

# Long-Term Environmental and Climate Activism in Germany

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## Introduction and Objective

Currently, the research on young climate activists of the Fridays for Future movement has increased, with little or no attention being paid to elderly activists (Barbosa et al. 2021; Kowasch et al. 2021; Soßdorf/Burgi 2022). Compared to the overall population in Germany, environmental activists aged 60-69 years are represented more frequently, similar to the group of 14-19 years olds (Statista 2022: 18). This research project aims to use a qualitative research design to provide perspectives on the reasons and motivations of elderly long-term environmental and climate engaged people.

## Research Questions

- How does climate awareness turn into the urge to become active? What motivates people to become active against climate change?
- Which strategies are used by people to remain active in environmental and climate protection in the long term?

## Research Entrance Theses

- Emotions are important motives for climate activism.
- Long-term activists can be attributed with a particular role in the environmental and climate protection movement.
- Special strategies are needed to persistently engage in climate protection.

## Research Procedure

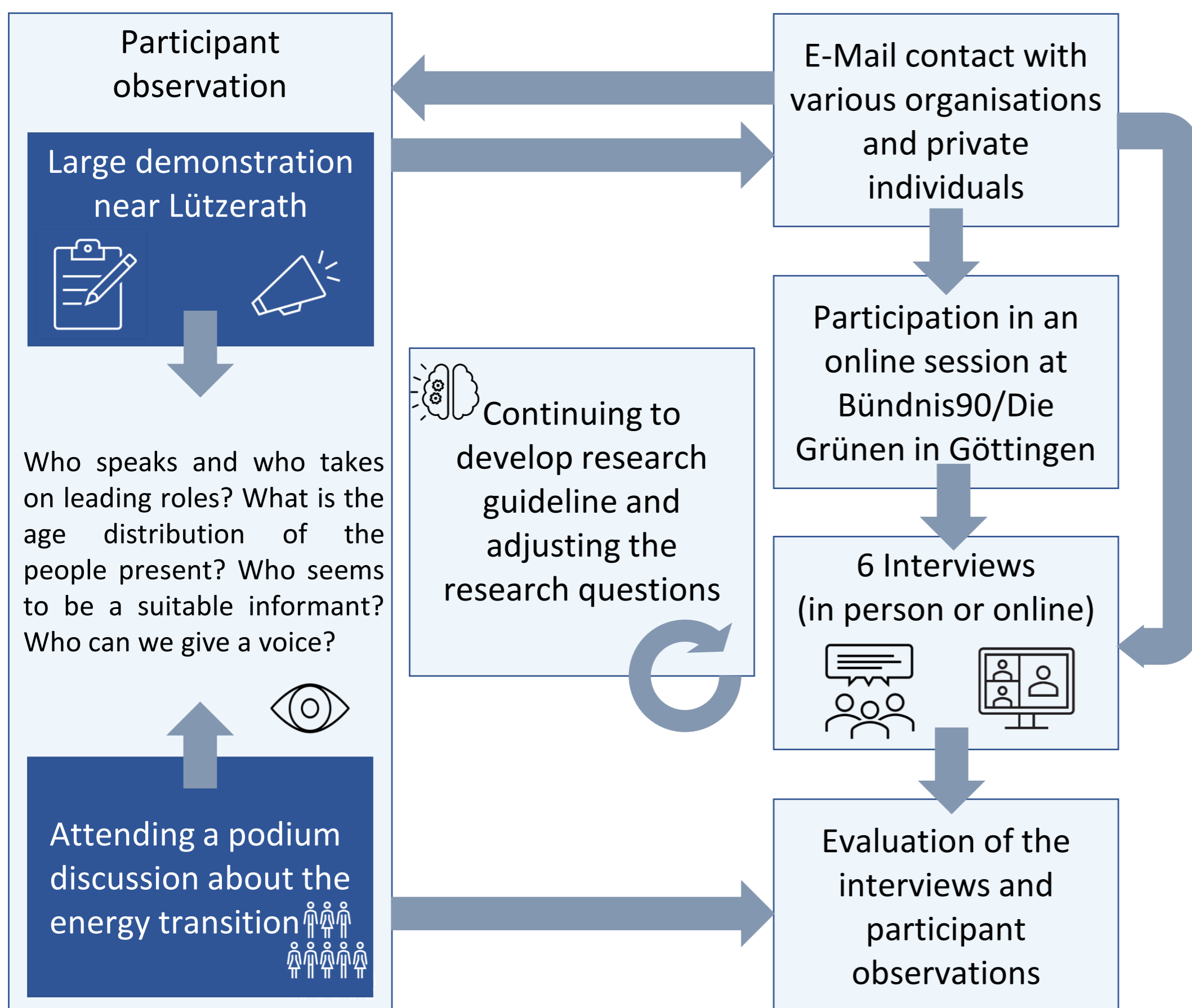


Image 1: Schematic illustration of the research procedure

## Methodological Approach and Research Design

- **Access to the Field:**
  - Through own research, contacting potential interview partners (emails, online meeting of Bündnis90/Die Grünen, large demonstration).
  - Three gatekeepers that enabled access to the field, but also partly prevented it (cf. Breidenstein et al., 2015: 63-67)
- **Interviews**
  - Six semi-structured guided interviews (three online via Zoom & three in person).
  - Duration between 45 min and 1:30h, audio recordings with subsequent transfer into interview transcripts as well as reflection notes
- **Participant Observation**
  - Large demonstration near Lützerath
  - Podium discussion on the topic of the energy transition in Göttingen
  - Reflection of the observations according to Rosenthal (2015: 116-122)
- **Evaluation Method**
  - Coding in Grounded Theory according to Strauss and Corbin (cf. Rosenthal 2015: 244ff; cf. Breidenstein et al. 2013: 142-157).

## Field Work Impressions



Images 2-4: (From left to right, self-taken pictures) Demonstration near Lützerath, authors in the field, podium discussion in Göttingen

## Presentation of First Research Results

- **Our Interview Partners:**
  - Age range between 61 and 69 years
  - Five out of six have studied
- **Biographical Patterns of Engagement:**
  1. Youth (anti-nuclear movement and peace movement)
  2. Work and family (break or less engagement)
  3. Less work and family responsibilities (renewed political commitment also due to stronger presence of environmental and climate protection issues)

### Forms of Engagement

- Organising and participating in demonstrations, lectures and/ or providing information
- Non-parliamentary: NGOs (Parents/ Omas for Future, others), private
- Parliamentary: local politics (independent or in a party)
- Lifestyle
  - Mobility: No car, no/fewer plane trips
  - Diet: Vegetarian, organic, regional, home-grown food
  - Consumption: e.g. Clothing
  - Alternative lifestyle

### Own Beliefs

- Society should influence politics
- „probieren muss man´s“ (Interviewee, 2023)
- Demonstrations can make a difference
- Reject individual guilt but take responsibility

### Being a Silent Role Model

- Set an example for alternative lifestyles without forcing direct confrontation with others
- Not hiding their own values & attitudes
- „Man kann in dieser Gesellschaft nicht 100% konsequent leben“ (Interviewee, 2023)

**Emotions** occur very individually: Fear, anger, sadness, frustration, disappointment, hope, joy, grief

### Individual Reasons for own activism:

- Be aware of the situation
- To contribute their expertise & make suggestions
- Wish for a better future for the younger generation
- Not wanting to be like the generation of their own parents
- Want to experience the change
- To change as much as possible in administration through political activity (even small steps)
- Quitting is not an option
  - Remaining critical & being aware of the time it takes
  - Connecting with like-minded people

### Role of Activists

- **Lützerath Demonstration**
  - Fewer older than younger participants; some have self-made, others professional banners; elderly are under-represented in speaking roles
- **Podium discussion**
  - 30% of the audience are elderly people
  - Mostly questions and discussion contributions from older men

## Our Next Steps

- Transferring remaining data into transcripts
- Continuing coding and connecting results
- Deciding on appropriate theory to be used (Brandstätter et al. 2013, Dohm et al. 2021, Bosnjak et al. 2020, Sevelsted et al. 2023)

## Outlook

- **Extend research:**
  - to include people from the global south (cf. Kleres/ Wettergren 2017)
  - Regarding reasons for different forms of engagement
- **Comparison of generations in terms of motives and emotions**