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YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: SUBVERSION OR CONFINED TO THE EXISTING ORDER?**

Abstract. *The article addresses different forms of youth environmental activism, starting from the phenomenon of the ambivalent position held by young people in environmental activism where on one hand they stand up for structural and radical change and, on the other, they cooperate with the authorities or at least make demands of them, thereby giving them legitimacy. The paper focuses on the relationship of young resisting subjectivities towards power and their interplay with strategies and practices and power mechanisms in the field of environmental regulation. The paper addresses various forms of youth environmental activism, especially looking at young dissenting subjectivities' relationship to power and their intertwining with governing strategies and practices in the environmental field. Focus is given to the ways in which young activists are implicated in, constituted within, and respond to power relations and the exercise of governing, particularly when it comes to environmental issues. It draws on the Foucauldian approach of eco-governmentality and the analytical concept of counter-conduct as an analytical concept to examine how young activists address, co-constitute and potentially subvert or undermine power structures. Using this approach, we reflect on the diversity of agency found in youth activism, which includes an examination of the different forms, actions, strategies and practices associated with this activism.*
Keywords: *youth, environmental activism, political ecology, eco-governmentality, counter-conduct.*

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INTRODUCTION

The climate strike held in Ljubljana and Maribor on 3 March 2023 was, at least in the Slovenian context, one of the most important events to be organised by young environmental activists. Mainly coordinated by the civil society collective *Mladi za podnebno pravičnost* (Youth for Climate Justice) with the support of other organisations, groups and individuals, the protest was arranged under the central motto "Countless promises, still unfulfilled!". The young people issued an official statement regarding the purpose of the rally, expressing that they wanted to send a clear message to the government that it should "abandon its lip service and passivity" (Mladi za podnebno pravičnost 2023) with respect to environmental issues. During the rally, the younger generation also voiced its opinions and made them visible on banners carrying messages such as "Change the climate system" and "Reduce emissions, burn capitalism". With slogans like these and the official statement issued by the organisers, the demands and political views of the demonstrators were made clear.

On one hand, the slogans and posters were expressing radical demands for systemic changes to be made to the economy and the political system. On the other hand, young people were addressing governments and corporations directly and calling on them to act, thereby recognising and to some extent legitimising their authority. This binarism reflects the different attitudes and orientations held by young people with regard to their environmental actions. While the seemingly contradictory positions of young people might be attributed to their inconsistency and confusion, this article takes these conflicting stances and attitudes *in stricto sensu* (see Marquardt 2020). The radically different positions and perspectives of young people *vis-à-vis* the political authorities and other actors suggest that young people have no single position on tackling environmental problems and instead recognise and use a variety of ways to deal with and address those problems. These include identifying the causes and actors responsible for climate change and environmental issues and utilising different discourses and practices to initiate and bring about change. As a starting point, we claim that the simultaneous duality evident in young people's environmental activism questions and challenges traditional binaries like power–resistance or power–freedom (Death 2010, 235). As we may observe from the young activists' written statements and demands, there is a complex interplay at work between advocating systemic change and co-operating with existing structures of power and authority. This duality therefore goes beyond the conventional either/or and can instead be seen as the coexistence of both or even multiple elements (see Death 2010; Marquardt 2020).

The article examines the various forms of youth environmental activism, concentrating on its relationship to power and its intertwining with government strategies and practices in the environmental field. It focuses on the ways in which young activists are implicated in, constituted within, and respond to power relations and the exercise of governing, especially when it comes to

environmental issues. In particular, we focus on understanding the potential for subversive action within these dynamics. How do young activists position and situate themselves within the power structures they seek to challenge? What do their actions say about the nature of power itself and the possibility of resistance and change?

We approach the central theme from the field of political ecology, which is broadly concerned with the question of power dynamics and the exercise of power on the structural as well as micro levels, including the relationships between political, broader social and economic forces and factors in the human society–(natural) environment relationship (Perreault, Bridge, and McCarthy 2015; Robbins 2019). More concretely, the article draws on the Foucauldian approach of green or eco-governmentality (Luke 1995b; Rutherford 2007) and the analytical concept of counter-conduct (Davidson 2011; Death 2010; Pyykkönen 2015; Rossdale and Stierl 2016), which provide a framework for understanding and reflecting on the relationship between contemporary modes of power and resistance practices in the environmental activism context (Arifi and Winkel 2021).

Eco-governmentality as a concept and an approach has been developed and conceptualised by critical scholars (Agrawal 2005a; Luke 1995b; Rutherford 2007) within the framework of political ecology and is rooted in Michel Foucault's (2009; 2008; see also Gane 2008) notion of governmentality. Although there are many different understandings and interpretations of it (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011; Elden 2007; Lemke 2002), for us the crucial aspect is that it is an analytical approach enabling an insight into the complex processes through which power is co-constituted by individuals and collectivities, and focuses on the interplay between power and the self – how power shapes individual and collective subjectivities through various technologies, practices and techniques (Lorenzini 2023). Eco-governmentality places emphasis on the question of how governing is also produced, achieved and enacted through concern for the lives and well-being of populations and relative to the natural environment.

At the same time, it was important for Foucault (1982) to acknowledge that power is not omnipotent in its operation, but that there are always resistances, which he sought to address and make sense of (Foucault 1980; 1982). A key concept in this context is counter-conduct, which Foucault proposed in order to "understand subjects' inventive, but always invigilated, practices" (Odysseos, Death, and Malmvig 2016, 153) of revolting against being governed and addressing in what way to be governed. In this regard, Davidson (2011, 27) highlights that Foucault's claim is that resistance "is not in a position of exteriority with respect to power, and that points of resistance do not answer to a set of principles heterogenous to relations of power". The concept of counter-conduct is relevant because it opens up space for reflecting on environmental activism, including youth activism, as a specific set of practices that not only or necessarily oppose existing power structures, but engage with them in different ways.

The article is organised as follows. After the introduction, we provide a historical contextualisation of the emergence of environmental activism, considering the role of young people in various socio-political processes. We start from the idea that a historical perspective is essential for understanding the development of contemporary activism and the circumstances that enable different actions. In the third part of the article, we set out the theoretical framework based on political ecology to analyse the nexus between power, authority and environmental activism. We draw on eco-governmentality and Michel Foucault's concept of counter-conduct as an analytical framework to examine how young activists engage with, co-constitute and potentially subvert power structures. In the fourth section, we use the developed analytical approach to reflect on the diversity of forms of agency in youth environmental activism, which includes an examination of the different forms, actions, strategies and practices. Finally, we summarise the main findings and underscore ways in which youth environmental activism can be addressed as a dynamic and influential heterogeneous force that can continuously engage with and change the existing configurations of power.

THE EVOLUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS AND FORMS OF ACTIVISM: CONTINUITIES, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH

Contemporary forms and practices of youth environmental activism are often described in academic literature as new and unprecedented, with the youth activist movement Fridays for the Future and its central representative, Greta Thunberg, identified as their starting point (see, for instance, Skovdal and Benwell 2021). Such interpretations, which look for a specific, clearly defined origin of contemporary environmental activism, potentially lead to an uncritical and uniformed view of young people's engagements. As Neas, Ward and Bowman (2022, 2) critically observe, we need to think about youth activism as "much more heterogeneous in its nature" and "more expansive in its vision". For a more holistic and complex understanding of young people's environmental actions, it is necessary to reflect at least briefly on the historical constellations and evolution of the knowledge, principles and ways of managing issues related to the idea of environment along with the environmental ideal and forms of activism (Borowy and Schmelzer 2017). Further, this calls for a reflection on the development of environmentalism with respect to its different currents, the knowledge frameworks that formed its justification, the interests and causes that influenced environmentalist practices, the broader social and political context, and the embeddedness of environmental organisations and movements in power relations and the exercise of power (Sörlin and Warde 2009).

Environmental movements and forms of activism do not have a single, conclusive and overarching history. Nehring (2009) thus suggests speaking of genealogies of environmental activisms and movements in order to highlight the

multidirectional historical flows that contain regional, national and local specificities (see, for instance, Toplak 2023) and dimensions and are simultaneously influenced by broader socio-political factors. In this context, McCormick (1991, 4) notes, for example, that early environmental activism in Britain was linked to the anti-slavery movement and the struggle against the inhumane treatment of all living beings. Moreover, at the end of the 19th century, civil society organisations began to point to problems relating to public health and stress the need to provide clean water and adequate sanitation. At the same time, early efforts to preserve and protect the environment were primarily aimed at protecting agricultural land from over-exploitation (McCormick 1991).

Notwithstanding the historical complexities just mentioned, according to some scholars (Heidenblad 2021; Rucht 1989) the development of environmental activism has undergone three periods: conservationism, environmentalism and ecologism. While somewhat reasonable as a division, Rootes (2004, 612) states that such periodisations are simplistic and lead to universal historical sequences of the development of environmental activism as a specific socio-political phenomenon.

Following from the above, it may be argued that recognising different genealogies in terms of the heterogeneity of the historical origins and flows of environmental activism and movements, and in turn avoiding the simplistic periodisation, allows us to understand contemporary movements and activist practices in a wide range of earlier and predecessor struggles and campaigns. In this way, the complexity and multi-layered nature of current environmental struggles, including those in which young people play a key role, can be brought to the fore.

Against this background, the following discussion of the historical contexts of youth environmental activism does not aim to be comprehensive, but focuses instead selectively on certain key moments, dimensions and processes of environmental participation and activism, including the role played by young people. In so doing, we aim to draw attention to the changing nature and evolving dynamics of young people's environmental struggles and the broad range of issues they have raised, articulated and publicly addressed.

The 1960s were crucial for contemporary environmental activism, with the emergence of important movements and the intensification of engagement in a range of relevant socio-political issues. Kaijser and Larsson Heidenblad (2018) stress the importance of the events and socio-political circumstances of the time in contributing to the articulation of the 'ecological turn'. In this regard, the rise of the New Left and the student revolts are notable since, among other things, as they were crucial in opening up the critique of consumerism and capitalism, the feminist critique of gender inequalities, and, in conjunction with this, the critique of environmental degradation and over-exploitation of resources. Woodhouse (2009) argues that students on campuses and in universities on both sides of the Atlantic played an important role in raising awareness of environmental issues and establishing a more activist ethos. However, it was not until the late

1960s that the student movement fully embraced and articulated environmental issues, often from a radical perspective and stance as the "the New Left's anarchist, or at least anarchistic, ideology would set the terms for its particular brand of environmentalism" (Woodhouse 2009, 61).

Alongside the student rebellions, an important aspect of this period is the emergence of the counterculture movement, which also had a significant transformative impact on environmentalism (Kirk 2007). As Gottlieb (2005, 105) clearly explains, "the counterculture, together with the New Left, served as a link to a new environmental politics in which the question of nature could no longer be separated from the question of society itself". Out of this broad movement, in conjunction with the peace movements, came, among others, the organisation Greenpeace (Zelko 2013).

During this time, another important movement – Friends of the Earth – entered the spotlight. In this movement, young people looked for ways to address and talk about the environmental issues of importance for them. But both Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have transformed profoundly by increasing their networks and reach, while their actions and tactics have simultaneously changed from radical to more moderate approaches (Rootes 2004). This shift reflects the particular dynamics of environmental activism, which is constantly adapting its strategies and "repertoires of contention" (Tilly 1992; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) to address changing environmental challenges.

Although we have mostly focused on the United States context thus far, it is worth recalling that the 1960s and 1970s were also critical for environmental activism in various European countries and regions. In Scandinavia, for example, environmental movements emerged at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s that were characterised by the multi-level nature of their activities (Lundberg and Larsson Heidenblad 2023), meaning that they were a mixture of local, national and transnational initiatives. These movements were not isolated from each other, but intertwined, with young people playing an important role and being actively involved. Through their engagement they were not only concerned with local environmental issues, but also involved in broader, cross-border dialogue on environmental responsibility and sustainability (Lundberg and Larsson Heidenblad 2023, 233).

The 1980s saw the parallel development of environmental activism in Germany, which took shape mainly in the context of the anti-nuclear movement (Maylath-Bryant 2023). This period was one of the key points in the forming of broader awareness of the problem of the use of nuclear technologies, as partly reflected in the fact that the anti-nuclear movement was present not only in Germany, but in France as well (Nelkin and Pollak 1980; Tompkins 2016). By no means, however, did the anti-nuclear ethos constitute the only framework for the formation of environmental activism in the 1980s. Gliński (1994), for example, shows that young people in Poland adopted an activist stance and were concerned with environmental issues. Activist youth movements in the then socialist

socio-political orders were not mere copies of their Western counterparts, but developed given the specific features of these contexts (Mushaben 1983).

Another example of such adaptations is the rise of the environmental justice movement in the United States. Murdock (2020, 13) states that "what qualifies as environmental injustice is a broad and diverse set of issues" and that this movement was characterised by the heterogeneous origins of both its knowledge frameworks and the ways it was put into practice. Despite such diversity, a core issue to which the movement responded in locally specific ways was the issue of environmental injustice faced by black and other marginalised communities. In this respect, the movement has made an important contribution to linking certain environmental problems to broader socio-political injustices including those related to Black communities and other marginalised groups (Purdy 2018). In addition, gender has emerged as a vital element in environmental discourse.

Another important movement that brought earlier currents of environmental activism together is ecofeminism. MacCanty (2014) and Mertus (2010) both describe how this movement was not limited to Europe and had a great influence around the world, including in countries such as India. Yet, in terms of youth participation, it should be noted that ecofeminism represents the meeting point of feminist thinking and environmental activism and is often associated with feminist youth movements. As such, it articulates the inherent complexity of environmental activism at the intersection of gender, age and ecological issues.

As stated above, and as Rootes (2004) argued, the historical development of environmental movements and activists since the 1960s has been denoted by both continuity and discontinuity. Despite the continuity of environmental campaigns and activisms, the nature and strategies of these campaigns changed significantly in the 1990s and early 2000s. New struggles emerged that in some respects were more radical than those of the previous decade, and there was greater internationalisation.

A look at the historical trends, concrete practices and knowledge contexts of environmental movements and activism reveals several key findings. First, the political and social action of young people has been inextricably linked to the development of contemporary environmental activism. Their role has varied. At certain moments, for example in the late 1960s, they were a key driving force, while in other contexts young people have taken on a more passive role. It is nonetheless important to recognise that young people have historically been a relevant collective subjectivity. In this respect, Walker and Bowman (Walker and Bowman 2022) similarly stress the importance of acknowledging the "historical roots, tensions and complexities" of youth environmentalism. Taking this into account permits a better understanding of the transformations that environmental movements and activisms have undergone.

Second, environmental movements and activism under the initiative or with the support of young people have always been part of wider social and political constellations. Environmental issues have never existed in a vacuum separate

from other socio-political issues. In dealing with environmental matters, youth activists have always been concerned with a range of directly or indirectly related issues, including critiques of war, of the capitalist order, of gender equality, and of the rights of marginalised groups.

Third, the repertoires, practices and techniques of young environmental activists have changed from time to time. Radical as well as more moderate forms of activism have emerged, with notions of what is radical and what is not being shaped in part by the media, knowledge frameworks, various expert institutions etc. In last two decades, as Rootes (2004) highlights, a growing trend towards mass movements and organisations working with governments, economic actors or corporations, reflecting the further strategic diversification of environmental activism.

Given the historical reflection provided above, it makes sense to reflect further on the heterogeneity of young dissenting subjectivities. It is precisely the highlighted nuanced nature of activist practices, encompassing both more collaborative and more oppositional or confrontational practices vis-à-vis authorities, that calls for a theorisation that allows us to think about this multiplicity.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY, (ECO-)GOVERNMENTALITY AND COUNTER-CONDUCT: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand and make sense of contemporary forms of youth environmental activism in a more comprehensive way, it is necessary to consider them with regard to power relations and structures, which are always a condition of possibility and constitutive for various activist norms, values, conduct and actions. In this context, Lilja and Vinthagen (2014, 111) claim that activism is always a response "to power relations in different ways, from obedience to subversion". The point is that the actions of activists cannot be seen as the unified engagement of individuals and collectives, but as a multiplicity of ways in which they are implicated in power relations. In and through environmental activism, this interaction with power structures is continuous, whether in the form of global movements, local initiatives or individual acts of resistance.

These relationships – and we deliberately use the plural – between environmental activism and the exercise of power by various authorities is a multifaceted topic linked to the broader question of the relationship between nature, society, and political action. It is this very relationship that is a central question which political science (Vodovnik 2022) and specifically political ecology has been addressing and dealing with since its beginnings. As Robbins (2004, 12) puts it, "[the] many understandings of political ecology together seem to describe: empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of power relations". By explicitly addressing the question of power, the functioning of subjectivities embedded in power relations and socio-political constellations, political ecology enables the theorisation of environmental activism in its

varied forms, addressing both the underlying rationalities of activisms and the concrete practices via and with which activists engage.

Political Ecology

Throughout its development, political ecology has always been closely linked to practical action or *praxis* (Loftus 2015). There has always been a productive relationship between theoretical work within political ecology and on-the-ground environmental commitments and engagements. While Heynen and Van Sant (2015) stress the importance of the exchange between academic production and activists' strategies in addressing environmental problems, it is crucial to note that political ecology is not a unified and monolithic field of knowledge. It encompasses a range of approaches and methodologies that focus in different ways on uncovering power dynamics related to human interaction with nature. Scholars working on the history of political ecology point out that the field itself is characterised by constant shifts in focus, and are determined by their geographical situatedness (Loftus 2019), epistemological and ontological starting points and orientations (Tetreault 2017).

The early phase of political ecology was thus characterised by a structuralist approach that has important sources in political economy and was strongly influenced by Marxist theories: "the first generation of political ecology was heavily influenced by the Marxist principles of dependency theory/world system theory" (Roberts 2020). In the next decades, the burgeoning literature within political ecology brought various debates through which a post-structuralist approach to understanding the nature–society relationship has gained ground. One of the more relevant authors, Escobar (1996; 1999), highlighted a 'non-essentialist' perspective that has also addressed the epistemology of this relationship. As a key contributor to postcolonial studies and the Latin American modality of the critique of modernity, he has contributed to green political thought and forms of environmental activism. In this sense, he identified political economy and ecology as modern frameworks of knowledge and stressed "the connection between the making and evolution of nature and the making and evolution of the discourses and practices through which nature is historically produced and known" (Escobar 1996, 325–26). Escobar's critique challenges traditional, static notions of nature and in turn calls for a re-evaluation of how we conceptualise and engage with the natural world (Lövbrand and Stripple 2013).

The background and one of the cornerstones for such non-essentialist approaches within political ecology is, among others, Michel Foucault's thought, particularly his reflections on the exercise and functioning of power (Nustad and Swanson 2022). His explicit concern was to rethink how to address power in a non-essentialist way and thus claimed that power emerges from myriad sources and is constituted within and through the interaction of various discursive and non-discursive elements (Foucault 1982; 1986; Collier 2009). In outlining the influence and application of Michel Foucault's ideas in political ecology, Valdivia

(2015b, 467–68) points out that Foucault, with his analytical approaches to understanding the workings of power and the role of discourse in creating reality, forms the essence of specific arguments within political ecology that "environmental truths are not ahistorical, but are produced in a variety of places and by a variety of actors, and that different social groups have the potential to act politically" (Valdivia 2015b, 478).

(Eco-)Governmentality and Counter-Conduct

One of Foucault's central analytical concepts that has gained relevance in the political ecology framework is governmentality. Perhaps the key background to this is that the 1990s saw the intensification of the scientific criticism of technological and international institutional solutions to climate and environmental problems (Death 2013). Luke (1995b; 1999) is one of the first scholars within political ecology to use the term environmentality, merging the terms environment and governmentality to emphasise how nature, understood as a passive, controllable and manageable environment, had come under the domination of capital and the capitalist state. In these processes of control and domination, non-governmental organisations such as the WorldWatch Institute are often complicit as they are among the actors collaborating and interconnected in the exploitation and domination of nature and people (Luke 1995a, 58–9; Death 2013). As Death (2013, 79) notes, Luke's understanding of governmentality is very specific as he adopts the understanding of power as centralised and repressive from the post-Marxist tradition. This is problematic from a Foucauldian perspective because Foucault (2003; see also Dean 2010) wanted to contribute, also via the concept of governmentality, to a different articulation of power as decentralised, diffused and not always negative, but positive in the sense of the production of specific subjectivities and their agency, as well as their behaviour. It is in this sense that some authors (Goldman 2001; Agrawal 2005a; Rutherford 2007; see also Pušnik 2023, 127; Pušnik and Banjac 2022) also used the concept to address the ways in which power is exercised in environmental and climate governance. Rutherford (2007), for example, speaks of green governmentality and Goldman (2001) of eco-governmentality. Agrawal (2005b) also made an important contribution in this area by adopting the concept of environmentality.

Central to their research is an understanding of governmentality as both a specific modality of power and an analytical framework. While scholars like Gordon (1991) and Dean (2010) made extensive and systematic contributions to the interpretation of governmentality, here we only highlight Foucault's underlying conceptual background. Crucially, Foucault saw power relations as intricately intertwined with systems of knowledge. These knowledge systems both maintain and are maintained by the exercise of power. In this mutually reinforcing relationship, knowledge becomes a crucial terrain in which power operates (Oels, 2006). Moreover, in his lectures given at the Collège de France in 1977–78, Foucault provided insight into the 'how' of government: "both how governing

happens and how it is thought" (Sokhi-Bulley 2014). In this sense, the government is "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population" (Foucault 2009, 108).

With governmentality, Foucault addressed power on different levels. Thus, while the governmentality approach stresses and focuses on the macro level of the exercise of power that targets the population, it also recognises discipline as one of the modalities or aspects and areas of government through which individual subjectivities and their bodies and behaviour are targeted, controlled and manipulated through "meticulous, often minute techniques" (Foucault 1995, 139). Government is therefore not just about political structures, laws and the way in which the state and its institutions are administered but is also multiple ways "in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed […]. To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 2001, 326).

Based on these considerations and an underlying notion of power, the art of governing is addressed as a complex endeavour that operates through intricate assemblages. It is these assemblages that produce the governable subjectivities and normalise social behaviour. Adopting this analytical perspective provides a range of possibilities for analysing specific manifestations of power within the constellation of various actors in the field of environmental protection. Rose (1996) argues, for example, that modern studies of governmentality stress the importance of self-governance in the contemporary socio-political landscape. Neoliberal, progressive-liberal and neosocial societies are witnessing the rise of these subtle mechanisms that target subjectivities, subject positions including complaints, critiques and acts of mobilisation (Baumgarten and Ullrich 2016). The eco-vernmentality approach (Rutherford 2007; Valdivia 2015a), or as Dean (2010) calls it, the analytics of power, thus simultaneously provides a macro view of the socio-political structures in which environmental activists and movements operate and also opens up the possibility of thinking about other questions related to the functioning of the movements and activists (Baumgarten and Ullrich 2016). As we have already pointed out, activism is always related to the exercise of power, knowledge and ideas on how to understand nature and how to regulate environmental issues. In this context, activism may be seen as contributing to visions, structuring knowledge and expertise about the environment when it approaches a range of authorities on different levels with demands or engages with them in environmental governance (Fletcher 2017).

Although Foucault's concept of governmentality emphasises how the actions and behaviour of individuals – including activists – are directed by a variety of practices, techniques and strategies, he also reflected on the possibility of subversive or resisting practices challenging the order and the hegemonic exercise of power. Foucault did not accept the idea that resistance is always in opposition to power. Just as he saw power as highly complex, with multiple, multidirectional

and multidimensional actions and agencies involved, he rejected the idea of resistance as a monolithic force that merely opposes power. For Foucault (2009, 355), resistance is "coextensive and absolutely contemporaneous" with power; resistance exists in the strategic field of power relations and power relations themselves exist only relative to a multiplicity of points of resistance (Foucault 1978, 95–6).

While Foucault does address resistance, he sees a problem with the term because it implies that it is "the other side", an opposite of power. Therefore, in the lecture series Security, Territory, Population, he rethinks the problem of resistance (Foucault 2009; Lorenzini 2016). After considering and rejecting terms such as resistance, dissidence, revolt, insubordination and disobedience, Foucault settled on the term "counter-conduct". He chose this term since it allows him to emphasise the active sense of the word "conduct" (Foucault 2009, 201). The essence of counter-conduct lies in the struggle to assert and achieve an alternative form of conduct that permits individuals to be conducted (or to conduct themselves) differently (Death 2010). Consequently, counter-conduct always implies, on the one hand, a (state) mechanism of power that tries to impose a certain form of behaviour on a group of individuals (which becomes the target of resistance and struggle) and, on the other hand, a refusal expressed by individuals who can no longer accept being led in this way and who try to behave differently (Davidson 2011). It is thus clear that Foucault introduced the concept of counter-conduct with the aim of giving resistance a "positive", "productive" meaning, rather than a purely "negative" or "reactive" one. He was always careful to avoid misunderstandings on this point; for example, Foucault explicitly claims: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather as a consequence, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. […] [The] existence [of power relations] depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of opponent, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the network of power" (Foucault 1978, 95).

YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: A LIMINAL SPACES AND THE PRACTICES OF ENGAGEMENT AND RESISTANCE

As we have repeatedly shown so far, young people are involved in a variety of environmental engagements, from symbolic acts to protests as a form of political mobilisation. This reveals that not all forms of climate change and environmental activism are equal and based on uniform strategies and goals (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018; Partridge 2020). This means there are different ways in which youth challenge the existing order and power relations but at the same time also constitute, legitimise and support certain narratives and practices that perpetuate hegemonic climate change and environmental narratives, along with the dominant approaches to addressing climate issues and resolving environmental problems (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018).

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in 2009, the 'Copenhagen Summit', for example, mobilised activists who took up the discourse on the "now or never" opportunity to combat climate change (de Moor et al. 2021). However, this engagement was followed by a widespread sense of failure, leading to demobilisation (de Moor and Wahlström 2019). Despite the recurring sense of failure, young people at summits such as Copenhagen (2009) or Dubai (2023) are entering into dialogue with established institutions and interest groups already recognised as 'relevant'. By participating in established political order, and involving themselves in the institutions and decision-making processes, young people obtained the opportunity to engage and interact with "technical, entrepreneurial and political elites" (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018).

Concretely and related to this, for example, youth representatives play a role in the COPs through various forms of engagement and lobbying and strive to establish themselves, their voices, and, thereby, their agency within the power structures of global climate governance. They participate in the COP sessions as delegates from non-governmental organisations, as members of national delegations and through youth-led groups such as YOUNGO, the official youth representation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC 2023). The representatives use the platform to "make official statements, provide technical and policy inputs to the negotiations and engage with decision-makers at UN climate change conferences, and promote youth participation in climate change projects at local and national levels" (UNFCC 2023).

Cooperation and networking in such a substantive and formalised form lead to the establishing of a specific form of governance that presupposes and realises the cooperation of a series of different actors, including those from the public and private sectors, and civil society. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) notes that the participation of a series of actors in political processes "is today presented as a new paradigm of social regulation that has come to supplant the previously established paradigm based on social conflict and on the privileged role of the sovereign state to regulate this conflict through the power of control and coercion at its disposal" (Santos 2009, 46). O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (2018) interpret this form of youth activism as "dutiful dissent", a type of activism characterised by cooperation but simultaneously time includes criticism of the currently dominant norms, practices, solutions and aims. From an eco-governmentality perspective, the relationship between young activists and their engagement with the existing power structures can hence be understood as part of the broader exercise of power. As Fletcher (2017) shows, governmentality in the field of climate change and environmental issues encompasses various mechanisms aimed at shaping attitudes to nature and the environment. This governance modality seeks to influence the actions of environmental movements and activists by focusing on and examining how they position themselves on environmental issues, adapt, interact with authorities, and also develop and implement strategies of critique and opposition.

This liminal and ambivalent position of young activists, in which on one hand they criticise and condemn those in power, but on the other demand action from them and thereby acknowledge their legitimacy, is also stressed among Pickard's (2022, 735–36) insights into Greta Thunberg's narrative. On 8 September 2018, shortly after initiating her first school strike, Thunberg challenged political parties that were claiming to be addressing the climate crisis, stating, "To all political parties that pretend to take the climate question seriously. […] the future of all future generations rests on your shoulders" (Thunberg in Pickard 2022, 735–36). Then, just over 1 year later, on 23 September 2019, at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York, she confronted the decision-makers present: "For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look the other way and come here and say you're doing enough, when the policies and the solutions that are needed are still nowhere in sight" (Thunberg 2019).

Similar to what can be seen in Greta Thunberg's liminal discourse, which moves between being critical of the authorities on one side and accepting their authority on the other, de Moore et al. (2021) highlight the position of the entire Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion movements. They point out that before the emergence of larger and more visible movements, a Do-It-Yourself approach could be observed among youth (Pickard 2022), but afterwards the movements "returned to the state". In this context, they had concrete demands for decision-makers chiefly on the state, but also other levels. Extinction Rebellion's demands, for example, called on governments to "tell the truth, act immediately and set up citizens' assemblies". Similarly, the Fridays for Future movement has demanded that politicians "listen to the science" and "implement the agreements reached" and argued that this is a form of putting "pressure on policymaker" (2024), namely, an important goal of the movement.

From the perspective of eco-governmentality, the demands of concerning the institutions young people perceive as holding power are inherent in their individual and collective subjectivities within environmental governance arrangements on different levels of political decision-making. Still, the cooperative attitude of some young activists should not be confused with simple submission. As O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (2018) explain, while young individuals engaged in dutiful dissent may seem to be unreluctantly cooperating, they are committed to change through the recognised importance and potential of seizing opportunities within the existing structures and systems. It is thus a specific strategic activist approach to committing to change from within by understanding and effectively utilising the mechanisms of power. This hybrid position young activists adopt is challenging the existing mainstream understanding of power and counteractions, reluctances, and critical resistances.

While some youth activists are, as we have shown, more cooperative in their strategic comportment, other activist collectivities are more directly disruptive. They are more interested in directly challenging and changing the system than

working dutifully with certain political and other stakeholders in the field. However, this position of opposing, challenging and directly confronting rather than cooperating with institutions, actors etc. implies that the latter are actually constitutive of young dissenters. This is precisely Foucault's point (1996, 224) when he claims that resistances exist within the relations of power and "are present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault 1978, 95). This makes it important to note that resistances always exist specifically in the web of power in which force relations structure the possible field of actions of individuals and collectivities. As Lilja and Vinthagen (2014, 107) state, while oppositional practices must always be understood as conditioned and shaped within existing hierarchies and power relations they can also disrupt the governing mechanisms. On the other hand, the resistances existing within the modalities of power can reinforce the existing exercise of power and create new mechanisms and relations: "Power, then, occasionally, relies on the production of resistance. Power and resistance exist in a mutually constitutive relationship […]" (Lilija and Vinthagen, 2014, 111).

O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (2018) argue that certain expressions, critiques and symbolic acts of dissent can "trigger awareness and social reflection, generate debate, open spaces for new actors and issues, and create momentum for social change", which can in turn bring "important strategy with far-reaching impacts" (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018). Often, these resistances are very minute, local: "more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society – that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds" (Foucault 1978, 96; see also Lilja 2018).

De Moore et al. (2021) provide an example of such local resistance, claiming that climate activists' engagements continued after the Copenhagen Summit, albeit on a smaller scale, especially in Europe, for example in the form of local direct action campaigns, climate camps, world social forum meetings, prefigurative projects, and divestment campaigns. Such activism may be described as a specific form of infrapolitical dissent. Scott's (1990) concept of "infrapolitics" emphasises covert actions that, while not directly challenging authority, serve and act as significant forms of opposition. Similarly, El Khoury (2015) describes how infrapolitical activism, often concealed and informal, can "encompass a wide range of activities from dissent arts, and media to squatting to satire to gossip" (El Khoury 2015, 104) and can challenge the status quo by creating choices and alternatives that weaken the influence of the prevailing ideology without confronting it directly or explicitly. Such youth activist engagements are visible in practices by various Degrowth Movements and initiatives (Burkhart, Treu, and Schmelzer 2020) acting against the hegemonic system and actors. These are instances of counter-conducts where collectivities and individuals act in a way to transgress existing norms, values, practices and are simultaneously often a

propositional praxis aimed at transforming resistance strategies into substantive acts of creation (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018) and achieving the goal of "building processes and structures that embody the fought-for ideals" (El Khoury 2015, 109). Our position with regard to propositional resistance actions is that they form specific conduct of young people that enable power relations to be modified, the particular locally stabilised organisations of power to be counteracted and thereby influence the possibilities of acting in new ways. An organisation or systemisation of power relations is, as Davidson (2011, 29) reminds us, intrinsic to a physical environment, a social configuration, a behavioural pattern, a physical gesture, a certain attitude or a way of life. All of these characteristics can structure the field of action of individuals, and thus power and resistance can potentially come from everywhere (Foucault 1978). What Foucault is suggesting here is a need to recognise and take into account a myriad of micro-level practices that can shape activist attitudes. We need to move away from the idea that activism only occurs in the form of grand and visible movements or street protests.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have considered the seemingly nonsensical, incoherent and inconsistent position of young environmental activists who on one hand, criticise power structures and institutions on different levels, from local to national to global, and demand radical change and, on the other hand, address the authorities with their specific initiatives and demands, thereby legitimising them as actors who have the leverage to bring about change. It is clear that youth environmental activism is characterised by a diversity of tactics and strategies. Many authors (Pickar, Bowman, and Arya 2022; Bergman and Ossewaarde 2020; Henn and Pickard 2023) have highlighted their commitment to environmental issues and pointed out that it is precisely in the field of the environment and climate change that young people are the most vocal, which gives weight to the claim about a "youthquake" in political participation in this very area (Sloam and Henn 2019).

One of the central points of the paper is that youth environmental activism is not a new phenomenon, but has its origins, sources, practices and strategies in earlier episodes of environmental activism. The paper accordingly challenges the prevailing view that youth environmental activism is a recent phenomenon and instead situates it within a broader trajectory of environmental engagement. In this way, the paper underscores some of the mixed origins of these movements, which are also related to their regional, national and local specificities, while recognising their interconnectedness with broader socio-political factors. We also focussed on showing how young people were involved in and contributed to these movements in the past. From the early environmental movements to the radical positions and elements of youth in the 1960s and the emergence of vital organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, the history of

environmental activism has been shaped by the critical engagement and inventiveness of young people. Further, the historical observations revealed the adaptability of environmental movements in response to changing social, political and environmental challenges. This adaptability is reflected in the shift from radical to more moderate approaches, the development of activist strategies, and the increasing internationalisation of environmental activism. It is important to note that the historical formations reflect the dynamic nature of environmental activism, including the strategic diversification that has given these movements visibility and, to some extent, influence.

Our theoretical starting point in this paper was based on combining the approach of eco-governmentality and Foucault's concept of counter-conduct. Starting from eco-governmentality (Goldman 2001; Luke 1995b; Rutherford 2007), we reflected on the action of the authorities on the subjectivities, both collective and individual, that operate in the field of environmental activism and highlighted the ways in which young activists engage within existing institutional arrangements on different levels, and how young people respond to power technologies and practices that seek to guide, reinforce and promote their agency in contexts of environmental concern. Following O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (2018), for example, we conceptualised youth civil society forms of participation in climate summits as dutiful dissent, where engagement is not only confrontational but also in the form of participation with existing structures to advocate for 'meaningful' policy change. In forums like the COP Summits, young people use these platforms to influence debates, contribute their expertise, and work to ensure that young people's views, at least to some extent critical, are incorporated in climate policy. While at first glance it may appear that such mechanisms entail the mere co-opting of the youth voice and that young people are subject to the existing power structures, their position is borderline given that resistance is always absolutely embedded in power relations. Or, as Foucault expressed it: "Working with a government doesn't imply either a subjection or a blanket acceptance. One can work with and be intransigent at the same time. I would even say that the two things go together" (Foucault 2001, 455–56).

But, of course, within the diversity of youth environmental activist practices, it is possible to trace and find more directly and visibly confronting, opposing, contesting and resistant subjectivities. These include the Degrowth movements, and perhaps even more evident in the past, the movement under the label of eco-terrorism, especially in the 1980s (Eagan 1996). It is this oppositional and dissent action that we have articulated in this paper through the concept of counter-conduct, an analytical tool for understanding the specificity and heterogeneity of the forms of resistance and alternative practices that young activists develop in response to power mechanisms and modalities within the environmental field. Counter-conduct practices include open and overt, individual and collective struggles against actions imposed by power structures and at the same time are proactive, creative and inventive in the sense they conceive and materialise novel

ways of organising and materialising social relations and relations with nature. Youth activists not only resist but also propose new ways of thinking about and interacting with the environment by challenging the dominant paradigms and practices of environmental governance.

The heterogeneousness of youth activism – from constructive engagement with existing institutions, to willingness to challenge and subvert them – demands a move away from the existing understanding of opposition between governing structures and resistances. The actions of young activists are clearly embedded and fluid across and through the terrain of environmental governance and as such are an important force creating, articulating and materialising possible ways of addressing the dominant order of relations to the environment, of managing the environment and thus of regulating socio-political realities, as well as of imagining alternative orders.

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▪ Marinko BANJAC

OKOLJSKI AKTIVIZEM MLADIH: SUBVERZIJA ALI OMEJITEV NA OBSTOJEČI RED?

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava različne oblike okoljskega aktivizma mladih, pri čemer izhaja iz fenomena njihove ambivalentne pozicije, ko se po eni strani zavzemajo za strukturne in radikalne spremembe, po drugi strani pa z obstoječimi oblastmi sodelujejo ali pa jim vsaj postavljajo zahteve in s tem dajejo legitimnost. Članek se tako osredini na odnos mladih upirajočih se subjektivitet do moči in njihovo prepletanje s strategijami in praksami ter oblastnimi mehanizmi na področju urejanja okoljskih vprašanj. Osredotoča se na načine, na katere so mladi aktivisti vpeti v oblastna razmerja in izvajanje vladanja, se v njih oblikujejo ter se nanje odzivajo. Članek se pri tem opira na foucaultovski pristop ekovladnosti in koncept protidelovanja kot analitično perspektivo preučevanja, kako mladi aktivisti naslavljajo, sokonstituirajo in potencialno subvertirajo ali spodkopavajo oblastne strukture. Na podlagi tega pristopa reflektiramo raznolikost delovanja, ki jo je mogoče prepoznati v mladinskem aktivizmu, kar obsega tudi premislek o različnih oblikah, strategijah in praksah, povezanih s tem aktivizmom.*

Ključni pojmi: *mladi, okoljski aktivizem, politična ekologija, ekovladnost, protidelovanje.*