Governmentality of and in global climate governance:

The experiences of non-state actors at the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COP)

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that non-state actors play key roles in global (climate) governance. They do so also and in particular at the yearly UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COP) where thousands of participants from states, civil society, businesses and the media meet to produce global climate governance. Filling a gap in existing literature, this thesis analyzes the experiences of non-state actors at COP from a perspective of governmentality, paying special attention to how individual conduct is shaped by, represents, (re)produces and potentially challenges wider process and logics of governance.

Based on seven semi-structured interviews with non-state actors who have been to at least two COPs, it is argued that by going to COP and engaging in a variety of activities for a variety of goals, non-state actors represent and reproduce the logic of COP as the central institution and process through which climate governance is to be (publicly) conducted. However, meaningful participation often requires long preparations, strategy building and respective knowledge and experience. This factor advantages bigger and more professional groups which (can) adapt their conduct accordingly. While a central feature of COP, physical interactions between participants are shaped by differences in access, the hectic atmosphere and advantage participants with more resources and adapted forms of conduct. COP is also a stage for the theatrical performances of authority and legitimacy. Finally, activism is controlled through both direct and indirect means, including activists' self-disciplining to avoid losing access and negatively reflecting on their organizations.

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1. Introduction

In today's global governance regimes which are often characterized by the absence of a central authority, multiple layers, fragmentation, diversity and countless formal and informal rules and relations between diverse actors, non-state actors have garnered key roles and authority (Ruhlman 2019, Campbell et al. 2014, Zou and Wang 2021). This accounts also and in particular to environmental governance, where "non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an incrementally visible and significant role in five key areas, namely, 'information collection and dissemination', 'policy development consultation', 'policy implementation', 'assessment and monitoring' and 'advocacy for environmental justice'" (Zou and Wang 2021, 81). In fact, global environmental governance has heralded the increasingly important role and participation of non-state actors, most notably at global conferences such as Stockholm 1972, Rio 1992 or Johannesburg 2002 (Nasiritousi 2019, 330-331; Orsini 2020, 241-242).

For Campbell et al. (2014), these conferences fulfill key roles in global environmental governance and for non-state actors. Even when they fail to produce binding interstate agreements, they are important for setting the agenda and shaping new norms and policies. Non-state actors can influence, support or challenge governmental decisions (3-4). As the authors put it, these meetings are distinct moments, "when diverse actors, normally dispersed in time and space, come together to produce - through decisions, interpersonal relationships, information exchange, etc. - environmental governance" (3).

A special example are the yearly Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which since its entry into force in 1994, has garnered almost universal membership with 198 countries having ratified it (UNFCCC n.d.). As the supreme decision making body of the UNFCCC, COP has grown into the biggest yearly UN conference and a mega event of global reach (UNCSS 2014). As evident in official UNFCCC statistics, every year it attracts thousands of participants from states, NGOs

and the media. The number of officially admitted non-state organizations has been ever increasing from under 200 to over 3000 (UNFCCC n.d.). As Bäckstrand et al. (2017) argue:

> "UN climate diplomacy has been pioneering in enhancing access, inclusion and representation of non-state actors through a range of deliberative and participatory mechanisms [...]. Ever since UN negotiations on the global climate were initiated in the early 1990s, NGOs, businesses and local governments have been present as activists, experts and diplomats." (564)

Despite concerns over unequal representation, especially of Northern and Southern NGOs (Gereke & Brühl 2019), non-state actors at COP have not only grown in numbers but also in heterogeneity and plurality (Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér 2017, 587; Nasiritousi 2019, 335-336; Bäckstrand et al. 2017). Although criticized as inadequately addressing this heterogeneity (Cabré 2011), the UNFCCC officially differentiates between nine loosely organized and differently-sized constituencies of non-state observer groups, namely businesses, environmental NGOs (ENGOs), farmers, indigenous people, local and municipal authorities, research, trade unions, women and gender and youth (UNFCCC n.d).

At COP, these diverse non-state actors engage in a variety of activities for a variety of goals and employ both in- and outsider strategies (Nasiritousi 2019, 332-333). Interestingly, information exchange and networking are often more feasible and important than influencing the complex negotiations (Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér 2017). In line with points raised by Campbell et al. (2014), Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2017) describe COPs as "messy political sites, where a multitude of actors come together to exchange ideas and knowledge, benchmark climate performance, build interpersonal relationships, organize resistance and propose policy alternatives in parallel to, and in view of, the interstate negotiations" (581-582).

Almost ironically, the failure of the Copenhagen conference 2009 to produce a successor for the Kyoto Protocol not only caused lots of frustration, especially among non-state actors, but also facilitated the move from a top-down approach to climate governance to a more bottom-up, multi-level and multi-actor system (Bäckstrand et al. 2017). Particularly since the

Paris agreement codified this new governance architecture, COP has become the central orchestrator and as Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2017) call it, a "facilitative practice" of this system. Non-state actors play increasingly important roles and "can affect outcomes by contributing with ideas, raising awareness, shaping discussions, influencing decisions, implementing policies, and normalizing actions" (Nasiritousi 2019, 339). However, also critical analyses of this set up have been presented (Nasiritousi 2019, 338; Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017; Jernnäs and Lövbrand, 2022), often speaking to wider debates on the institutionalization of big environmental NGOs, changed (tamed) strategies and discourses, their cooperation with governments and corporations and the potential conflicts with more radical activism (Berny and Rootes 2018; Stroup and Wong 2018; Ciplet 2015).

However, these wider systemic analysis of the roles of non-state actors in global climate governance and a somewhat functional approach to the role of COP, tell us little about the practices and specifically the experiences and meaning making of non-state actors at these "active political spaces" (Campbell et al. 2014, 4). Hence, this project asks: *How do non-state actors personally maneuver and experience the conference space and its dynamics?* To bring together the analysis of systemic dynamics, personal experiences and (micro) practices, this research employs the theoretical framework of governmentality, developed by Michel Foucault. It allows a unique view into the working of complex power dynamics and their logics. Often defined as the "conduct of conduct" (Li 2007, 275) this analytical tool helps us understand the complex interplay of how experiences and conduct are shaped by, reflect, (re)produce but can also challenge and shape wider systemic dynamics and logics.

Based on this theoretical framework and seven semi-structured interviews with non-state actors who have been to at least two COPs, I argue and show that the fact, that every year thousands of diverse actors go to COP to engage in a variety of activities for a variety of goals represents and reproduces the logic of COP as the central nod of the global climate governance

regime. It is exactly through this institution and its process that climate governance is to be (publicly) conducted. Benefitting mostly bigger and more professional groups, meaningful participation requires long preparations, experience and knowledge of the system and its dynamics. While a central logic of COP, physical interactions between participants are also shaped by differences in access, the hectic atmosphere, resources and "appropriate" conduct. COP is also a stage for the theatrical performance of authority and legitimacy, while activism is controlled through direct and indirect means. Non-state actors are not passive objects but active subjects which both self-govern their conduct according to the logics of the system and thereby (re)produce it but whose conduct can also challenge and shape the system and its logics. They are an integral part of the system and logic of COP.

I hope that this thesis and its findings shed new light on the experience and conduct of non-state actors at COP, how they are shaped, reflect and (re)produce wider dynamics and logics of climate governance and COP. While overall situated within International Relations as a research field, this multidisciplinary project hopefully contributes to and brings together a variety of sub- and related fields and their literature, including non-state, environmental and climate governance as well the wide field of governmentality studies.

This thesis is structured as follows: having provided some background on non-state actors in climate governance and the COPs, the consequent literature review provides a brief overview of some of the existing research on non-state influence, activities and strategies at COP. The following chapter introduces governmentality as a theoretical framework, starting with a brief overview of its general concept before discussing its application on the study of non-state actors in global (climate) governance. Next, the methodology used in this research will be discussed, before the above outlined findings of the empirical analysis will be presented. The thesis ends with a conclusion.

2. Literature Review: Non-state actors at COP

2.1 Influence and strategies in environmental negotiations

A rather substantial body of existing literature deals with non-state actors' influence and strategies in the negotiations, with most focusing on ENGOs and business and industry organizations.

In their widely cited work *NGO Diplomacy*, Betsill and Correl (2008) develop and discuss a theoretical framework to qualitatively assess NGOs' level of influence in international environmental negotiations. They identify five factors, considering influence on both the process (issue framing, agenda setting, positions of key states) and outcome (procedural and substantive issues) of these negotiations. Based on the application of their framework in a range of case studies in the remainder of the book, they arrive at a not-exhaustive list of eight factors conditioning NGO influence: NGO coordination, rules of access, stage of the negotiations, political stakes, institutional overlap, competition from other NGOs, alliances with key states, and level of contention (187).

Rietig (2011) develops this framework further by differentiating between insider (policy advice and scientific expertise as members of state delegation), outsider (public pressure through protests, campaigning and cooperation with the media) and semi-outsider (lobbying) strategies. Based on four indicators for each of the latter two strategies, she assesses specifically the influence of ENGOs during the climate negotiations between 2009 and 2011. Under certain limited circumstances, public pressure could be effective, but as she also finds in later research (Rietig 2016), generally, lobbying and protests had little influence, as most positions and decisions had been agreed on beforehand. Based on this concern, Rietig (2016) and Downie (2014) see influence from a long term perspective and call attention to the domestic sphere, to the buildup of influence through early access to policy processes, networks and sustained mobilization. However, as Pacheco-Vega and Murdie (2021) show for non-OECD countries,

effective environmental advocacy in the domestic sphere requires civil liberties or states to be vulnerable to external pressure.

In contrast to the limited influence of ENGOs found by Rietig (2011), Vormedal (2008) found a rather substantial influence of business and industry NGOs during the negotiations around *Carbon Capture and Storage* under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. They effectively used their network to share their preferences and pressure decision makers. Giving somewhat of an explanation for these different findings, Lund (2013) shows that most explanatory factors of influence play out in favor of businesses (e.g. technical expertise, financial resources, win-win discourse etc.), while legitimacy remains ENGOs' most valuable resource. However, as she points out, this asymmetry "may be problematic from a democratic point of view as private economic interests and public interests frequently diverge" (739).

Other research deals less with the degree of influence but with its conditions and strategies. For example, Betzold (2013) points out that business groups use more inside- and ENGOs more outside strategies. However, in both groups increasing experience and longer-term involvement increases the use of inside strategies as access improves. Although the wide-spread employment of outside strategies (e.g. side events) is often a response to existing restrictions, they can also be an opportunity for networking and increasing visibility. Hanegraaff (2022) looks at access to policymakers as a precondition for influence and finds that "overall, business non-state actors gain more access to policymakers compared to NGOs. Importantly however, the privileged position of business groups becomes less pronounced – sometimes even disappears – if countries are more developed, less reliant on fossil fuels, more democratic, or the impact of climate change is higher for a country" (1). In the particular context of lobbying, Betzold (2014) shows that NGOs interact with both

responsive and influential countries but often focus on delegations of democratic and low income countries, large emitters and the NGO's home country.

2.2 Side events

In some way, this focus on the negotiations is somewhat surprising considering that Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2017) found that most non-state actors attend COP not to influence the negotiations but to showcase their work, for networking, coordination and information gathering and exchange. In this context, a particular space of NGO activities at COP, which has been growing in popularity, are the side events, typically panel discussions, presentations or workshops administered by the UNFCCC (Lovell and Schroeder 2012, 27-28).

In their research, Hjerpe and Linnér (2010) find that these side-events serve a wide variety of functions for organizers, participants and the wider system. They are avenues for capacity building, information and vision sharing, agenda setting, (public) awareness raising and for linking and bringing together different people and stakeholders from various levels of climate governance. In case of more stakeholder diversity, "side-events have the potential to increase the input legitimacy of the international policy process" (167).

Building on this research, Lovell and Schroeder (2012) echo the argument of Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2017) and argue that COP side events are key coordinating, networking and meeting spaces. Many view side events as more solution-focused than the politically driven negotiations. Not always directly focused on the actual negotiations, they are (also) venues for cross-level policy coordination and the introduction and discussion of new (controversial) ideas. Ironically, one might even argue that for many non-state actors, "in this sense, it is the formal UN climate negotiations that are a 'side event'" (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012, 31).

2.3 Smaller actor groups

While, as argued before, most research on non-state actors at COP focuses on businesses and ENGOs, some authors also consider smaller actor groups, often paying less attention to their influence but their activities, experiences and subtle dynamics. For example, as a peculiar subset of businesses, Nasiritousi (2017) analyzed the various governance activities and positions of major fossil fuel companies. Unlike state-owned companies, western private companies often participate as observers and use the conferences to interact with all sorts of stakeholders, "follow policy debates and to present information at side-events or exhibits" (633). Furthermore, in a series of two studies, Krantz examined religious NGOs. Making up a small percentage of the NGOs accredited to and attending COP, they are mostly Christian and Western (Krantz, 2021). Next to activities and goals similar to other NGOs (e.g. networking), they specifically aim to express solidarity with other groups, showcase interfaith standing-together and the compatibility of religion with climate science and protection (Krantz 2022).

Another specific group are indigenous people, who according to Suiseeya and Zanotti (2019), are visible but understudied (39). Employing feminist collaborative event ethnography at COP21 in Paris, the authors observed complex and plural forms of power and how indigenous groups represented themselves and their demands both in self-created (digital) spaces and through "conventional" means such as press conferences, protests, side events and interactions with state delegations. Especially relevant for this project is the research and approach taken by Belfer et al. (2019). The authors conducted interviews to understand the experiences, barriers, opportunities and interactions of indigenous people at COP. They identify a range of material and logistic constraints for indigenous participation, ranging from finance to the registration process and language barriers. Hence, in-group support and coordination are key, also in the negotiations, when divergent and local viewpoints need to be represented as a unified position. A further risk is the tokenization of indigenous participation, for example when cultural

performances make them highly visible but their voices remain unheard and disrespected. Ultimately, indigenous involvement depends on "personal relationships and political will" (12).

Of even higher relevance for this project, Thew (2018) qualitatively researched youth and their constituency at COP. Paying special attention to five modes of participation (conference access, plenary interventions, high-level meetings, (protest) actions, side-events and exhibits) the author finds that perceived agency and recognition are key in shaping youths' experience and strategies. While higher levels contribute to active engagement in policy development and constructive interactions, perceived marginalization often leads young people to appealing to their symbolic power (vulnerability and representation of future generations), engage in disruptive acts or even challenge the overall legitimacy of the UNFCCC process. However, such activities further "negatively impact[...] upon their agency as it damages how they are perceived by decision-makers, creating a downward spiral of low self-perception, negative participatory strategies and loss of recognition" (385). Not least, Thew (2018) highlights that youth participation is further disadvantaged by the lack of material resources (e.g. money and logistics) which limits their ability to organize impactful side events, sustain participation over a longer time and develop lasting (insider) relationships.

Because COPs "function as catalysts for the emergence of an issue-specific transnational public sphere" (Lück, Wozniak, and Wessler 2016, 26), non-state actors not only interact with state delegations and each other, but also with the media. As Lück, Wozniak, and Wessler (2016) show, they are important information providers and problem communicators. While ENGOs often "adapt to the media logic" (30), both sides use each other and co-create common interpretations. However, these complex and heterogeneous networks and interactions are shaped by a range of factors, namely the NGOs strategic orientation, the journalists' outlook and focus, the media type and the target audience.

2.4 Issue framing

As mentioned before, issue framing is a key strategy and tool for NGO influence. Especially for complex topics such as climate change, frames help interpret, understand and construct a problem and potential policies against it (Hjerpe and Buhr 2014; Vanhala and Hestbaek 2016; Allan and Hadden 2017).

COPs are one key space where climate issues are (re)framed. Examining topics and frames presented in official COP side events between 1997 and 2011, Hjerpe and Buhr (2014) argue that the scope and specificity of topics has increased. They do not just reproduce issues from the negotiations but raise and assess new (sub)topics. Interestingly, the authors observed that most frames were rather conformist than confrontational and in line with the prevailing governance approach. This finding is less surprising, considering that, as Zeng et al. (2019) show in a case study from China, NGOs which align their frames with those of the central state and the media are more likely to impact policy change than if adopting a confrontational frame.

Further diving into the involved dynamics of issue framing, Vanhala and Hestbaek (2016) engage in detail with the contested political debates around *loss and damage* and argue that "from 2008 onward, an overarching and ambiguous "loss and damage" frame began to replace two more specific historical framings—a "liability and compensation" frame and a "risk management and insurance" frame—in the discussions" (112). This process allowed the bridging of certain stark divisions and some compromise. While the authors see NGOs as important actors, contributing ideas and supporting certain frames, the analysis seems to focus on the official state negotiations. In contrast to this, Allan and Hadden (2017) specifically look at NGOs and under specific reference to Betsill and Correl (2008) argue that the shift from a legalistic and technical framing of loss and damage towards moral justice greatly expanded NGOs influence and allowed them to successfully push for a compromise in the final agreement. Specifically, a justice framing helped raise attention for the issue and build a wide

coalition with developing countries and organizations beyond the environmental community. NGOs were able to actively persuade or coerce states and build up pressure by framing the topic of loss and damage as a mark-stone for the success of the overall Paris agreement. The good connections with developing countries and the provision of knowledge and expertise allowed NGOs to exert influence even during closed-door negotiations. Additionally, their claimed moral authority helped persuade developed countries and soften some opposing positions.

All in all, a quite substantial body of literature deals with different perspectives on non-state actors at COP and especially their influence and strategies to achieve it (e.g. issue framing). However, only some works specifically look at personal experiences. While research, for example by Belfer et al (2019), Suiseeya and Zanotti (2019), and Thew (2018) partly showcase how these experiences reflect and are shaped by larger structures, none of them specifically works with governmentality as a framework of analysis. Hence, the following chapter aims to introduce governmentality as the framework guiding this research and review some existing literature which has used governmentality to study non-state actors in global (climate) governance.

3. Theoretical Framework: Governmentality

Originally developed and presented by Michel Foucault in the 1970s through his lecture series at the Collège de France, governmentality has been widely discussed, adopted and hybridized (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2007). In essence, governmentality, often defined as "conduct of conduct" (Li 2007, 275), represents a tool to analyze power and the art of governing through distinctive means and ideas (Li 2007).

To illustrate the significance and application of this theory to this project and its analysis of the experience of non-state actors at COP, the following paragraphs will briefly outline the general idea of governmentality, before discussing the key work of Sending and Neumann (2006) who showcased the utility of governmentality to research the role of non-state actors in global governance. The final part reviews literature which employed governmentality to the study of non-state actors in global climate governance.

3.1 The concept of governmentality

For Foucault, forms of power are to be understood within historical contingencies and developments (Foucault 1991; Valdivia 2015, 467). Starting from Machiavellian ideas of sovereignty and rule over territory, Foucault (1991) shows how developments such as population growth and the abundance of money made control of the population through laws, administrations and patriarchal conceptions increasingly difficult. In other words, a new art of government developed in response to a changed reason and rationality of state, namely the centrality of the economy. Instead of sovereignty, the population, its welfare, conditions and economic prosperity become the ends of government. To achieve its goals, populations are directly and indirectly acted upon by the government through specific knowledge and techniques. The population, which is distinct from the individual and their wills, is aware of

what it wants, but not (necessarily) how it is governed (Foucault 1991; Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006).

Hence, as a theoretical framework, governmentality encourages us to ask and analyze who governs what, to what end, according to what logics and through what techniques (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006, 84-85).

Recalling the working definition of governmentality as the "conduct of conduct" (Li 2007, 275), it is important to understand that broader systemic logics and actual practices and conduct are inseparable and mutually dependent. For example, while discipline and its institutions do not disappear (Foucault 1991, 101-102), governmentality shows how peoples' conduct is not shaped and controlled through coercion but through "educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs" (Li 2007, 275). People govern themselves and their conduct according to internalized ideas and logics. For Valdivia (2015), governmentality hence works both from above and below. She sees a form of relation between the governing and the governed.

As Li (2007) highlights, within this relation, "governmental power is not homogenous and totalizing" (276). On the one hand, not only individual conduct but also governmental interventions are shaped by the logic and the nature of the system and its processes. On the other hand, within a system of governmentality where conduct is not controlled by force, people, by definition, have a certain degree of agency. As the author puts it: "the analytic of governmentality draws our attention to the ways in which subjects are differently formed and differently positioned in relation to governmental programs (as experts, as targets), with particular capacities for action and critique" (276). Although Li (2007) does not employ the term, this ability to resist, challenge and critique governmental rationales and interventions, clearly resembles what Foucault called counter-conduct (Odysseos, Death, and Malmvig 2016). Overall, governmentality shows how forms and processes of governance are not static but

created through the dynamic interplay of goals, logics and conduct. As Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde (2006) point out: "rationalities are constantly undergoing modification in the face of some newly identified problem or solution, while retaining certain styles of thought and technological preferences" (98).

3.2 Governmentality of non-state actors

In their influential study, Sending and Neumann (2006) bring the study of non-state actors in global governance and governmentality together and show the analytical power of the above outlined theory. Their starting point is the criticism of traditional views of global governance, which see power between states and NGOs as a zero-sum game and have failed to deliver on their promise of analyzing governance as a process as well as to overcome the analytical triangle between sovereignty, authority and legitimacy. Consequently, the authors suggest governmentality as a (new) theoretical framework to analyze the relations, processes and their logic between NGOs and states. In short, they argue:

> "In the governmentality perspective, the role of nonstate actors in shaping and carrying out global governance-functions is not an instance of transfer of power from the state to nonstate actors [...]. Rather, it is an expression of a changing logic or rationality of government (defined as a type of power) by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of government to be acted upon and into an entity that is both an object and a subject of government. We argue that the self-association and political will-formation characteristic of civil society and nonstate actors do not stand in opposition to the political power of the state, but is a most central feature of how power operates in late modern society." (652)

Sending and Neumann (2006) highlight how from a governmentality perspective, non-state actors acquire their importance from the ability to mobilize civil society and "carry out regulatory functions" (658). While at the same time, their goals and conduct are shaped by the current governance system and its logics. They both represent civil society and constitute a tool through which it is governed.

3.3 Governmentality of non-state actors in global climate governance

Apart from this more general view, a range of studies employ governmentality to specifically understand the role of non-state actors in global environmental and climate governance. For example, Gareau (2012) uses the rather peculiar case study of the *Methyl Bromide Controversy* in the Montreal Protocol to show that while NGOs can indeed impact environmental negotiations and represent "progressive" ideas, they are also impacted by the prevailing policy discourse. In order to participate, especially some big and institutionalized organizations "have learned to 'govern themselves' in ways that legitimize powerful state agendas" (89). Not least by the "dissemination of certain knowledges/discourses" (91) they legitimize and sustain a neo-liberal model of governing and exclude alternative approaches.

Bäckstrand and Kuyper (2017) look specifically at the orchestration efforts of the UNFCCC which "seek[s] to mobilize intermediaries – non-state actors, IGOs, transgovernmental networks – on a voluntary basis to impact targets in pursuit of a governance goal" (767). Orchestration is hence a soft and indirect tool to address, one might argue govern, the ultimate targets (people, firms, states) through intermediaries without any hard control or coercion. For Dryzek (2017), these orchestration efforts clearly resonate with the logic of governmentality, as by participating in such initiatives, non-state actors (unconsciously) reinforce the regime. They become "compliant subjects" (792) which "help render an unruly world governable in the interests of values they share with the orchestrator" (792). In a similar vein, Jernnäs and Lövbrand (2022) explicitly employ governmentality to show how "nonstate actors [are mobilized] as active and responsible partners in the quest for rapid and deep decarbonization" (38). However, defined by clear logics and knowledge, such efforts "leave little room for contestation over the characteristics of the decarbonized society (what future do "we" want?) and the sorts of transformations required to get there (what needs to be transformed?)" (54).

Apart from these more systemic analysis echoing ideas raised by Sending and Neumann (2006), Kuchler (2017) looks specifically at the importance of discourse. A focus which seems important as in Foucauldian thinking, discourse represents and reproduces certain logics of governance and hence shapes conduct (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2007). Resembling some of the discussions around issue framing, in the case of NGOs in climate governance, this means that framing their positions within established discourses provides them with a shared frame of reference with policymakers but also delineates "thinkable" actions and policies (Kuchler, 2017). The author bases her analysis on three meta-discourses originally developed by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2007) which also today reflect different logics of how to govern the climate (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2019). First, *green governmentality* reflects a "science-driven and centralized multilateral negotiation order" (124). Second, *ecological modernization* situates itself within a "decentralized liberal market order" (124). Third, *civic environmentalism* can be divided into more radical and reform-oriented versions. While the former challenges power-relations and Western notions of consumption, capitalism and sovereignty all-together, the latter focuses on how civil society can complement state practices and increase accountability and legitimacy. Returning to Kuchler (2017), focusing on debates around the Clean Development Mechanism, she finds that several NGOs turned towards a more radical, confrontational, justice and human rights based discourse, thereby arguably discursively resisting and challenging established technical and market liberal logics of governance.

On a somewhat different note, Death (2011) employs governmentality not to study non-state actors but specifically big summits as a core component of environmental governance. He argues that even when they fail to produce tangible outcomes, they are instrumental in making the regime governable and producing certain discourses. In particular, summits are not just talkshops but "can also be viewed as moments of political theatre, performative enactments of legitimacy and authority, and sites for the communication of particular examples of responsible

conduct" (1). They present a certain state-centric logic of doing politics, of hard working elites in an heroic struggle and individual responsibility for self-optimization. Therefore, summits are a "technique of government at a distance" (1) within a broader rationality of "regimes of advanced liberal governmentality" (2). A somewhat ironic role falls on activists which are often criminalized but also "have an important role as both an audience, and a kind of Greek chorus, for the heroism, tragedy or farce of the official negotiations" (12). Thanks to their potential impacts on the course of a summit, they become part of its theatrical performance. Death (2011) concludes that these summits can be stages for both depoliticization and repoliticization dynamics. While they "are at best somewhat sporadic, and irregularly successful, sites for the conduct of conduct in a global audience" (13) they can also be spaces for disruption, contestation and dissent.

All considered, the previous sections not only introduced the general idea of governmentality but also reviewed some existing literature skillfully applying this theoretical framework to study the role of non-state actors in global (climate) governance. While these contributions provide valuable insights and showcase the analytical power of governmentality to analyze both systemic logics of governance and conduct but especially their dynamic interplay, they neither focus on personal experiences nor specifically on COP. In turn, the work by Death (2011) focuses on COP, but also takes a more systemic and state-centric approach. Hence, the focus of this research to employ governmentality to study personal experiences and (micro) conduct of non-state actors at COP seems to fill a crucial gap in the literature and follows Li's call (2007) to "examine constellations of power in particular times and places" (279).

4. Methods[1]

In their study, Nielsen and D'haen (2014) found that many articles on the human dimension of climate change lack a detailed engagement with the used methods. However, especially in interdisciplinary research, transparency on the methods is important to "make it at least possible for other disciplines to follow and in turn perhaps understand the research process, evaluate the results and possibly appropriate other types of insights" (Nielsen and D'haen 2014, 406). Taking this concern seriously, the following paragraphs aim at providing some insights into how the qualitative research in this project was conducted.

4.1 Methodological approach

I conducted a total of seven semi-structured qualitative interviews between March and April 2023. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to generate narrative data, uncover otherwise hard to observe effects and understand people's thoughts, words and feelings and how they construct meaning within their social context, while the semi-structured nature allows for flexibility and probing while providing a similar and comparable structure (Alshenqeeti 2014, 39-40).

The approach to interviewing taken here is inspired by the concept of *relational interviewing* developed by Lee Ann Fujii, which is based on three core core assumptions: a humanist ethos, reflexivity, and "the ethical treatment of all participants" (Fujii 2018, 1). In her own words:

> "Relational interviewing engages participants in two-way dialogue. These interactions are shaped by the particular context in which they occur as well as the interests, beliefs, and backgrounds that each party brings to the exchange. It is through these interactions that the data emerge. The value of these data lie not in their factual accuracy, but in what they convey about the speakers' worlds and how they experience, navigate, and

[1] A first draft of this chapter has been submitted in the course INTR5078 - Research Design Methods in International Relations (III): Qualitative Methods 2022/23 (Winter), Central European University, 2023.

> understand them. [...] Relational interviewing allows the researcher to peer inside these and other social arenas and to catch a glimpse of their inner workings." (Fujii 2018, xv).

The approach and hence this research are situated within the wider field of interpretivist scholarship, which since the 1990s moved "from defensive and marginal positions to a robust and thriving agenda that offers more contextual, reflexive, granular, and practice-oriented perspectives on contemporary phenomena in international politics" (Kurowska 2020, 94).

4.2 Selecting, accessing and interviewing participants

"One of the first steps in any interview project is deciding whom to interview" (Fujii 2018, 35). Given the focus on personal experience, the only real selection criteria participants had to fulfill was to have been to at least one COP in the last years as a non-state actor. While one might criticize these criteria to be very broad, it should be noted that the focus has never been generalizations but individual lived experiences and meaning making. Furthermore, this broad selection was instrumental in creating a wide pool of potential interviewees which is critical given potential access problems and the tight time frame and scope of this research project.

Access to potential research participants is often a key hurdle, especially when interviewing elites (Mikecz 2012). While there is no clear definition of what constitutes *elite* (Mikecz 2012, 485) and status being both fluid and context dependent (Fujii 2018, 20-22), it can be argued that non-state actors operating at the high level forum of a COP can be considered elites. Although (some) non-state actors might be easier to access than members of state delegations, I tried to lower the access barrier by utilizing personal and professional connections to find and be connected with people willing to be interviewed for this project. While the reliance on interlocutors and gatekeepers can be problematic and requires the build-up of a

trustful relationship (Clark 2010), the fact that existing and partly very close connections were utilized greatly reduced these trade-offs and eased the overall process.

After some initial contact, introduction to my research and agreement to participate, participants were sent an official information sheet and consent form which were developed following official CEU guidelines and pre-approved by my thesis supervisor, outlining key concepts such as the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews were conducted in English and based on a pre-developed interview guide (see Appendix). Inspiration for some of the questions was taken from Belfer et al. (2019). Interviews lasted between 27 and 62 minutes and were recorded and consequently transcribed.

With the exception of one highly experienced participant who has been to many COPs for a range of different organizations (Interviewee 4), interviewees were rather young and had all been to two different COPs. However, they did so in a diversity of roles, ranging from being (former) UN youth delegates for their respective countries (Interviewee 2; 5; and 6) and working for a major environmental NGO (Interviewee 4; and 7) to networking and participating in and organizing side events for their small NGOs or a larger research institute (Interviewee 1; 3; 5; and 6). In terms of geography, four participants were from Europe and three from the Americas/Caribbean. Importantly, in this research and the analysis, I did not consider the impact of factors such as gender, race, social class or ethnicity. I focused solely on individual experiences and conduct.

Besides one in-person interview, all were conducted via Zoom. The advantage lies in avoiding long and costly travels while having the ability to speak with people from different parts of the world (de Villiers, Farooq, and Molinari 2022). However, for relational interviewing this means new challenges (Fujii 2018, xvi), especially regarding the “reading” and controlling of visual cues such as body language or the work environment. Moreover, successful online interviews require both sides to possess adequate internet connection, soft- and hardware (de

Villiers, Farooq, and Molinari 2022). While certain trade-offs, as a certain reservation of people to open up in virtual settings, could not be ruled out, the fact that all research participants had ample experience and the technical and social skills for effective online communication, not least “thanks” to the Covid-19 pandemic, allowed for a smooth interviewing process.

4.3 Working relations and positionality

Instead of rapport, Fujii (2018) prefers to speak of ‘working relationships’. While these relations “are shaped by the interests, values, backgrounds, and beliefs that each brings to the exchange” (3) they are ideally characterized by “active listening, learning to speak the language of interviewees, seeing “mistakes” as gifts, and treating participants with dignity and respect” (3). Fortunately, in the course of the interviews, no major difficulties in establishing respectful, fruitful and professional relationships were encountered. All participants were very nice, open and seemed genuinely interested in the research and happy to contribute to it. The largely similar age and shared values might have greatly contributed to that and balanced naturally existing power relations.

In general, a researcher's positionality and (knowledge) background have an important impact on the research and data collection (Mikecz 2012, 483). Hence, reflecting on these factors is a core component of relational interviewing and interpretivist scholarship more broadly (Fujii 2014). Because space does unfortunately not allow for a detailed written reflection on all the many factors (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, wealth, language (Nielsen and D’haen 2014, 404)), some general notes must suffice. As a young researcher (24 years old), having been born, raised and educated in Western Europe, I of course bring with me a certain way to look at, think and speak about the world. This is relevant regardless of the fact that I would describe myself as overall open-minded, politically liberal and personally and professionally very interested in deep sustainability. Moreover, it might be important to

highlight that I have unfortunately never been to a COP, meaning that the project and data analysis lacks any sort of ethnographic component, which I tried to mediate through extensive background research and preparation. However, one might even argue that this "naiveté" gives participant's stories and meaning-making more space as it decreases own biases and expectations.

5. A governmentality reading of non-state actors' experiences at COP

Having mapped out existing academic literature on non-state actors at COP, governmentality as a theoretical framework, its application to non-state actors in climate governance and the methodology of this research, the following sections aim to showcase and discuss the actual findings of this research. Special attention is paid to how governmentality helps us understand how experiences and conduct are shaped by but also represent, (re)produce and potentially challenge wider dynamics and logics. The overall analysis is divided into six interconnected parts, starting with an analysis of the meaning of COP, its logic as the center of global climate governance, the conduct of preparations and strategy development and the importance of knowledge and experience in maneuvering this system. The final two sections look specifically at individual conduct in the form of personal interactions and dynamics of activism, control and theatrical conduct.

5.1 The meaning of COP

As a first step, the analysis of the experiences and conduct of non-state actors at COP, requires an understanding of the meaning they attribute to it. In other words, one needs to understand what this space offers, why non-state actors immerse themselves in it and, as Interviewee 4 said, "bleed" and "sweat" it. On a personal level, some described COP as a learning experience, allowing them insights into the wider dynamics of climate governance, the relation of different actors and the working, implications and usefulness of the international policy process (Interviewee 2; 3; 6; and 7). Interviewee 7 even exclaimed: "I've been to two COPs and they've both affected me in different ways and have shaped the way that I think about climate change."

On a more structural level, COP is an important place for conducting global climate governance, for stakeholders from all over the world to meet and drive global action. As such,

COP matters even when progress is lacking, too slow or not directly visible (Interviewee 2 and 7). As a former intern at a big ENGO put it: “I view it [COP] maybe as a tool and not a panacea” (Interviewee 7). In the words of a highly experienced COP participant:

> “The COPs are the only global space where governments come together to discuss how they are going to address climate change. And I believe that talking is better than not talking. So even if, if those talks don't result on anything at least the space is there for governments to come together and, and discuss that they're not going to do anything and sort of understand what the repercussions of that, of that is” (Interviewee 4).

In practice, this central space of global climate governance consists of what one participant calls, “two COPs” (Interviewee 3). In line with Campbell et al. (2014) and Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2017), it is a space for the official state negotiations but also for networking, knowledge exchange and awareness raising. While non-state actors are engaged in both of these spheres, individual experiences, perspectives and conduct are determined by the goals, capacities and roles of their organizations.

To exemplify this, two interviewees from large environmental NGOs (Interviewee 4; and 7) and an UN youth delegate (Interviewee 2) discussed their activities around the actual negotiations. One even called other parts of COP a “side circus” (Interviewee 4). At the same time, other interviewees explained that they did not even attempt to engage with the negotiations and global policy making. They echoed views in the literature (e.g. Rietig 2016) that doing so is hard or even impossible, not least because most decisions and positions have been agreed on beforehand. Interviewee 3 discussed how in their experience many negotiation sessions revolve around questions of formulation or commas in the final agreement, leading them to claim that “if you're not directly involved in the negotiations, the negotiations are honestly not something you want to go [...] because the things that they're discussing is not what people probably have in mind.”

However, in line with existing literature (Lövbrand, Hjerpe, and Linnér 2017) all participants highlighted the importance of COP for networking, coordination, knowledge

exchange and attention raising. For example, one participant described COP as a rare opportunity for various stakeholders, including government representatives, to learn about each other's work and demands (Interviewee 3). A view largely shared by other participants who describe COP as a place to raise awareness for certain topics, discuss them from different perspectives and especially as a place to bring various people and stakeholders from all over the world together at one specific time and place. Therefore, COP is, maybe most importantly, a space for meeting, networking, coordinating and building partnerships. As one participant put it:

> "So for me, I'll, even in my role as executive Director and leading a civil society organization, it was just more to see how best my, during my participation, I called how I can rally on different civil society organizations, members of government and other persons, like minded individuals in this space to see how best we can work together." (Interviewee 6)

Typically, networking and knowledge exchange often serve a specific purpose. For example, one participant explained how they specifically met with certain organizations they wanted to partner with for a specific project (Interviewee 1), while another participant highlighted their networking with other youth activists for professional reasons, "to get insight or information or collaborate to then achieve more progress on the topic itself" (Interviewee 2).

One maybe peculiar example of networking and cooperation which also shows how the experiences of non-state actors can differ, is the search for (corporate) funding. In fact, one participant expressed how there isn't any real willingness on the corporate side to actually finance local projects (Interviewee 1). In contrast, another participant proudly reported that they "were able to connect to persons, leading banks etc. to help fund and support our different programs" (Interviewee 6).

A unique feature of COP is that people come together physically. One interviewee mentioned how it is simply different to connect with other youth activists in person instead over

social media (Interviewee 2). Regarding both the networking and the actual negotiations, COP is a space where high-ranking politicians and decision makers who are otherwise hard access are more or less approachable. Non-state actors can approach them to ask something, hand over papers or even just take photos (Interviewee 4; and 5). One participant referred to "the famous huddle, where it's basically asking people that are there to come and talk to you physically to move themselves basically from where they are and, and just huddle literally, like make a bunch of people just discussing about the specific topic" (Interviewee 4).

However, it should not go unnoticed that not all participants shared the view of COP as a space for effective networking, coordination and knowledge exchange. In the context of their specific community level work, Interviewee 3 argued that other spaces and avenues for connection are more relevant, concluding that "for me personally, I would leave the COPs as a kind of negotiation space to invite activists to, to drive the pressure and the ambition. But I don't see the need for everything else that is involved so much myself."

Indeed, several other participants also highlighted the importance of COP as a space to drive more ambitious climate action and policies. Not least thanks to the huge media attention it attracts, COP provides opportunities to highlight the importance of climate change to the public, set and frame the agenda and hold states accountable (Interviewee 2; 5; and 6). However, one participant also raised the concern that this high, but timely limited (media) attention is also problematic, "because it should be a headline story every day, and not just during the [...] two week conferences, where the, the supposedly most powerful people of the world meet together to discuss it" (Interviewee 2). Even if just for a limited time, COP provides a space for different discursive constructions and framings of climate change to be created, coexist and compete (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2019). Interviewee 5 described it as a space for "shaking up" the discourse (Interviewee 5), for non-state actors to (discursively) challenge incumbent logics and techniques of governing the global climate.

What the summarized experiences show is that COP is neither just a space for state negotiations nor just a climate fair for networking and awareness raising, it is both at the same time and together more than the sum of its parts. It is a space for civil society to meet, discuss, see and hear each other but also to interact with states and their delegations. It is a space where non-state actors publicly showcase their will, conduct their roles in global climate governance and challenge dominant logics and techniques of governing the global climate. In fact, it is a space where even states with otherwise limited civic space, such as Saudi Arabia, cannot escape civil society and its scrutiny (Interviewee 4). For example, one participant shared that NGOs sometimes go to presentations where states showcase their often unsustainable political agendas "to hear them say something really dumb and you can then blast them for, online" (Interviewee 7). Indeed, an example of the power of some non-state actors to pressure states and their delegations through public shaming is the 'Fossil of the day' award, given by the Climate Action Network to countries doing the least or worst for climate action. An award which, as an intern at a big ENGO explained, is really painful for some countries (Interviewee 7). Arguably, non-state actors thereby directly challenge states' performance of responsible conduct and hence the wider logic of a state-centric and neo-liberal governance regime (Death 2011).

5.2 The logic of COP

Turning to the underlying logic and rationale of COP, the provided insights support the view that COP is first and foremost a nod in the wider field of global (climate) governance. Actors otherwise dispersed come together to produce governance through both the actual negotiations but also the coordination, networking and awareness raising. In other words, COP provides a unique view on the working of a dispersed and multi-layered climate governance regime which orchestration has been argued to represent logics of governmentality (Dryzek 2017; Jernnäs and Lövbrand 2022). Even more than providing a window into the working of

this system, it seems fair to argue that COP is an integral feature of this rationale of doing climate governance. It is the main international space where this form of governance is publicly conducted. Hence, one might argue that it is a logic in itself that climate governance is conducted this way exactly in this space. Once every year, thousands of stakeholders, from politicians to activists, policymakers, NGO workers and business representatives go to COP and engage in the negotiations, networking, coordination or use the media attention to raise awareness. Through this conduct, they reproduce the logic that it is exactly through this institution and procedures that the global climate is to be governed by exactly the present actors. As one participant remarked, these conferences and the larger system "keep themselves going more out of momentum than anything else" (Interviewee 3).

Within this system, there is no (need for a) central omnipotent authority actively controlling and administering this process. By engaging in all the discussed conduct, participants actively produce this orchestrated climate governance and govern themselves and their conduct. Indeed, this system and its logic are both pervasive and self-enforcing. While some interviewees mentioned that COP is and should not be the only opportunity to achieve global progress on climate change, with the exception of the above-cited Interviewee 3, nobody explicitly expressed the view to continue their work (solely) outside COP and its system. Rather the opposite, most seemed excited and eager to continue going to and working at COP. Nonetheless, this pervasiveness is not absolute, especially when COP fails to produce the necessary outcomes and one considers the huge emissions associated with the mega conferences and the questionable human rights situation in host countries like Egypt (Interviewee 1; 3; and 7). Not least based on these concerns, Interviewee 1 described their experience at COP27 in Egypt as "heartbreaking" and "an absurd show" which they would still be part of. While showing much respect for the attitude of some climate activists who see COP

as a “lost cause” one interviewee explicitly called for the preservation of the integrity of COP (Interviewee 7).

Importantly, governmentality reminds us that forms and structures of power and their rationalities are the product of historical developments and “constantly undergoing modification in the face of some newly identified problem or solution, while retaining certain styles of thought and technological preferences” (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006, 98). Indeed, the huge role non-state actors play at COP and their inclusion into its logic is a product of the changed reality and rationale of an increasingly less top-down climate regime and the bigger role of non-state actors in its governance (Bäckstrand et al. 2017). Non-state actors are not only objects to be acted upon but active subjects which (re)produce the system and its logic through their participation. Although one can debate to what extent non-state actors possess real agency to influence, critique and represent themselves and their ideas at COP, their presence and conduct has become part of the logic of this space and global climate governance more broadly. Indeed, state power is anything but total. One could even argue that states are also bound by the developing logic of COP as the space where global climate governance is supposed to be conducted in a certain way. This for example means that they have to expose themselves to civil society and its scrutiny. Even more, there might be something like an increasing logic of cooperation also pertinent to states. With their long experience at different organizations, Interviewee 4 expressed some optimism that although “COPs can't lift countries outside of their animosity” it might increasingly become a space “where countries can disagree on trade or human rights or whatever you call it, finance, but they can agree on, on climate,” a development they observed for example at COP26 in Glasgow.

5.3 Conduct of preparation and strategy

Adding to the logic of COP as the central nod of a dispersed climate governance regime, with all their experience in working for and at COP in various positions and for various organizations, Interviewee 4 highlighted that in their opinion, COP is not to be understood as a discrete space but as a process of preparations and work. They even speak of a "cycle". As one participant critically remarked: "Something you hear all the time at any COP, people are crazy about: What's going to happen next year? And I don't understand why they're not focusing on what's happening here and now. And you know, they're already preparing. There are many people come at COPs for setting their foot for next year" (Interviewee 1). What these observations showcase is most importantly, how the logic of COP as the specific place where climate governance is supposed to be conducted shapes the conduct of those involved in the system at, before and after COP.

As Interviewee 4 explained in detail, this accounts especially for non-state actors and organizations attempting to do meaningful policy work and influence the outcome of the conference. Dialogues often start already in January right after the last COP, for example with debriefing country negotiators on the actual meaning and local implications of the made decisions. However, also states and especially the host state act in accordance with this logic of cyclical preparations. Early on, they start their diplomatic activities to explore which topics will be relevant at the coming COP and which decisions it might bring. Importantly, large-scale developments such as the Paris agreement, whose governance structure was largely engineered by a group of NGOs and think tanks, often take years of work and planning. A procedure, which requires actors with respective large ambitions to think ahead years in advance and act very strategically (Interviewee 4).

Indeed, as one participant explained, the agency a group has at COP is ultimately a product of how well they design their strategy and use their capacities (Interviewee 4). Or, as one might argue, how well they adapt their conduct to the logics of the system. Preparing for COP is first and foremost a process of internal and external coordination. Including the setting of positions and goals, understanding which capacities a group has (e.g. technical analysis, diplomacy, public outreach) and ideally effective coalition building (Interviewee 4). Especially for big ENGOs, these preparations also entail mapping out the policy positions of states and other key actors to understand who can be partnered with and who might be indifferent or opposed (Interviewee 7). In other words, finding an answer to the question "Whom to Lobby" (Betzold 2014) is key for actually influencing the negotiations and their outcomes, because ultimately only states make and sign agreements. As Interviewee 4 put it: "you can influence what gets into the agreement by convincing somebody that has the power to put things into agreement that that's a good idea."

For a small number of big NGOs (e.g. Greenpeace) this preparation cycle also includes the discussion over and ultimately setting of landing zones or benchmarks for what COP should deliver (Interviewee 4). Especially thanks to the logic of COP as a space where global climate governance is publicly conducted, they can not only set the agenda but also create a form of discursive pressure on states to deliver certain results, a pressure that is both amplified and exercised through the media (Lück, Wozniak, and Wessler 2016). They pick up the comments and evaluations of major NGOs which in turn forces states and especially the host country (presidency) to engage with NGOs and their demands (Interviewee 4).

Although the above explanations mainly refer to the experience of participants working with bigger NGOs with respective ambitions, goals and capacities, Interviewee 4 underlined that setting a strategy knowledgeable of their own capacities and goals is also key for smaller non-state actors. As they put it in rather provocative terms, when "somebody cries, it's usually

because there's a lack of performance, or their people are overwhelmed or, you know, they just whatever it is that they're doing is way too big for them." For example, to amplify the message and provide the necessary attention for their events, smaller organizations could partner with bigger organizations which in turn benefit from a perceived increase in legitimacy from partnering with more niche actors. "But it's not very often that that happens because usually those organizations, small organizations are not either nonprofessional campaigning organizations, so they either lack the know-how or the overview of when this decision is going to be made. Who's the person that I need to go to like so, they need [...] a lot of support."

Importantly, even for actors who don't attempt to directly influence the negotiations, participating at COP requires time-consuming preparations, often starting with the accreditation and registration process and especially in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic detailed travel preparations (Interviewee 6; and 7). Moreover, participants who mainly went to COP for networking and partnership building explained that they invested time and effort into researching which organizations and representatives would be at COP at what time and partly pre-arrange meetings (Interviewee 1; and 3). While the actual organization of a side event requires lots of preparation work and often large financial resources and the necessary contacts (Interviewee 1), even just attending them often necessitates some research and planning effort. Given the large scale of COP and the enormous number of participants and events, Interviewee 6 specifically highlighted the importance of pre-registering for events to avoid long waiting times.

What the provided explanations clearly show is that attending COP, but especially any meaningful attempts to exercise a certain degree of influence, is a highly time- and resource-consuming process. The implications are far-reaching. First, the time and resources spent on these preparations cannot be spent on other projects or activities. While this might be less of a concern for big organizations or those specifically focused on COP and the policy process it

might prove problematic for small and community oriented groups. However, the fact that many of these organizations still go to COP and make the necessary "investments" only supports the above-raised idea of the pervasiveness of COP as the place where global climate governance is supposed to be conducted. Second, these structural hurdles systematically disadvantage or even exclude more marginal groups such as youth or indigenous people which either lack the necessary resources to effectively build a strategy or even attend at all (Thew 2018; Belfer et al. 2019). As a consequence, only a smaller number of highly professional NGOs and likely other groups such as businesses have the capacity to exercise meaningful agency at COP. A view, which echoes previously raised concerns that it is an integral feature of the system of climate governance that a small number of professionalized, institutionalized and somewhat disciplined NGOs are elevated as partners of the states while smaller and especially more radical groups are often left out (Ciplet 2015; Berny and Rootes 2018). In sum, the logic of COP that influence and agency require resource-intensive preparations and strategies excludes some actors from (meaningfully) participating while those participating adapt, one might argue self-govern, their own conduct accordingly.

5.4 Knowledge and experience

Apart from the necessary resources, the successful preparations for COP, the development of strategies and ultimately agency requires also the necessary knowledge and understanding of the dynamics at and around COP. However, this knowledge and understanding often have to be gained through personal experience. In contrast to a rather small group of experienced and knowledgeable insiders and organizations, this constitutes another hurdle for less institutionalized groups and especially first time participants who lack both the knowledge and suitable preparation structures. Indeed, most interviewees described their first

experience at and with COP as somewhat overwhelming and hectic while at their second participation most could use the gained experience to adapt their conduct accordingly.

The experience of a UN youth delegate (Interviewee 2) showcases some of these dynamics. They reported how their late election into this position gave them a mere six weeks to prepare for COP. As a full-time student and in the absence of a preparation program they had to develop their own initiative to collect information (e.g. articles and podcasts) and engage with their predecessor. In particular as it was their goal to directly understand and potentially shape the position of their country, they also tried to reach out to the ministry to understand and engage in discussions on their goals and strategies. However, in their experience the responsible ministry of their small European country lacked the capacity and experience but also motivation to set up such dialogues. Although some challenges remained, the preparation for their second COP started a lot earlier and was more structured, comprising the detailed following of the media on important topics and developments in other countries, the preparation and sharing of a document synthesizing important information and sources and the proactive outreach to the ministry and its diplomats.

An interesting question is to what extent non-state actors (un)consciously (re)produce this system which disadvantages new and less resourceful participants through gatekeeping these information and experiences. Indeed, as a UN youth representative explained:

> "I need to be proactive in not gatekeeping this information because it's super easy to fall into that trap of, you know, it's just my knowledge, my experience, that I've gained on my own. But that's the wrong way to look at it and think in that way my role is to enrich the movement, enrich other people, empower other people by using my knowledge and transferring it and communicating with others so they can also benefit and the movement as a whole can benefit from me having this." (Interviewee 2)

5.5 Conduct of personal interactions

As it has been highlighted before, a key feature and, one might argue, part of the very logic of COP is that it allows physical interactions between various people and stakeholders

otherwise dispersed or hard to access. However, the kind of people one can interact with is heavily dependent on access and personal connections. Access first of all refers quite literally to the parts of COP participants can access with their respective badges. A general distinction is to be made between two main areas. First, the actual negotiations take place in the UN administered *Blue Zone* where countries, agencies and other actor groups also present themselves and their work in so-called pavilions. Second, the *Green Zone* is administered by the host country and meant to provide a space for "events, exhibitions, workshops and talks to promote dialogue, awareness, education, and commitment on climate action" (UN n.d.). Not surprisingly, access to the blue zone allows much closer access to key actors, or at least country offices. Apart from this more general distinction, also personal connections determine access. For example, Interviewee 6 explained how their relation with a high-ranking UN official allowed them entry into VIP rooms where they were "able to engage with ministers and high profile diplomats" which in turn enabled further interactions as "they were constantly introducing me to different persons in different spaces, or that they worked with." Another participant reported how some meetings are more or less informal or open only to members of a certain group which requires participants to first of all learn about these meetings and then get access (Interviewee 3).

Also the hectic atmosphere at COP, as this global governance space, impacts conduct and interactions. One participant highlighted how messages had to be "condensed" and "snappy" as attention spans were often limited (Interviewee 5). Furthermore, meaningful interaction often necessitated participants to somehow step out of the space, for example for a chat over a coffee or even arrange a meeting after COP (Interviewee 3; and 5). One interviewee spoke about how their organization organized an event in a nearby hotel. Including a shuttle bus, the provision of food and seating in a circle, this separate set-up enabled better conversations and connections between the participants (Interviewee 5).

Regarding the actual interactions, most interviewees reported rather positive experiences. One participant shared, how they were able to indeed find a few good listeners who were open to discuss with them, which they experienced as "empowering in a very rational but emotionally good enough way" (Interviewee 1). However, it should not go unnoticed that such open interactions might not always be the norm. As one participant highlighted, most interactions are based on and shaped by the specific mission and targeted reasons with which both sides go to COP. While this might mean less openness to change, it is a prerequisite for successful working within a space as big and hectic as COP (Interviewee 3). Indeed, Interviewee 5 explained how convincing state or organization representatives to attend certain events their research organization had organized was often dependent on the clear communication of their relevance and stakes in the topic .

In fact, not all interactions are genuine exchanges but more theatrical. In line with findings by Belfer et al. (2014) on indigenous people at COP, Interviewee 7 explained how they experienced some interactions between youth and senior officials as a form of tokenization. In their words:

> "My impression was always that it feels like these ministers who do set up meetings with youth activists, they do it for a photo op or they do it because, ok, well, it's popular to consider that you have to tune by perspective and stuff, not necessarily because they're actually going to listen to what they say, but because it's more of like an opportunity to look good. And you can sense that easily, by the way, that youth is excluded from the more proper high level spaces"

Nonetheless, some participants reported that although it might take some courage, COP is indeed a space where non-state actors can also approach high-level actors such as ministers or EU commissioners (Interviewee 4; and 5). However, especially youth participants reported how they sometimes felt very small in certain interactions and the overall space (Interviewee 1; and 7). Arguably, successful interactions require a certain specific conduct which conforms with accepted logics of how climate change governance is to be talked about by a specific kind of people. To quote one interviewee:

> "There's only a certain type of a young person that is allowed fully and those are like the typical model UN like went to boarding school, I'm in a suit kind of person, that acts older than they are. If you're actually acting your age as a teenager or as a young adult, you will be perceived as someone with less experience, which is true. But you will be given less respect for it and I think that was a bit frustrating" (Interviewee 7).

In fact, the positive experience of a UN youth delegate (Interviewee 2) with members of their state delegation supports the argument that especially young non-state actors need to discipline and adapt their conduct to be included and taken seriously. "They were open to listening to me. They were open [...] to having me along. They didn't try to exclude [...] me from dialogues or activities. And with most of them, it was quite a casual, open, honest dialogue." However, as they explained, this close and meaningful interaction was enabled through the careful build-up of trustful personal relations and adapting to the daily routines and conduct of the other delegation members. It was through this skillful and adapted conduct that they were able "to influence them the most I can and get the most information as possible, then this is what I have to do and I made sure to set the norm myself before they could set the norm that I wouldn't participate. So that's one way that I worked around something that could have become a very opposite path dependent scenario."

Apart from such experiences which arguably require more than just the disciplining of conduct but rare personal qualities such as eloquence, some divide seems to exist between interactions of non-state actors with each other and with state representatives. For example, Interviewee 3 highlighted how at presentations, government representatives were very sought after and, as they called it, "at the receiving end of conversations." In line with other participants, they highlighted how interactions between non-state actors happen more on a "horizontal playing field. And so [...] there's less kind of like asking and answering or like, you know, giving and receiving kind of dynamic, and more just the sharing of knowledge, sharing of experiences." Other participants also spoke about a certain community feeling among NGO

representatives and especially youth activists bonding over shared experiences and values (Interviewee 2 and 7).

Overall, these experiences showcase how, not very surprisingly, the logic and structural dynamics at COP impact participants' conduct and their interactions. While the space encourages interactions, its hectic atmosphere inspired by the logic of being a global meeting and coordination space as well as the need to strategically approach these interactions might sometimes constrain an open dialogue among the various actors. Moreover, especially for deeper and productive interactions with states, non-state actors seem to need to act in a certain way. As such, the conduct of interactions as COP both reflects and sustains a system which advantages a certain group of non-state actors. Namely those who have the necessary access and connections to meet people, the necessary resources, for example to actually organize an event in a nearby hotel, the necessary knowledge of the working of COP and the consequent "appropriate" conduct to be taken seriously and be included.

5.6 Activism, control and theatrical conduct

As it has been highlighted before, not least thanks to the global (media) attention, COP is also an avenue for activism and protest, both in- and outside the actual conference venue (Interviewee 7). Through this activist conduct, non-state actors can arguably challenge and interrupt an otherwise fine-balanced orchestrated system of conduct and even some of its underlying logics. While one participant also described their participation in panel discussions as a form of activism (Interviewee 6) which is reasonable given their impact for exmaple in framing issues (Lovell and Schroeder 2012), Interviewee 7 reflected more on actual protests actions which can range from big protest marches organized and attended by many organizations to smaller actions inside the actual conference venue. To give an example:

> "So one thing that we did and I did with them was we disrupted a few meetings by chanting outside some meeting rooms, peacefully. And also we, we like painted eyes on our hands to be like we're watching, we're watching. And it was after the first draft of decision text where they had actually mentioned phasing down fossil fuels. And the whole, the whole point of the act was to, like, keep it in the text, whatever." (Interviewee 7)

Importantly, such disruptive forms of activism target not only states and the delegations, but also non-state actors, for example through a banner drop at a presentation which speaker and content some NGOs accused of greenwashing (Interviewee 7).

Given their disruptive character, activist conduct at COP is tightly controlled and disciplined. As Orr (2016) shows with a special focus on COP21 in Paris, security and rules of access are key tools of regulating civil society and its conduct. Boundaries and rules which clearly define the acceptable and tolerable range from general security checks to a prohibition of blocking hallways and hence the flow of people through the venue (Interviewee 4 and 7). At the same time, one activist described, how they would try to creatively bend the rules of the acceptable, negotiate with the UN security personnel and utilize the presence of popular individuals such as Greta Thunberg to legitimize their actions (Interviewee 7).

Despite this agency, activists and their conduct are subject to direct and indirect forms of control. Most importantly, participants are at risk of losing their entrance badges. "And if you get your badge taken away, you get access taken away, and then you get influence taken away. Unless you're powerful enough to use that, act as like: 'look what they did to me, guys. Boycott this is whatever'. But for most people, that's not the case" (Interviewee 7). Arguably, this threat and punishment is especially effective in controlling activist conduct as within the logic of COP as the central space of global climate governance, losing access means losing the very ability to participate in the conduct of global climate governance. Therefore, it can be expected that to avoid this, activists self-discipline their conduct to mostly conform with existing rules.

Interestingly, reputation is both a tool in the hands of activists and indirectly controls their conduct. On the one hand, it limits central power and its security apparatus as actions against people with "clout in those corridors" (Interviewee 7), such as Great Thunberg, would not be publicly accepted, a fact which activists can use to legitimize and "protect" their activities. On the other hand, the fact that activists also get their entry badges through accredited organizations or even state delegations disciplines their conduct. As one participant explained:

> "If you get sent to COP by, I don't know, a university or an organization like Greenpeace or Action Aid, very likely they'll talk to you and be like the typical talk you get pulled when you're wearing a uniform at work or in school. Like, when you're wearing this, you're representing us or you need to know that your actions will reflect on us. So I think everybody is a little bit limited in that sense of course" (Interviewee 7).

While this logic of indirect control is especially pervasive for participants with personal stakes such as the prospect for a job, participants affiliated with somewhat activism-oriented organizations, including big players like Greenpeace, typically have more freedom in their activities than those from state delegations (Interviewee 7). The experience of a UN youth delegate exemplifies this:

> "I had to be like, somewhat careful with what I would do. I think that's one, yeah, it was like one implicit rule that if, if for example there, if there would be like a loss and damage protest or so, like I could attend, but I would just have to make sure that my badge was invisible because at that point I was not representing the [country]" (Interviewee 5).

Apart from these experiences of activism and their control, for Death (2011) activists and protests act as a "Greek chorus, for the heroism, tragedy or farce of the official negotiations" (12) and are hence an important part of the political show of COP. In support of this argument, one interviewee explained how in their experience states sometimes explicitly cooperate with activist groups, for example to counter certain push backs in the negotiations (Interviewee 3). While Death (2011) focuses mainly on states as key actors of the theatrical performances of legitimacy and authority, this research suggests that within this system, non-state actors play a very active role. They are not just passive recipients of this conduct but active subjects acting

within and according to this logic. Especially for big ENGOs, COP is not only a stage to actively influence the negotiations and policy but also to garner global attention and arguably perform their own legitimacy and authority. One interviewee remarked that media attention is even an explicit goal for some groups (Interviewee 4). Even more, another interviewee mentioned that some groups aim for what they called a "classical Greenpeace action moment" (Interviewee 7) which showcases their activist roots and thereby, arguably, demonstrates their resolve and importance to other COP attendees, the wider public and especially their follower base.

While not a specific focus of this research, also businesses engage in what one might call theatrical conduct of sustainability, albeit with questionable success. One participant expressed disappointment over the Saudi sponsored innovation zone at COP27 which they saw as space for pushing corporate agendas instead of meaningful dialogue and action.

> "The majority of the events were very neo-liberal, even, I don't know, topics such as mental health and climate change were presented in such a corporate way with this shortcuts that kind of disconnect you from, you know, if you're talking about nature. Please don't bring me a white person that is hippie like barefoot, so telling me to breathe and whatever. I don't think there's a huge problem with that. Everyone is free to do whatever they want, but I would like more engagement from the people that do have a strong ancestral connection. Bring me an indigenous person and help me diversify, change my paradigm into regarding how I perceive the world and the actors that you know have a right to being such like events"(Interviewee 1).

6. Conclusion

Today, non-sate actors play important and varied roles in climate governance. They do so also and in particular at the yearly UNFCCC COP, where thousands of participants from states, civil society, businesses and the media meet to produce global climate governance. Based on seven semi-structured interviews with non-state actors who have been to at least two COPs and governmentality as a theoretical framework, this thesis project set out to research how non-state actors experience and maneuver this space.

As this research shows, governmentality allows unique analysis of (individual) conduct and experiences which go beyond being purely descriptive but offer insights into the working of systems of governance. It helps us uncover how individual conduct is shaped by wider process and logics of governance. Within these systems, conduct is not controlled through coercion but through governance of the self, according to the internalized logics of the system. However, non-state actors at COP are not only passive objects but active subjects which through their conduct (re)produce the system and its logics but also possess the agency to shape and challenge it.

From this research, the following key points stand out. COP is an opportunity to influence the official state negotiations but maybe even more importantly a learning experience, a space for physical meetings, interactions, networking, knowledge exchange, holding states accountable, agenda setting and awareness raising. Taken together, this conduct is both shaped by and reproduces the logic that COP is exactly the space, institution and process where all of this should happen and through which global climate governance is to be conducted and orchestrated. Even more, within this logic of doing global climate governance, influence, agency or generally meaningful participation requires long preparations, detailed strategies and the necessary knowledge and experience. While a smaller group of mostly bigger and

professional groups adapt their conduct accordingly, non-sate actors which lack the necessary resources and knowledge are disadvantaged or even excluded.

While a key feature of COP, physical interactions between participants are influenced by different degrees of access and favor participants with adapted "professional" forms of conduct and good connections. Moreover, in accordance with the logic of COP as a central, but hectic space of conducting climate governance, messages have to be concise, explicitly relevant and interactions are often driven by concrete missions.

Not least, COP is also a stage for the theatrical performances of authority and legitimacy for both states and non-sate actors. Activism is more than a Greek chorus for these performances. It can challenge the system and its logics. Although rules can be bended and renegotiated, activism is tightly controlled and regulated through both direct and indirect means. Apart from security and rules of access, non-state actors self-discipline their own conduct to avoid losing access and hence, in the logic of COP, the ability to participate in climate governance. Furthermore, participants discipline their individual conduct to avoid any negative reflection on the organization they (indirectly) represent.

In conclusion, this analysis and research show the intimate interplay of experiences and conduct and wider systemic logics and processes. By attending COP and through their conduct, non-sate actors are active subjects (re)producing the logic of conducting global climate governance through this institution and its processes. Their conduct and experiences are shaped and self-governed by these logics. However, non-sate actors at COP also possess agency to act and challenge.

I hope that the insights gained from this research contribute to a better understanding of COP as a peculiar space, process and institution of global climate governance *and* the experiences and conduct of non-sate actors within it. By doing so, this research hopefully not only adds to existing (academic) literature but also has some policy relevance for how to make

COP more open and inclusive for different non-state actors and their input. While attempting to answer how "COP could be changed to make that better" (Interviewee 3) goes beyond the scope of this project, the presented findings hopefully provide a foundation for the understanding of the intimate interplay of conduct and wider logics at COP and hence a starting point for any meaningful improvements.

Appendix

Interview Guide

Good morning/day/afternoon/evening

First of all, please let me again thank you so much for taking the time for this interview and for speaking with me. Please let me again briefly introduce myself and this research. My name is Marc Flessa, I am a graduate student of International Relations at the Central European University (CEU). In this master thesis project under the supervision of Prof. Erzsebet Strausz, I look at the UNFCCC Conference of the parties (COP) as sites of global climate governance and aim to research how the representatives of non-governmental organizations experience and maneuver this space. In other words, I am interested in your personal stories and accounts.

Thank you very much also for signing and sending back the consent form. I hope it was all clear? Please let me remind you that your participation in this research is absolutely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time up to two weeks after this interview and refuse to answer any question. The interview will be audio and video recorded and later transcribed and anonymized.

Do you have any questions, comments or concerns before we start?

Introductory Questions

Please let me start with a few introductory questions.

1. How did you get interested in the topic of climate change?
2. Which role and meaning do the COPs have in global climate governance and for you personally?
3. Which COPs have you been to and in which occupation?

Going to and being at COP

General Experience

4. How did you prepare for and before going to COP?
5. Why did you go to COP, what were your goals, what did you want to achieve?
6. What kind of activities did you engage in at COP?

Access and interactions

7. How did you interact with other participants and how did you experience these interactions? → Probe: Access to and power differences between different actors, also within non-state actors, especially towards state delegations
8. What kind of im- and explicit rules and barriers did you encounter at COP and how did they shape your activities and interactions?

Personal meaning making, agency and positionality

9. How did you experience your role and position vis-à-vis other actors and within this mega event and site of governance?
10. Do you feel like you could impact the agenda, negotiations and policy work? Did you feel you had any meaningful agency?

Conclusion

Towards the end I would love to ask you…

11. After your experiences at COP, how do you feel about your place in climate governance and climate action and what does your experience mean for your future work in the field?

Is there anything else you would like to mention or raise?

Thank you again so much for your input, it is truly of invaluable importance to my research. Once my thesis is ready and has been graded, I will be very happy to share it with you.

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