when they allow bottom-up, transparent, and accountable mechanisms to create a safe environment for participation. Questions include: '(a)re there any challenges or constraints in implementing decisions effectively?', '(a)re there any disagreements, confrontations or conflicts regarding decisions being made?', '(h)ave there been any instances where specific individuals or groups have had to be excluded from the organisation, or some activities or types of decision-making? Who? Why?'

5 Results

Intuitively, XR Aus seems to be more inclusive than ACF with much ease of access to decision-making and a great emphasis on egalitarian and participatory principles. However, it remains to be seen whether XR Aus could achieve a higher level of procedural justice by harassing its self-organising principle (see Table 1).

5.1 ACF

5.1.1 Diversity

ACF is seeking to be a highly culturally diverse organisation. Its objectives include: 'building a wave of people who care and act into powerful, organized communities' to hold political leaders accountable and 'inspiring people to work together to create a better future for all of us'. According to an internal document, ACF planned to recruit 15 % of its staff from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Existing data shows that it is quite gender diverse within its managerial team and overall staff composition. According to its 2021–2022 annual report, 63 % of its staff are female, and 2 % are non-binary. 59 % are female in management. In terms of age, 1 % of its staff is Gen X. 10 % of its staff are baby boomers, born between 1945 and 1964. 30 % are Gen X, aged between 40 and 54. Most of its staff are Gen Y, aged between 25 and 39 (ACF 2022a). There is also an LGBTQ caucus for community-building.

More importantly, in 2022, its Council and Board do not seem to be incredibly diverse, even though they are elected by registered members through proportional

Table 1: A new breakdown of organisational inclusiveness.

Dimensions	Diversity	Equity	(New) Procedural justice
Features	**Demographics** ACF: limited diversity. Majority of volunteers are 50 or above, highly educated, female, and Anglo-Saxon.	**Ease of access** ACF: lacking access to decision-making, local groups need to follow national campaign direction, volunteers lack autonomy.	**Negotiation** ACF: senior management decides national directions, and organisers work with volunteers to deliver campaign outcomes.
	XR Aus: limited diversity. Majority of participants are over 50 or above, highly educated, female, and Anglo-Saxon.	XR Aus: free to join or exit local groups, organising and decision-making.	XR Aus: each States and Territories elect representatives to participate in the national platform, but local groups develop their campaigns and actions through extensive, consensus-oriented discussion, followed with majoritarian voting for each decision.
	Ideas and strategies ACF: try to embrace diverse values, but limited advocacy strategies.	**Voices amplification** ACF: working with miners, business communities, energy, and other professional sectors with specific campaigns and messages, advocate for Indigenous peoples (if being asked or invited).	**Conflict resolution** ACF: formal mechanism to manage serious internal complaints, organisers resolve volunteers' disagreements informally.
	XR Aus: try to embrace diverse values. Relatively diverse sets of repertoires.	XR Aus: claim to represent marginalised communities including young people, people of colour and migrants, but unclear with their presence and representation.	XR Aus: disagreements are allowed, regenerative culture encourages activists to abide by non-violent communication principles, but difficult to enforce.

representation system. Based on existing data (Table 2) shows that there is a lack of councillors coming from working class, ethnic minorities and migrant backgrounds. Moreover, most ACF executives come from middle-class, highly educated and Anglo-Saxon backgrounds.

This inclusion can be further teased out in several aspects. For instance, ACF very much welcomes individuals from all walks of life and nature lovers, regardless of their political stances, socio-economic backgrounds, nationalities or ethnicities. According to ACF Activist 01:

Table 2: ACF leadership backgrounds.

Backgrounds	Number of individuals
Indigenous heritage	1
Member of the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network	1
Member of Peace Foundation and the Australian Fabians	1
Migrant	1
Academics	4
Medical doctor	1
Campaigner	2
Directorate background	4
Land management	1
Water industry	1
Communication specialist	1
Legal background	1
Engineer	2
Sarah Reid: Vice President of ACT Conservation Council Susan Richardson: Expert Panel member of the Fair Work Commission, member of the National Sustainability Council, former President of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia	

Sources: ACF (2022b) Board & Council https://www.acf.org.au/acf_council.

> …I wanted people from all different walks of life – if they love nature – no matter who you vote for, how you have your cup of coffee in the morning, where you were born, if you shared values of love of nature, and you want to do something about that with others…

Nevertheless, its membership demographics seem to remain relatively homogenous. In Activist 02's opinion, '*…the classic community group member is a 60-year-old woman with postgraduate degrees and she's white. That is the norm in our community groups…*' Understandably, it is not ideal if volunteers only connect with Aboriginal organisations for their signatures in joint statements. According to ACF Activist 03:

> … They said, no we're not going to sign the letter, because you guys only come to us when you need something, [legitimacy] from us, but you never invest in the relationship…

As ACF is not culturally exclusive, culturally diverse ideas and values seem less visible in its existing practices. According to ACF Activist 06, the potential underlying reason might be due to lack of diversity at the top of the organisation:

> …I think that when you go up it's not like ideas are rejected. There is no opportunity for new ideas because people there are not from a different background…. So it's not like they are not democratic. It's just that they don't have diversity within their groups.

5.1.2 Equity

ACF has a relatively top-down, centralised decision-making process. Strategies and plans need to be approved by the most senior leaders, including its CEO, campaign director, engagement director, and fundraising director. Not only that, but decisions also need to be approved by the Board. Nevertheless, ACF's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ) Strategy defines equity as 'creating fair access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, acknowledging that some people face barriers others do not and proactively address this'. In its 2020–2022 Implementation Plan, ACF 'pledges to work to achieve an inclusive, equitable and safe community for everyone who cares about nature, free of discrimination and prejudice'. Aligning with this strategic priority, ACF specifically recruits and mobilises conservative minorities. According to ACF Activist 02:

> They are concerned about climate change, but they're also a small business owner, and they grew up on a farm, and their family have always voted conservative. Maybe they don't have many people from different cultural backgrounds in their life. Maybe they've never interacted with a person whose gay.

However, ACF does not seem to allow grassroots members a high level of access to decision-making, and the possibility to alter decision outcomes. According to ACF Activist 06, there is a sense of tension between volunteers and community organisers that requires persuasion or even pressure to convince suggested proposals:

> …the organiser is a gatekeeper to my ideas to the community groups…So for you to really implement it you have to fight the organiser, engage the organiser and be very aggressive about it. Then you get it through. But it takes pressure.

It could also be more challenging to accommodate the interests of workers transitioning from the fossil fuel sector. In this regard, in Gladstone, where Queensland's oldest and largest coal-fired power station is located, ACF community campaigner Jacklyn McCosker pointed out the perception that *'we (fossil fuel workers) are opposed to that conversation is a bit outdated…talking about the end of coal is not the same as attacking coal workers'* (McCosker 2022). Interviewees further highlighted that local workers' jobs could be at risk by simply attending any climate action meetings. Necessary precautions include turning off digital devices to protect workers' privacy are needed.

Still, culturally diverse individuals and groups could be marginalised as Activist 06 pointed out that *'(t)here can be a way of an organisation developing like a clique in a small – when it comes to community groups*'. In response, they gave specific attention and support. For instance, with the social media skills and training provided, it was able to grow that group from 10 to 100 people.

5.1.3 Procedural Justice

Despite ACF's hierarchical decision-making and values-aligned managerial approach, more explicit disagreements or even conflicts could still occur. ACF has a formal dispute mechanism to resolve any disagreements or conflicts. However, volunteers could find it stressful due to lack of achievement and the increasingly manifested impact of climate anxiety:

> …this manifests as a very negative outlook I think on everything. Sometimes they say that, oh what's the point of lobbying this politician…why we are wasting our time. (ACF Activist 03)

These volunteers are highly experienced and have been campaigning since the 70s. Others could perceive their pessimism as being negative and difficult to work with: *'(s)ometimes they might say things like, oh I don't feel like I'm enjoying my time because so-and-so has a very negative personality'* (ACF Activist 03).

Being aware of existing relational issues and tensions, ACF tends to minimise the problems or avoid further escalation. To do so, community organisers tend to work very closely with the groups. When potential areas or issues are bubbling up, they try to resolve them informally with volunteers. In this regard, ACF seems to be successful in creating a culture that minimises disagreements or conflicts. Members within ACF *realise* (or perceive) certain behaviours are not professional or appropriate. According to ACF Activist 03:

> …I try to keep the *positive vibe* and then usually they work it out among themselves. *They realise* that this behaviour was not professional, it should be different, and they say apology to each other eventually, which is good, because that's what we want to see.

5.2 XR Aus

5.2.1 Diversity

XR Aus recognises 'marginalised communities consistently on the frontlines of fossil fuel extraction, climate change, and ecological crises' (Wilson 2020, 7). It states that 'intersectionality as the decolonisation of the self' (Wilson 2020, 17) and recognises different forms of oppression and domination such as anthropocentrism, racism, sexism, eurocentrism, heteronormativity and classism. Also, regenerative culture is a core component that helps activists to become 'increasingly diverse and self-aware' (Wilson 2020, 7). XR Aus is 'committed to developing a regenerative culture internally and locally and in all our collaborations, partnerships, communities and relationships' (Wilson 2020, 4). Regenerative culture strives to help activists recognise the

'discrimination and lack of awareness based on gender, ethnicity, religion, class, ability and sexual orientation…'.

To achieve that, XR Aus actively tries to accommodate individuals from different social and political groups, as diverse as possible. With minimal human and financial resources, XR Aus adopts a self-organising approach. Activists can form local action groups without any formal approval or restrictions. There are templates suggesting the ways that each group can organise and roles with different mandates. To their surprise, XR Aus has found ways to accommodate different demographic groups' interests and sustain activists' engagement. For instance,

> … one group wanted to do dramatic, lie down, get arrested, lie down on the road, do all this stuff, and the other group said, oh, no, let's do more peaceful, I don't like that idea. I said that's fine, make two groups. One group doing, writing to the council, writing letters whatever they want to do, the other group doing more sort of hard core… (XR Activist 10)

In another instance, a yoga practitioner started organising a climate action group in yoga that encourages activists to slow down and explore novel ways to renew and regenerate from mental and physical exhaustion from activism:

> So, an emerging mental health kind of problem is eco-anxiety or mental health problems associated with the climate crisis, bush fires, floods…this could be another tool (yoga) when we're talking about wellness and regeneration… (XR Aus Activist 09)

However, many XR Aus interviewees acknowledge that membership demographics remain relatively homogenous. According to XR Aus Activist 01, a state capacity city group is led *'by white middle-class activists, and that makes the space really less inclusive and accessible to other people'*. Activist 02 also attributes this challenge to the fact that the organisation originated from the U.K., and *'there is a lot of expat UK people…(in a state capital city region), probably pushing up to 80 per cent…you go to a gathering there and you hear all these UK accents and it's not upper class UK. It's like – there's Northerners and there's Irish and everything'*. As Australia comes from former British colonies, many ethnics minorities, particularly Indigenous peoples, could hesitate to join XR or engage in relatively more disruptive politics.

5.2.2 Equity

According to XR Aus starter guidelines, its sixth principle states that it 'welcome(s) everyone and every part of everyone' to create safer and more accessible spaces. Its' seventh principle states that XR Aus 'actively mitigate(s) for power' and is 'breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation', and the tenth principle further states that XR Aus is based on autonomy and decentralisation, and they

'challenge power' and 'anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of Extinction Rebellion'.

In this regard, interviewees agree that activists can freely participate in meetings and activities. This open and engagement discussion encourages activists to pursue more diverse political actions that align with activists' different preferences and skills:

> you can be at home with kids. If you have a bad leg and you can't climb up a tree, you can still be doing work…(i)f you can give fulltime, great, if you can give one hour a week, great. So that's very important. (XR Activist 10)

XR Activist 07 also shared that different types of roles, tasks, and actions are categorised into red, orange, or green in their local groups. Green activities involve zero risk of being arrested. Orange activities could be illegal, but it is unlikely to be arrested. However, red activities are illegal and will be arrested. Most individuals would take up support roles, while only 10 percent to 20 percent would engage in direct actions or civil disobedience.

However, limited resources and other commitments could hinder activists' capacity to participate in XR Aus. In addition, the relatively 'disruptive' and 'radical' image could discourage individuals from certain backgrounds. According to XR Activist 03:

> … it's not that easy to get people [laughs] involved when they've got two jobs, they want all their kids educated, they're trying to get their kids into university. Kids in university have been hammered to – it was quite hard for them to pass. They might not come from a family that speaks English as a second language.

5.2.3 Procedural Justice

XR Aus has established guidelines to help assess activities' effectiveness and conflict-resolution system (XR Conflict Resilience System 2021). This system states that '(c) onflict is a form of feedback; signalling that some needs are unmet and change is emerging. It may contain information about our agreements, systems and shared purpose'. It also suggests that 'conflict is neither undesirable nor a "problem" that 'learnt behaviour of ignoring or attempting to repress feelings of conflict, frustration, anger'. This system encourages activists to practice active listening, facilitated conversations, facilitated group meetings, mediation, and restorative circle process. However, many activists lack the professional skills and knowledge to resolve conflicts. A few interviewees suggested that these procedures might not achieve their intended aims. Also, in contrast to ACF, with a clear hierarchy and decision-makers, according to XR Activist 06, *'(n)o one wanted to impose or mandate that some group do*

this. Culturally, we were very reluctant to intervene in another group's practices'. In addition, not every activist agrees that resolving these problems could help to push climate action forward:

> … and we added a fourth demand which is about decolonising. Even then we had to remove it because there was a lot of internal conflict around that… there was a big ideological divide about that as well. (XR Activist 01)

Moreover, while XR Aus strongly focus on direct action and civil disobedience, it also emphasises non-violent communication. For instance, where activists agreed to use some form of art in their messages such as a timebomb to convey climate emergency, that decision was being overturned:

> I actually wasn't part of – I wasn't there when this happened, when these other people came in and said no, we don't want that … So, it's thinks like that that just make me really discouraged… because if we say anything about let's fight for it, they're like no, no, we're not fighting, we can't fight, that's violent … (XR Activist 01)

As a result, regenerative cultural practices could be challenging to execute and implement. Existing societal and cultural factors influence group interaction across multiple cultures. Activist 02 carefully points out that activists could act in such ways 'unknowingly':

> …(this other dude) had this whole presentation done up to explain how unruly those youngsters were, you know what I mean? It was a bit vicious, I thought, the extent, because really, they're just doing actions, they're doing non-violent actions and at least they're doing something, right?

As the external political environment is changing rapidly and XR Aus intensively engage in direct disruptive action, reflection and recovery seem to become secondary to some activists. Many newcomers still have unpleasant experiences such as lengthy, unproductive arguments, feeling disrespected or burnout:

> (i)f they didn't like – if they weren't happy with it, they just burned – they'd just get burned out and they'd leave. (XR Activist 06)

5.3 Comparison and Discussion

From the above, while diversity remains a challenge to ACF and XR Aus, XR Aus has higher equity for two main reasons. First, XR Aus does not require formal member registration or compulsory fees. Second, it allows everyone to participate in strategic planning and campaigns, including leading roles shortly after joining. Apart from that, XR Aus allows individuals to share their ideas and concerns with minimal restrictions. On the other hand, while there are relatively more equitable

opportunities in ACF community groups, it also tries to manage tensions and insult conflicts without jeopardising the group cohesion, as well as its national objectives and campaigns. To a certain extent, that might be difficult to encourage robust discussions in ACF.

Nevertheless, XR Aus activists seem to find it more difficult to fully adhere to organisational demands and principles than ACF. Many XR Aus groups require tedious and exhaustive discussion sections to resolve disagreements or divisions. To remedy the situations, more experienced activists need to step in and prevent situations from spiralling out of control. That includes expelling certain individuals deemed 'problematic' from meetings. Understandably, there seems to be a sense of mistreatment or even unfairness to those who are being excluded, that could impact organising capacity and cohesion. Furthermore, XR Aus's case seems to resemble similar experiences documented in Staggenborg's (2020, 170, 195) studies in the U.S. that grassroots activists could remain hesitate 'to impose their ideas on others out of respect for participatory democracy', and 'fear being overly directive'. In addition, certain strategic issues were just complicated to resolve, and it is impractical to do so.

Then, as Verlie (2022b, 14, 101) points out, instead of trying to avoid or resolve every tension in relation to climate issues or concerns, they can be a source of communal motivation and strength through explicit acknowledgement. As la Cour, Hustinx, and Eliasoph (2023, 449) suggest, 'tensions and ambiguities are not problems to be solved, but are conditions to manage, in which the right approach can fuel excitement, creativity and development'.

6 Conclusion: Significance and Future Research Avenues

The above findings show much complexity in the various challenges and opportunities that ACF and XR Aus are facing in establishing more inclusive practices and outcomes. In this regard, this paper hopes to contribute to the literature of democratic studies by highlighting the importance of inclusive communication, and deliberation. They also reinforce previous findings regarding the significance of intersectionality in resolving collective action problems, and the need to pay attention to external and internal constraints on inclusive group practices (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003; Hustinx et al. 2022). More specifically, while empowering local community groups with greater autonomy seems to endanger organisational coherency or leadership, context-specific conflict resolution in an orderly, structured, trustworthy, and safe environment is needed to strengthen group resilience and learning capacity (Schlosberg et al. 2024).

Nevertheless, this study covers two different climate action groups in Australia. More longitudinal or cross-sectional case studies utilising other methods, such as participant-observation and surveys across different contexts, would be useful to test and revise this theory. Future studies are also needed to investigate the relevant organisational mechanisms that could enable or constrain inclusiveness, such as advocacy strategies, bureaucratical structures, decision-making, communication models, and trust mechanisms (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Han 2014; Hedström and Wennberg 2017; Ostrom 2014; Staggenborg 2020). Similarly, such studies on organisational inclusiveness could help to resolve collective action problems such as ethnic equality, domestic violence, gender discrimination, income disparity, gun control, and migration.

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