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Mobilising political intersectionality in Czechia's climate movement: Opportunities and pitfalls of coalition building in a post-socialist semi-periphery

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ABSTRACT

Political intersectionality is now increasingly mobilised by social movements and their coalitions advocating for climate justice in different contexts around the world. Employing feminist action research, we explore (1) individual, (2) organisational and (3) societal levels of political intersectionality in the Czech climate movement. Our focus on spatiotemporal factors reveals the opportunities and pitfalls of intersectional coalition building in a post-socialist semi-periphery. In a societal context distorted by a long history of climate scepticism, depoliticised interpretations of socioeconomic grievances and persistently large gender inequalities, recent experiments with political intersectionality in the Czech climate movement have the potential to influence public debates and climate action. We show that coalition building in the movement is currently complicated by internal inequalities between grassroots movements and mainstream NGOs. Their different approaches to intersectionality have led to the reproduction of techno-managerial approaches to climate change that obscure a systemic critique of oppressive hegemonic forces while decreasing the visibility and interests of women and other marginalised groups of people.

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Introduction

With growing recognition of inequality as the root cause of the global environmental crisis (Hathaway 2020), climate movements have been increasingly demanding climate justice (Jamison 2016) and mobilising intersectionality (Daniel and Dolan 2020; Hiraide and Evans 2023). Becoming increasingly popular (Di Chiro 2020; Kolářová 2008), the intersectional practice and approach has been spreading *via* inter-movement spillover

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in the form of *political intersectionality* mobilised by social movements (Roth 2021). This entails diverse movement constituencies across various identities that also have equal access to shape the movement, as well as forging new collaborations and coalitions across these identities (ibid.). These constituencies collectively struggle against environmentally destructive policies and projects (Di Chiro 2020; LeQuesne 2019) or demand inclusive systemic solutions to the ongoing, intertwined crises (Daniel and Dolan 2020; Getova and Zografos 2024; Teixeira and Motta 2024).

Similar developments are also taking place in Czechia's climate movement, which gained momentum towards the late 2010s and significantly transformed domestic environmentalist landscapes, previously depoliticised and sidelined by neoliberal governance (Fagan 2004; Fagin and Jehlička 1998) and dominated by mainstream professional NGOs (Novák 2021). After an initial few years of primarily focusing on the coal phase-out in the country (see, e.g. Černoch et al. 2019), since 2021, new grassroots collectives in particular started to also engage in an intersectional prefiguration of climate justice (see Černík and Velicu 2023) and propose alternative political programmes informed by intersectionality (Nová dohoda 2021). Together with mainstream environmental NGOs, they now make efforts to form coalitions across various movements and with collective actors, including labour unions, to tackle wider socio-economic issues, especially the energy and housing crises, in an environmentally sustainable way.

Intersectionality is, however, inherently spatial (Mollett and Faria 2018) and, just like social movements, affected by contextual factors, such as geography, demography, culture and institutions (Peretz 2020; Pixová et al. 2024). Other factors include the different positions of regions in the history of modern development, such as the semi-peripheral position of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in a world systems framework (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Gagyi and Slačálek 2021). Intersectionality may be easier to foster in places such as Atlanta, Georgia (Peretz 2020), and harder in places such as CEE, characterised by its homogenous White population (Imre 2005), depoliticisation (Gagyi and Slačálek 2021) or, in the case of Czechia, anti-feminist sentiments (Heitlinger 1996). How intersectionality travels as a concept and what it does in particular contexts is the subject of ongoing research and scholarly debate (Di Chiro 2020; Hathaway 2020; Hiraide and Evans 2023; Montoya 2021; Roth 2021).

This paper aims to expand existing knowledge about political intersectionality as a social movement practice and approach that is spatially and temporally situated. We propose researching social movements' political intersectionality in dialogue with spatiotemporal factors on three levels inspired by Jo Reger's levels of gender (in) equality (Reger 2018): (1) individual, (2) organisational and (3) societal, where the ultimate goal is to create intersectional coalitions and frames that can mobilise people across identities.

Our insights are also novel due to the focus on the climate movement, where the analytical lens of intersectionality has been scarcely applied. By focusing on the climate movement in Czechia, we are also highlighting complications arising from applying conceptual frameworks developed in the West in a non-Western context. In CEE, for instance, social movements are faced with the challenge of adjusting their strategies and framing processes to domestic interpretations of socioeconomic grievances, which have been shaped by the post-socialist transformation and technocratic

depoliticisation (see Gagyi 2015a, 2015b). The Czech case however also shows that internal inequalities between grassroots movements and mainstream NGOs, as well as their different approaches to intersectionality, can complicate coalition building and reinforce the dominance of techno-managerial approaches to climate change which obscure a systemic critique as well as the voices and interests of women and other marginalised groups (see Brooker and Meyer 2018). This experience is thus also a valuable addition to the debates on intersectional spaces of resistance and solidarity against the interlocking violence of racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and capitalism (Mollett and Faria 2018), all of which are more important amidst the omnipresent rise of anti-liberal, far-right forces and the anti-environmentalist and anti-feminist sentiments they espouse, hindering urgent climate action (see Hathaway 2020).

This paper is structured as follows: first, environmental and climate justice activism are reviewed from the perspective of intersectionality and, specifically, political intersectionality and coalition building. Next, we review the role of spatiotemporal factors in political intersectionality and suggest a way of studying them in the Czech climate justice movement. Our research methodology is then presented, followed by the study's findings, which focus on three levels of political intersectionality within the Czech climate movement. The article then concludes with a discussion about the opportunities and pitfalls of intersectional climate activism in the post-socialist semi-periphery.

Intersectionality and climate justice

First coined as an academic term by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality has become essential in highlighting the effects of overlapping axes of dominance and subjugation based on gender, class and race on people's lives, as well as in revealing the roots of these axes within the structural inequalities of existing power structures, such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism (Jampel 2018; Patil 2013; Verloo 2006). Recently, intersectionality attracted a surge of interest in social movements' praxis and analysis (Di Chiro 2020; Hiraide and Evans 2023; Montoya 2021; Roth 2021) but has often been reduced to identity politics, oblivious to structural inequalities and capitalist power relations (Salem 2018). However, the radical roots of intersectionality originating in the American Black feminist movement and Third World liberation movements have now been newly restored by scholarship concerned with intersectionality in issue-based struggles, such as those of the environmental and climate movements (see Di Chiro 2020; Hiraide and Evans 2023; Roth 2021). The radical potential rests in placing intersecting axes of discrimination in the context of intertwined crises, which are also caused by the interlocking violence of racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and capitalism and which connect human oppression to environmental destruction.

New conceptual frameworks like *intersectional environmentalism* (Thomas 2022) have been introduced to highlight the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis, environmental destruction and related social justice issues on people affected by the overlapping multiple axes of dominance and subjugation based on race, class and gender. These must be tackled by holistic solutions which do not separate the liberation of people from the liberation of the planet and require the dismantlement of

existing systems of oppression (Thomas 2022). A related conceptual framework, *intersectional climate justice*, then specifically focuses on socioenvironmental issues related to climate change and points to the necessity of incorporating intersectional perspectives into climate change studies and justice-driven climate planning and solutions as well as comprehensive insights about how the climate crisis impacts human rights. Intersectional climate justice has, for instance, been recently mobilised by the US coalition of feminist climate justice activists formed around the proposed Feminist Green New Deal, which is centred on an alternative economy based on principles of care and regeneration (Daniel and Dolan 2020); similar perspectives are also shaping other social movements and their coalitions around the world (Di Chiro 2020; Getova and Zografos 2024; LeQuesne 2019; Teixeira and Motta 2024).

Political intersectionality in climate justice movements

Although the ideas and principles of intersectionality are generally more aligned with the values of grassroots movements than those of mainstream NGOs, as well as being more applicable to the organisational structure of these movements (Heaney 2019; Hiraide and Evans 2023), Roth (2021) suggests that all social movements can use intersectionality as a political strategy as well as be studied using intersectionality as an analytical tool. Roth also distinguishes between *structural* and *political* intersectionality. The former concerns the way multiple forms of subordination shape personal experiences and access to resources, whereas the latter focuses on the influence of power differentials caused by different positionalities that shape the movements' agendas, choice of strategies or framing processes (ibid.).

Previous research on environmental and climate movements has, for example, shown that the perspectives of White male activists are more salient and influential, while those of women and other marginalised groups in these movements tend to be sidelined (Chan and Curnow 2017; Swim et al. 2018; Wong, Singh, and Brumby 2024). This reinforces an emphasis on business, science and technical solutions to climate change, which are preferred by men, instead of highlighting issues such as human rights, justice and care and portraying climate change as a product of socio-economic inequities (Hathaway 2020; Swim et al. 2018). A key aspect of political intersectionality is thus to ensure inclusion and balance power dynamics within and between movements and organisations, making sure that voices of less advantaged individuals and groups are not overlooked, silenced or excluded from shaping the movements' strategies and goals (Roth 2021). Within the climate movement, mainstream NGOs can, for example, practice political intersectionality by challenging ageist, paternalistic attempts to disparage the participation of young activists in the climate action debate (see Bergmann and Ossewaarde 2020) or counter bullying neoliberal attacks against young activists by demonstrating solidarity and unity in the collective demand for climate justice (see Telford 2023).

The ultimate goal of political intersectionality is to build coalitions across various social movements and organisations, addressing both identity and issue-based concerns (Roth 2021). Constituencies across class, gender, race and ethnicity can share the concerns of environmental activists and vice versa. They can also create important spaces of resistance and solidarity against oppressive hegemonic forces (see Mollett

and Faria 2018; Roth 2021). Forming alliances often requires the involvement of bridge-builders—individuals skilled in fostering communication and understanding between different movements (Pixová et al. 2024; Roth 2021). A strong example of an intersectional coalition is the previously mentioned Feminist Green New Deal coalition (Daniel and Dolan 2020). The project mobilises intersectional climate justice through its agenda as well as its constituency, which consists of ‘individuals and organisations working towards justice at all of the intersections that the climate crisis touches: migrant justice, racial justice, economic justice, labour justice, reproductive justice, and gender justice’ (Feminist Green New Deal 2020n.d.). Other examples include the joint mobilisation of climate activists with Indigenous water protesters (LeQuesne 2019), popular rural feminist movements concerned with climate change and demanding wider systemic transformation (Teixiera and Motta 2024), other grassroots initiatives aimed at preparing an alternative intersectional Green Deal programme in Europe (Getova and Zografos 2024; Nová dohoda 2021) and many others.

Movement-relevant research of political intersectionality in post-socialist CEE

Not all movements are capable of creating and sustaining inclusive coalitions committed to solidarity with marginalised groups (Montoya 2021; Roth 2021). Even movements prefiguring intersectionality may reproduce social inequalities (Ishkanian and Peña Saavedra 2019). More research is needed to explore which conditions determine the failures and successes of different groups when striving for political intersectionality and intersectional coalitions and how intersectional practice is interpreted by various groups (Roth 2021).

Particular place-based factors such as geography, demography, culture and institutions can enable intersectionality in social movements (e.g. in Atlanta; Peretz 2020), whereas others may disable it. In post-socialist CEE, for instance, limitations may arise due to the critique of capitalism or collective thinking being widely associated with socialism (Getova and Zografos 2024; Pixová et al. 2024). These factors require careful consideration, especially in framing processes (Benford and Snow 2000), but also in ensuring equal access among all movement or coalition members to shape these processes (Roth 2021).

The role of place-based factors in the political intersectionality of social movements nonetheless remains underexplored (Peretz 2020; Roth 2021), as is the role of time. More knowledge in this area is also needed to avoid a time-space bias driven by Western experience, which may otherwise misinterpret developments in non-Western contexts. Societies in the CEE region, for example, which were depoliticised by the undisputed post-1989 victory of ‘the democracy-cum-capitalism package’ (Gagyi 2015a, 22), tend to view socioeconomic grievances as separate from politics. People disenfranchised by capitalism instead use diagnostic frames, that is, they identify and attribute their problems (see Benford and Snow 2000) in ways which are shaped by conspiracy theories, esotericism, racism, xenophobia, anti-gender sentiments, nationalism, anti-environmentalism and the like (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Gagyi and Slačálek 2021). As a result of adopting this bias, some of the region’s social movements, inspired by Western movements, have often used radical diagnostic frames which are

critical of capitalism as the new post-socialist system, and which have alienated them from their own societies (*ibid.*). Recent efforts by progressive movements in the CEE region to experiment with political intersectionality thus have the potential to influence societal polarisation, both positively and negatively. Given the current aggravation of people's disenfranchisement caused by the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the energy crisis, all of which are contributing to the rise of far-right extremism and opposition to climate policies, these developments deserve our careful attention. In this paper, we focus on the Czech climate movement, which is currently the main force pushing for political intersectionality in the country.

Methodology

The research design of this paper is qualitative (Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Strauss and Corbin 1998). As feminist researchers, we consider the reflexivity of our position towards the climate movement as crucial for our choice of methodology and for understanding the studied phenomenon. We operate in the interstices between academic research and social movements. The second author, a sociologist active in feminist and environmental movements, contributed to data analysis, theoretical framing, and drafting the paper. The first author is a human geographer who has personally participated in the Czech climate movement since 2015 as a grassroots activist and, between 2019 and 2021, as a professional employee of the Czech Climate Coalition. As of this writing, she continues to engage with the movement as an activist scholar. Hands-on experience and participant observation provided her with invaluable insider knowledge about the movement and the motivation to understand the movement's internal dynamics, helping both authors in structuring and organising their data. The main data set analysed in this paper is primarily thirty-four semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between 2021 and 2024 from two separate research projects.

The first project, conducted between 2021 and 2022, was commissioned by the Heinrich Böll Foundation to uncover the underlying mechanisms and impacts of intersectional gender inequalities on the climate change debate in Czechia. Given the predominantly homogenous Czech population (Vachuška and Kurkin 2022) and the absence or derogatory use of class in post-socialist Czechia (Musílek and Katrňák 2015), the focus of the commissioned study was on identifying barriers which silenced women's voices in the public climate change debate. The study was conducted by the first author and another co-investigator. Its results were published in a publicly accessible practical book for activists (Pixová and Nebeská 2022), which also includes evidence-based guidelines for achieving effective women's empowerment within the movement.

The results published in the book (*ibid.*) were based on interviews with twenty activists and five experts. Two experts were also climate activists. The research participants belonged mainly to grassroots movement organisations (i.e. Fridays for Future, We Are the Limits, Universities for Climate, Extinction Rebellion, Parents for Climate); mainstream NGOs, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth Czech Republic; several newer NGOs focused on climate; the Green Party and two umbrella organisations for networking within the environmental and climate movement. Our aim was to cover a wide spectrum of organisations based in different parts of the country. The prevalence of women participants stems from our effort to give space to more

Table 1. List of research participants in the first project.

Nickname	Organisation	Gender	Age group	Place
Milada	NGO	Woman	Senior	City
Marta	Grassroots	Woman	Middle age	City
Marie	NGO + grassroots	Woman	Young	City
Markéta	NGO	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Lenka	NGO	Woman	Young	Capital
Eliška	Political party	Woman	Middle age	Region
Amarylis	Grassroots	Non-binary	Young	City & region
Daniela	NGO	Woman	Young	Capital
Zuzka	NGO	Woman	Young	Capital
Jana	Grassroots	Woman	Young	Capital & region
Fany	Grassroots	Woman	Young	Capital
Lilly	NGO	Woman	Middle age	Capital & city
Lucie	Grassroots	Woman	Middle age/senior	Capital & region
Silvie	Grassroots	Woman	Young	City
Pavla	NGO	Woman	Young	Capital
Pavel	NGO	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Filip	Grassroots	Man	Middle age	Capital
Petr	Grassroots	Man	Young	Capital & city
Robert	NGO	Man	Young	City
Dan	NGO + grassroots	Man	Young/middle age	Capital
Zdena	Expert: energy	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Radka	Expert: gender, environment	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Karla	Expert: gender	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Kamila	Expert: gender, movements	Woman	Middle age	Capital
Jaroslav	Expert: climate movement	Man	Young	Capital

marginalised voices and our inability to ensure sufficient diversity with respect to class and race. For more details on the sample, see [Table 1](#).

As feminist researchers, we believe we share responsibility with activists. In the study commissioned by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, we emphasised inclusivity and collaborative research typical of feminist action research (Bleijenbergh 2023; Reinhartz 1992). We began by consulting the research design and its usefulness with several prominent female activists and experts within the movement. We also conferred with the participants about the research process during the data collection and analysis. The preliminary results were discussed in an online meeting with the research participants and other interested members of the climate movement. Results of the study, along with the book (Pixová and Nebeská 2022), were presented to the Czech climate movement in several interactive workshops and at activist conferences. Since then, several movement members, both women and men, have approached us on different occasions to tell us that they find the book rather useful and often consult it. One research participant mentioned our work on social media as a rare example of research that does not just use activists to extract information but is also useful for the movement.

The second research project resulted from a research grant from The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies, which the first author received in 2022 as a co-investigator in an international project focused on exploring social movements’ resilience and resourcefulness in the context of multiple crises (www.sustainaction.org). As part of this project, she conducted nine additional interviews between 2023 and 2024 that focused on the efforts of the Czech climate movement to achieve political intersectionality and build coalitions. These interviews were conducted with six women

Table 2. List of research participants in the second research project.

Nickname	Organisation	Gender	Age group	Place
Vanda	NGO + grassroots	Woman	Young	City
Damián	NGO	Man	Young/middle age	Capital
Blanka	NGO	Woman	Young/middle age	Capital
Andula	Social centre	Woman	Senior	City
Fany 2	NGO + grassroots	Woman	Young	Capital
Vendula	Grassroots	Woman	Young	Capital
Milan	Grassroots	Man	Young	Capital
Tony	NGO + grassroots	Man	Young	Capital
Ola	Grassroots	Woman	Young	Capital

and three men experienced in coalition work and/or striving for political intersectionality in activism (see [Table 2](#)). In all interviews, the first author also asked activists to outline what kind of data, analysis and outcomes they would find useful for the movement and assured them of her commitment to disseminate knowledge gained from the research in non-academic spaces and outlets.

This paper draws on data from both research projects. Conducted interviews, which took between one to two hours, were recorded and transcribed. Research participants were given nicknames that only reveal their gender. The data analysis used open coding to segment the data in addition to techniques for increasing the researcher's theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Axial and selective coding served to analyse the relations of codes around the central category (political intersectionality) and interpret its dimensions. The analysis is a combination of inductive codes and codes deduced from theory. The coding protocol was created in the program MaxQDA.

As previously mentioned, our analysis focused on segmenting the data into three levels of political intersectionality: (1) individual, (2) organisational and (3) societal (see Reger 2018). We ascribe the individual level of political intersectionality to inclusivity towards the diversity of constituencies with various identities within the movement. The organisational level focuses on the ability of diverse members to shape the movement's agenda, frames, tactics and so on. Due to the lack of people of colour and lower classes in the Czech climate movement, this level of our analysis mainly focuses on gender inequalities and on the gendered division of labour in social movement organisations (Hurwitz and Crossley 2018). The societal level focuses on building coalitions across different issue- and identity-based movements, the incorporation of intersectionality into diagnostic frames used in communication with the wider public and, ultimately, the movement's ability to address wider audiences. In our analysis, we put these different levels into dialogue with various spatiotemporal factors and conclude by discussing their interdependencies and mutual conditionalities.

Empirical findings

Addressing intersectionality and climate justice

In the Czech climate movement, intersectionality is a relatively new concept and was more familiar among the young and LGBTQ+ research participants in particular. In line with the trend observed abroad (Heaney 2019; Hiraide and Evans 2023),

intersectionality in the Czech climate movement has also been gaining traction in grassroots movements that are 'more informal, nonhierarchical, more flexible, and deal with other problems and oppression, be it related to gender, racism or oppression in the Global South' (Silvie, NGO+ grassroots). Some research participants were, contrariwise, completely unfamiliar with the concept even though all of them agreed with the idea and principles.

Our data showed how intersectionality travels across the movement, and that it was typically grassroots movements that disseminated these ideas across the broader movement, functioning as role models and a source of inspiration for mainstream NGOs. However, grassroots movements and mainstream NGOs are not equal in terms of access to resources, public visibility and the like. This inequality is further pronounced by the relatively short history of grassroots climate movements in Czechia, which was demarcated by the first Czech climate camp organised in 2017 by We Are the Limits! (Limity jsme my!), a grassroots movement inspired by Here and No Further (Ende Gelände) in Germany that uses climate camps as performative acts of camping for climate justice and collectively blocking fossil fuel infrastructure (see Černík and Velicu 2023). After 2018, they were followed by other grassroots groups, such as the Czech chapters of Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Parents for Climate and many others.

Prior to 2017, the climate movement was only represented by (several) mainstream NGOs, with roots either in the Czechoslovak conservation movement or the political environmentalism that emerged in the 1990s but which quickly underwent deradicalisation and professionalisation (Novák 2021). Some of these mainstream NGOs have recently started to experiment with the intersectional approach and perspectives, although more formally and with difficulties. In 2021, for example, one of the NGOs organised a lecture by the second author of this paper about intersectionality as a new concept for its employees. The NGO then took a decision to employ an intersectional approach by better considering and communicating with economically disadvantaged groups when preparing strategies, communication and campaigns:

We reinterpreted intersectionality to mean that we want to talk more with poorer people within the framework of a just transition, to deal with the issue of expensive energy, etcetera. We concluded that we would work more with the government and push for the ecological transformation to be just and socially acceptable for the economically weaker parts of society. (Pavel, NGO)

The quote reveals a rather top-down reinterpretation of the intersectional approach. Given that the public debate about climate change in Czechia has been significantly delayed by the post-socialist transformation and the emergence of climate-sceptic think-thanks (Vidomus 2018), and has, to date, been dominated by a focus on phasing out coal, this shift of attention towards marginalised members of domestic society is still a significant achievement.

In the following sections, we will assess the opportunities and pitfalls of achieving political intersectionality in the Czech climate movement, considering the domestic context on the individual, organisational and societal level.

Individual level of political intersectionality

A fundamental part of political intersectionality at the individual level is movement inclusivity of people across diverse identities. Our findings confirm a slight prevalence of women and very few people of colour among movement members. Some members, including two research participants, openly declare their LGBTQ+ identity. Although diversity and inclusivity towards people of all colours, genders and sexualities, as well as an open denunciation of all forms of oppression, are important values and principles of the movements, the predominantly White Czech population allows for only limited diversity in terms of race and ethnicity (see Vachuška and Kurkin 2022).

The movement is nonetheless less accessible to people of Roma ethnicity who represent 1.93% of the Czech population (European Commission 2021) but face structural discrimination and both spatial and educational segregation (Cashman 2017). The movement reflects that professional positions in NGOs can exclude people with lower levels of education, whereas grassroots volunteering may be inaccessible to people with socioeconomic or health disadvantages. One of the NGOs was therefore looking for ways to involve these groups:

Thinking about the privileges of working in the nonprofit sector is a topic we think about, for example, in connection with volunteering. Is it exclusive? Is it always people from the same social group who can afford to go on an internship for free? We get very little of the ethnicity issue, so we considered cooperating with a local community centre working with Roma clients. (Radka, expert+ NGO)

While the movement is still in the process of developing a viable strategy for integrating marginalised groups, it is frequently women who appear as volunteers. More visible figures in paid positions, such as campaigners, experts and communicators, are typically men. Even grassroots organisations often have informal male leaders. Several smaller NGOs, however, frequently feature women in expert roles and as directors.

Despite women more frequently appearing in unpaid positions within the movement, our research participants predominantly consider the climate movement to be notably less affected by gender inequalities and manifestations of toxic masculinity than mainstream society. Male members actively endeavour to treat women with respect and exhibit gender awareness. Patronising and self-interested demeanours are not tolerated. Members who refuse to correct their behaviour are often gradually marginalised by other movement members. The movement also provides a safe and respectful environment for members with diverse gender identities and for alternative forms of masculinity. During our research, two prominent male activists were on parental leave. Some men bring their children to meetings and protest events and are increasingly willing to step back to make more space for women's voices. Both mainstream NGOs and grassroots movements make efforts towards enabling a healthy work-life balance. While NGOs offer a wide range of part-time jobs, the younger grassroots movements are increasingly considering new ways and extents of involvement which respect the specific needs of a wide spectrum of members.

The inclusivity of the climate movement, however, also varies depending on the group or collective. They are formed by students, parents, the autonomous scene and others. This leads to fragmentation but also a wider scope of options for people with

different preferences to involve themselves. Climate camps, for example, create 'political space for transnational and egalitarian relations and networking among leftist ecologists, feminist-queer activists, and anarchists' (Černík and Velicu 2023, 2) that may seem unapproachable to the majority population. Between 2019 and 2022, the Czech chapter of Extinction Rebellion seemed the most open thanks to its principle of not shaming specific people or politics and, thus, transformed into a large group of participants of all ages, gender identities, nationalities and other personal characteristics. However, as we learned from Milan, the lack of unity, different expectations, ensuing conflicts and generational differences eventually resulted in the group's dissolution.

Organisational scale of political intersectionality

Although there is an increasing number of movements around the world which consciously strive for diverse constituencies, they are still not immune to inequalities, and their different participants may still not have the same ability to shape a movement's agendas, frames and tactics.

While women have dominated the parental climate activist groups that have emerged since 2019 in Czechia, those in other parts of the climate movement typically appear in less visible roles, such as fundraising, coordination, accounting or protest event decoration. The most visible and influential actors are White middle-class and middle-aged men with expertise in the technical aspects of the coal phase-out, working as campaigners, lobbyists and communicators. This male dominance and their expertise often remain uncontested by female actors, as shown in the following quote:

I guess I don't take it negatively. I rather feel that, for example, with those energy topics, there is a predominance of men who have been dedicated to it for a long time and historically, and maybe, for me, they are some kind of authority. You have expertise here; you always see it. And maybe I don't understand it, even though I feel that here it is quite justified or that it doesn't seem to be somehow divided in terms of power. (Marie, NGO+grassroots movement)

Maria's perception of men as energy experts shows that these men's visibility stems from their merits as founding members of Czech environmental NGOs and from their expertise in the coal phase-out, which they had established as the dominant topic of the Czech public climate change debate. Our research has confirmed the dominance of men and issues preferred by men in both the movement and in the public debate on climate. Markéta, a project manager in a small NGO, however, questioned this bias, pointing out that the social topics of climate change, which are preferred by women, are largely ignored by mainstream media. Similar findings are not endemic to the Czech context (see Chan and Curnow 2014; Hathaway 2020; Swim et al. 2018).

At the time of our research, we identified endeavours to strengthen the role of women across the whole climate movement. These attempts often focused on motivating women to participate in public debates, become spokespeople, deal with politicians, do media interviews or take leadership positions. In line with these efforts, the Heinrich Böll Foundation organised capacity-building workshops and well-being group therapy for women in the environmental and climate movement. Similar

foreign-funded endeavours spread into other sectors, in part as a response to widespread anti-feminist and anti-gender sentiments in Czechia stemming from the troubled history of Czech feminism and a general perception of women's emancipation as having already been achieved under socialism (Heitlinger 1996; Šiklová 1997). Despite these efforts, mainstream NGOs continued to experience difficulties in trying to make women more visible. Although some hired female directors, they nonetheless reported failed attempts to recruit women as campaign leaders despite the significant professional capacities of their female employees. In 2022, the female leader of a campaign against the Polish coal mine Turów was the only exception.

Women's reluctance to take on these more visible roles had partly to do with the campaigns having previously been shaped by men and their technical focus, which contrasts with topics preferred by women (Swim et al. 2018). The Centre for Energy and Transport, for instance, employs female experts who focus on the social aspects of decarbonisation and climate policies. Visible and time-consuming positions, such as a campaigner, also come with certain demands which may be more attractive or easier to fulfil for men. Women tend to be very self-critical and make enormous demands of themselves. According to Markéta, a project manager in a small NGO, men tend to be more socially accepted as activists, whereas women's already low legitimacy is further compromised if they are activists as well. Milada, who works in a mainstream NGO, believes she is better equipped to handle visible roles and argue with colleagues thanks to the legitimacy and authority her PhD in science gives her.

Activist praxis such as political lobbying with power actors and participation in government decarbonisation debates can be difficult due to gender, age, experience, education and so forth. Young women in particular find it difficult to take on visible and leadership roles, especially if their male predecessors were experienced and charismatic. Daniela, who is an expert in her field, finds lobbying and negotiations mentally demanding, exhausting, stressful and unpleasant:

I will probably never be the kind of person who just goes to someone and lobbies for something vehemently or something like that. For example, a [male leader] spends a lot of time lobbying the politicians; I don't really see myself doing that. I'm more of a mediator between the parties, trying to find a compromise and target the public more. (Daniela, NGO)

It appears that while mainstream NGOs support women by promoting them and increasing their self-confidence, these women are also simply expected to act more like men and take over their agendas, such as the technical aspects of decarbonisation. This can be attributed to persistently large sociocultural and structural gender inequalities, due to which women have not had equal access to shaping the movements' agendas, as well as to professional development and activism. Instead, women have been expected to engage in parenthood. In Czechia, in roughly 98% of cases, it is women who take parental leave, which is among the longest in the world, ranging from 2 to 4 years per child. Parenthood then significantly contributes to the gender pay gap and reinforces men's smaller participation in childcare (see Kocourková 2019; Zajíčková and Zajíček 2021).

Although organisational political intersectionality comes more naturally in grassroots organisations, even these are often represented by informal male leaders, whose

visibility stems from their merits as the movement's founding members. Some grassroots collectives mitigate this by circulating various functions and responsibilities and by providing critical feedback to members who become too dominant. According to Fany, a young member of a grassroots movement, these efforts can however easily result in uncomfortable coercive situations, such as men unexpectedly handing over the facilitation of meetings to women who had not prepared for it or women becoming overburdened due to men backing away to give them more space in public debates and so on:

It often happened to me that a person was supposed to go somewhere, like a man to some debate, and then he called me, 'Hey Fany, I found out there's only one woman on that panel, and I'm really uncomfortable going there now. Does anyone else want to go?' (Fany, grassroots movement)

Fany's experience illustrates that even movements committed to organisational political intersectionality often struggle with deeply ingrained societal inequalities beyond their own structures. While these movements aim to challenge male dominance in public spaces and debates, they risk placing marginalised members—particularly women—in positions of self-exploitation.

Societal level of political intersectionality

At the societal level, political intersectionality can be attained through the creation of coalitions and solidarities between groups and movements, connecting people of various identities and disadvantages through common topics (Brooker and Meyer 2018; Gawerc 2021; Roth 2021) and increasing the movement's potential to mobilise wider audiences. Preparing such coalitions requires addressing differences related to the coalition members' respective contexts (Pixová et al. 2024). This can, for example, mean acknowledging the unique histories and conditions of post-socialist countries as well as how these affect the way domestic societies interpret their grievances (see Gagyí 2015a, 2015b).

As the following quotes illustrate, our research participants recognise the challenges of operating in Czechia, where their efforts to connect with other groups and movements are constrained by factors specific to the post-socialist semi-periphery. Those include the widespread depoliticisation of socioeconomic issues, meaning they are often seen as separate from politics or environmental destruction by the mainstream population:

If I take it pragmatically, influencing policies and urgent things like the end of coal, then I don't think it's strategic given the current composition of the government. Instead, it creates culture wars, and soon, the person you're dealing with will frame you as someone who waves some flags and always wants something. (Eliška, local group)

I am aware that it is very important—solving inequality is a question of humanity—but pushing for that now would be counterproductive. The public, which is undecided about the climate issue, could get discouraged, thinking that it won't be solved anyway and that socialism is back again. (Daniela, NGO)

The quotes above reflect that the climate movement agenda must be adjusted to the sentiments of part of the general population, which does not see the common

root of their grievances in issues such as gender inequality or environmental destruction. Moreover, public debate about climate change in Czechia has been distorted by climate scepticism and disinformation (see Čermák and Patočková 2020; Vidomus 2018) as well as by the post-socialist political establishments' lack of support for environmentalism (see Shriver and Messer 2009). In this tradition, the European Green Deal is now being portrayed by populists and right-wing groups as a path leading people into poverty. In Czechia, the implementation of climate measures is, on the one hand, lagging behind (Pixová 2020) and completely oblivious to the social implications of the crisis on the other (IHRB 2023). With its concern for coal, which many people use to heat homes, or foreign frames such as climate justice, the climate movement in Czechia, to some extent, resembles a niche project with limited potential for broader mobilisation, with many of its protest tactics facing significant public criticism.

Opportunities to engage wider audiences emerged during the severe and prolonged droughts between 2018 and 2021, which spurred some local governments and associations across Czechia to mobilise against projects affecting water resources. On several occasions, the Czech climate movement joined forces with local civic associations to create joint platforms and campaigns and to organise protest events. Although these events did not attract large crowds, they were at least partially successful in highlighting the links between climate change and the grievances people experienced due to drought.

A unique opportunity to develop a more lasting, intersectional coalition occurred with the energy crisis and high inflation aggravated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In Czechia, the impact of rising energy prices on low-income people is a highly relevant issue, intersecting with ethnic disadvantages, particularly that of the Roma minority. In Autumn 2022, several NGOs and grassroots movements within the Czech climate movement joined forces with Czechia's relatively small housing movement. They forged a coalition titled Energy for People (Energie lidem 2023 n.d.) focused on campaigning to tame high energy prices for vulnerable groups with clean, efficient and decentralised energy solutions. While NGOs primarily focused on political lobbying, the grassroots groups were spreading awareness and offering practical help to people affected by energy poverty, including a refugee centre in Brno. This cooperation, however, suffered from internal inequalities within the coalition. Coordination was difficult due to the different needs of professional activists and grassroots volunteers who have jobs or schools to attend. Although operating under the name Energy for People, the coalition's joint communication featured both the technical solutions preferred by mainstream NGOs and the diagnostic frames amplified by grassroots organisations for targeting systemic causes and the geopolitical implications of the energy crisis. The following quote shows that this mixed messaging provided the media with an opportunity to cherry-pick topics congruent with mainstream discourses and ignore frames with bigger potential for mobilising people disenfranchised by capitalism:

When all the movements write a common press release, I find it to be, like, for a different dog, a different master. [A mainstream NGO] writes how much emissions and money will be saved by insulating windows with silicone implants, and we [a grassroots movement] write that we

are losing while [the owner of an energy holding company] is making profit, and it is unjust. And what do the journalists take from the press conference? Czech TV featured just [the energy expert] explaining how the insulation works, and they did not show us talking about the injustice. They did not even show [the local human rights activist] who emphasised the paradox of helping Ukrainian refugees fleeing from that conflict, which is connected to gas [and] which is expensive because Putin needs to make money. They are not interested in this. All they want are nice, practical tips. (Vanda, grassroots movement)

The internal inequality within the coalition's external communication overshadowed messaging about the systemic causes of energy poverty and might have therefore weakened the coalition's potential to cooperate with the Czech labour unions and to achieve political intersectionality at the societal level. Although two Energy for People activists were invited to introduce their campaign at a labour union's demonstration titled 'Czechia Against Poverty', when Energy for People organised its own demonstration later in April 2023, the labour unions did not support them. Eventually, the coalition dissolved.

Another important attempt of the climate movement to strive for political intersectionality at the societal level was the development of the document *New Deal: Social-Ecological Transformation Programme for the Czech Republic*. Following similar examples abroad (see, e.g. Daniel and Dolan 2020; Getova and Zografos 2024), the initiative was launched in 2020 by Re-set: A Platform for Social-Ecological Transformation, an NGO established by a collective of grassroots activists engaged in issues such as climate and housing. Other experts and activists were invited to create a common vision of an ecological and socially just society based on principles of care, which was published in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nová dohoda 2021). As of this writing, the document was publicly endorsed by fifty civil society organisations and twenty-six prominent individuals, primarily academics. As we learned in our research, participants engaged in spreading the document across the movement; however, some environmental NGOs refused to support the document due to its allegedly excessive leftism, perceiving ecology as separate from social justice, or out of fear of losing supporters who identify as right-wing. In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the document did not gain any traction in the wider society. In September 2024, new debates within Czech eco-left circles were initiated to explore the possibility of pushing the document's agenda further.

Concluding discussion

In Czechia, the climate movement currently constitutes an important space of resistance and solidarity against oppressive hegemonic forces at the root of the intertwined societal and environmental crises and the overlapping axes of dominance and subjugation based on gender, class, race and others. Even this space, however, suffers from internal inequalities. Some are linked to universal structural inequalities further aggravated by various spatiotemporal factors, such as the context of post-socialism, but others stem from differences between grassroots movements and mainstream NGOs in their approach to intersectionality (see Hiride and Evans 2023). In our paper, we suggested that political intersectionality be studied in social movements at three

levels—individual, organisational and societal—as well as in dialogue with contextual spatiotemporal factors.

At the individual level of political intersectionality, the movement is mostly White due to the predominantly White Czech population. Most movement members have higher education and a middle-class background, which makes the movement less accessible to people who are structurally disadvantaged, including the Roma minority. Women are more numerous than men but often in less visible roles, such as fund-raising, volunteering and the like, whereas men are more publicly visible as leaders and experts, which corresponds with research conducted in the West (e.g. Chan and Curnow 2017). Compared to mainstream society, the movement is a more gender-sensitive and gender-equal environment, where LGBTQ+ members openly declare their identity, and some men engage in parental leave. Not all movement members, however, embrace the progressive politics or the structural critique underlying the intersectional approach, which has, in part, to do with their negative experience with socialism and a perception of capitalism as a more environmentally friendly system.

At the organisational level of political intersectionality, we recorded efforts geared toward strengthening the role and significance of women and other nonhegemonic actors in mainstream NGOs and grassroots movements. These efforts are, nevertheless, constrained by existing axes of power, privilege and discrimination, which are both universal and exhibit spatiotemporal characteristics that further influence how movements operate. In Czechia, this is especially true of the climate movement's focus on the energy transition, which is congruent with the public superiority of techno-managerial discourses, persistently large gender inequalities and public debate about climate change being delayed and distorted by the post-socialist transformation and climate-sceptic think-tanks. This constellation increases the visibility of male energy campaigners with technical knowledge and discourages women from being more actively involved in political lobbying, debates with influential 'power actors' or campaigning. Women feel taken less seriously both as activists and as experts in media debates or political meetings, which tend to be dominated by men, with their experience and expertise often seen as inferior or less relevant. This partly explains why mainstream NGOs are failing to convince women to engage in positions previously shaped by men and their techno-managerial approaches. Grassroots movements are more active in promoting the voices of marginalised actors, but this may come at the cost of their self-exploitation.

At the societal level, the climate movement is increasingly aware of the need to create coalitions with other movements and collective actors, such as the housing movement and labour unions, and to adjust its agenda and framing processes to the domestic contexts. Climate activists understand that those most affected by socio-economic inequalities often fall prey to authoritarian, anti-liberal rhetoric, which offers simplistic scapegoats—identity politics, the Green Deal, the Roma minority, immigration and so on—for people to blame for their grievances. Between 2020 and 2022, opportunities for intersectional coalition building were opened by recurring periods of drought, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the energy crisis. These crises have led to several short-lived campaigns forged by the climate

movement in cooperation with local civic associations and other social movements. The Energy for People coalition, however, exposed some of the pitfalls of similar cooperation caused by the different needs and strategies of grassroots and mainstream NGOs as well as by their overlooked internal inequalities. While the grassroots amplified a systemic intersectional critique of the structural causes of the energy crisis, mainstream NGOs continued to promote their techno-managerial discourses and approaches in congruence with mainstream discourses, which later overshadowed the messaging of their grassroots coalition partners in the media.

This power imbalance between mainstream NGOs and grassroots movements constrains the climate movement from achieving its own goals. In the technocratic depoliticised context, mainstream NGOs will continue to face complications in recruiting women for more visible positions and addressing nonhegemonic actors. Furthermore, a systemic critique of the structural causes of the energy crisis will fail to reach the public debate. People might therefore continue to see their socio-economic grievances as separate from politics and environmental destruction, and climate measures as a threat. Some movement members hope that a viable counternarrative to the depoliticised, techno-managerial discourses could be based on frameworks of care. This alternative entails intersectional climate justice and is less explicitly relatable to left-wing politics, class rhetoric, gender and other concepts whose meanings have been distorted in the economic post-socialist transformation of Europe's semi-periphery. New debates were launched in 2024 between various eco-left movements in Czechia to discuss how the New Deal could be pushed into practice and mainstream politics. Previous experience with coalition work however shows that this complicated riddle most likely cannot be solved without addressing internal inequalities between different movements and organisations as well as the substantial involvement of those currently missing in the debate at all levels of political intersectionality: people marginalised and disenfranchised by capitalism who currently lack an emancipatory alternative they could relate to see (see Gagyi and Slačálek 2021).

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Ethical approval

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