

From the global to the school level: connections and contradictions between Fridays for Future and the school context

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Abstract: The contribution first outlines the state of research on the relatively new Fridays for Future (FFF) movement and categorises first studies particularly from a German perspective, to provide a basis for a further differentiation in this field of research. In this context, fundamental aspects of the movement are presented. The self-concept of the German Fridays for Future movement in terms of a young protest movement with a global orientation is then compared against the educational tasks stipulated in the school legislation of the federal states (Bundesländer) with their societal-educational objectives. The contribution focuses on the question in how far the self-concept of the German branch of the FFF movement as an international protest movement and the activists' engagement for climate protection and political participation is reflected in the educational objectives stipulated in school legislation. Statements are analysed regarding climate and environmental protection, participation and democracy and transnational references in the school legislation. A link can be found between the self-concept of the Fridays for Future movement and school legislation, but this does not resolve the conflict between the school strikes and compulsory schooling – a conflict that is intended by FFF to highlight the perceived urgency of the cause. Schools, educational administrators and educational policymakers are thereby urged to take a stance.

Keywords: Fridays for Future, Climate Change, Climate Protection, School Acts, Protest Movement, School Strike

1. Fridays for Future as an international protest movement

Once the Fridays for Future (FFF) campaign emerged particularly in 2019 and became a large-scale climate protection movement, it aimed at being an international movement. “Because we know that climate justice is an international matter and we can only be successful if we show solidarity and work together” (FFF Germany, 2021a) the website for FFF Germany reads two years later. Internationalism as a crucial concept is little surprising given a movement that began in Sweden and has spread across several continents since. Yet, the self-perception of a global movement reaches even beyond the beginnings, since internationalism is viewed as an urgent requirement for successful action.

FFF perceives itself as an international movement linked by a common goal, that is, organising protests appealing to politicians to adhere to the objectives of the Paris Agreement signed in December 2015, i.e. a limit of global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius maximum. Individual (country) groups have adhered to this principle and organised activities, action days and strike formats. Internationalism is thus conceived as an asset in itself that comes first: owing to the additional strength of an international weight and owing to a conviction that young people all over the world are confronted with the climate crisis. The German FFF website thus also states that “the climate strike movement is organised internationally, it is non-partisan, independent and decentralised” (FFF Germany, 2021b). There is an equally clear demand to take the interests of younger people into perspective in the democratic process of decision-making, as they are particularly affected by climate change (FFF Germany, 2021c).

Such a commitment to internationalism on the one hand and to democratic structures and patterns of actions on the other hand should actually be viewed in a positive light by stakeholders in education. After all, educating students to act in a democratic sense and raising an interest in global and political issues is an educational objective (see Schulz et al., 2018; KMK, 2018). At the same time, FFF has opted for school strikes as a means of enforcement – thus violating compulsory school education. The movement deliberately seeks this conflict to stress the urgency of the cause, to generate widespread attention and to evoke reactions among politicians and in society. Moreover, this approach also points to the underlying conflict of generations and to inadequacies in the education system which according to the FFF movement does not focus on fundamental problems. For example, this attitude is expressed in the German language slogan “We are here, we are loud – because you are nicking our future” (Wir sind hier, wir sind laut, weil ihr uns die Zukunft klaut) that is often chanted at manifestations.

Educational practitioners and policymakers are thus faced with the task of having to decide how to deal with the protesting groups of (younger) students. The scope of reactions reaches from cautious endorsement of the cause to consequent rejection. Yet, society regards FFF in Germany with far more approval than was the case for former protest campaigns of young people. The movement is also supported by satellite groups, such as Scientists for Future, Parents for Future or Grandparents for Future (Trumpa, 2020, p. 15).

This contribution presents an overview of the state of research in the new research field and subsequently targets the relevance of school legislation in Germany and the stipulated

educational objectives in the context of the Fridays for Future movement. Is the interest of FFF and its German branch reflected in the educational objectives formulated in legislation for the 16 federal states regarding political action, global contexts and internationalisation? Beyond the conflict concerning compulsory schooling and school strikes, do these educational acts offer a basis for the climate activists' self-perceptions and actions? On the one hand, a focus is placed on the relevance of political actions and climate protection in school legislation. On the other hand, the question is pursued in how far school legislation formulates internationalisation as an asset concerning identity formation.

2. Fridays for Future as a new field of research

2.1. The state of research

The Fridays for Future campaign was initially triggered by Greta Thunberg, a Swedish schoolgirl who was 15 years old at the time of beginning an initially three-week school strike in August 2018. She later campaigned for more climate protection outside the Swedish parliament each Friday. In 2019 this initiative turned into a worldwide, large-scale campaign run by young people. Initially, researchers wanted to find out more about the movement and its actors. Against this background large-scale surveys accompanied global climate strike days in March and September 2019 – first across Europe, then also involving North America and Australia (Wahlström et al., 2019; Sommer et al., 2019; De Moor et al., 2020a). These assessments allow an immediate comparison of movements in the different countries. Findings from the surveys were also supplemented with local or thematically focused analyses and in Germany, an additional survey was carried out on the global strike day in November 2019 (Haunss & Sommer, 2020 and Sommer et al., 2020; Grupp et al., 2020; Koos & Lauth, 2019).

Furthermore, research was focused on organisation processes within the movement, FFF in the media and reactions in society to the climate movement (Koos & Naumann, 2019; Rucht, 2019; Meade, 2020; Lucke, 2019). The high attention FFF received is due to several aspects: besides the fact that climate protection has gained importance due to recent events (for example droughts, wildfires), it is also crucial that many of the FFF activists are very young and allegedly formulate claims representing their generation. A discussion of the underlying generational conflict and the role of pedagogy in this context can be found in Holfelder et al. (2021). With regard to FFF protagonists, the role of Greta Thunberg and her public appearance have been focused in particular, including reports about her family background and discussions of autism (Daniel & Graf, 2020; Rucht & Sommer, 2019). From 2019 some of the leading activists of the movement voiced their opinions in publications beyond the press and internet platforms (for example in Germany Neubauer & Repenning, 2019; Neubauer & Ulrich, 2021 and internationally Thunberg et al., 2019 or Nakate, 2021). Finally, the spectacular action of school strikes was highlighted because a violation of compulsory schooling would provoke reactions from politicians and educational administrators (see Teune, 2020; Trumpa, 2020; Haselwanter, 2020).

Moreover, researchers have dealt with the objectives and visions of the movement (see also Marquardt, 2020; Bowman, 2019; Stuart et al., 2020; Evensen, 2019) and considerations regarding the potential of the movement for innovations in teaching and possible consequences for the design of future education systems (Budde, 2020; Burow, 2020). This

is also based on a consideration that the climate activists' reproach should be taken seriously that education systems are not taking sufficient interest in issues of climate protection, environmental protection and sustainability (cf. Bright & Eames, 2020). It is worth noting that first calls for environmental education were raised in the 1970s in Germany – and ever since, there have been repeated approaches to integrating the topic into curricula (cf. Becker, 2001; Kyburz-Graber et al., 2001 and with a global perspective Spring, 2004). More recently these efforts are also grouped under the umbrella of education for sustainable development (Holfelder et al., 2021, p. 127). What is yet new about such demands for reformed curricula is a new weighting of the thematic field – climate protection and sustainability being treated as an essential element of education rather than a subsidiary subject (Burow, 2020). Additionally, practice-oriented and subject-didactic literature has been published for treating the topic of FFF in lessons (e.g., Reidelshöfer, 2020; Chucholowski, 2019).

2.2. Basic character of the movement in Germany and further research potential

First climate protest actions were held in Germany in September 2018 in Berlin. Local groups were founded in the wake of protests in 50 places in Germany, on January 18, 2019. Besides ongoing activities, FFF organised several global climate strike days worldwide, on March 15, 2019 respectively May 24, from September 20 to September 24, 2019 and on November 29, 2019. Swedish researchers initiated large-scale surveys of participants internationally: In March 2019, participants in 13 European cities (Berlin and Bremen in Germany) were interviewed (n = 1,905); in September 2019, 16 cities in Europe (Berlin and Chemnitz in Germany) as well as Mexico City, New York and Sydney were targeted by the researchers (n= 3,154) (Wahlström et al., 2019, p. 6; De Moor et al., 2020b, p. 8).

An assessment of the responses reveals some information about the protest movement profile in Germany: In March 2019, protesters were young and there was a majority of female participants. The age group of 14-19-year olds amounted to 51% and another 19% were between 20 and 25 years old (children aged under 14 were not surveyed). The participation rate of women amounted to 59,6 % (online survey), respectively 57,6% (local survey on site) (Sommer et al., 2019, chapter 3.2). A majority of the protesters came from a well-educated background and a high number of the protesters' parents were academics (ibid.). The German findings are reflected in a European comparison, with some variation regarding age distribution (Wahlström et al., 2020, p. 9). This might be linked to the individual stance taken by schools regarding the strike days and thus their facilitation or aggravation of participation in the strikes and reflect in how far older people also opted to join the students in the strikes.



Figure 1: FFF demonstration in Bonn, March 2019, picture by Mika Baumeister on Unsplash

600 local groups had emerged in Germany by August 2019, and in September 2019, when climate protests were held at the same time the federal “climate cabinet” convened, around 1.4 million people in Germany joined the global climate strike – compared to around 300,000 participants in March (Neuber & Gardner, 2020, p. 118). The proportion of women and the proportion of protesters (respectively their parents) from a highly educated background corresponded to the proportions in March, while there was a clear trend towards older protesters that would continue throughout the year. FFF had intended and desired such an expansion of the movement (De Moor et al, 2020a; Sommer et al., 2020, p. 60). Despite the high number of participants, FFF did not manage to mobilise an entire generation of students at this point. In this regard, its success is thus less linked to a nationwide mobilisation than to a continual, successful setting of the agenda (vbw, 2020, p. 12), as is evident from a Federal Constitutional Court ruling on the amendment of the climate protection act as of 29 April 2021 (BVerfG, 2021).

As a point of reference, FFF is highly committed to scientific evidence while concentrating on its main objective to urge the states that they should adhere to the Paris Agreement. Principally, this claim corresponds to a commitment Germany and many other states have already signed. Yet, the issue remains critical because the states have so far not been sufficiently engaged in their commitment to limiting global warming. FFF generally seeks little confrontation beyond the strikes, signals a willingness to debate in public and emphasizes a peaceful nature of protests (Sommer et al., 2019, chapter 4). For this reason, FFF has been labelled as one of the most harmless protest movement in Germany’s history with regard to its means of action (Watson, 2021). Following this line, leading activist Louisa Neubauer in an interview in summer 2020, for instance, saw FFF’s primary role in mobilising masses for climate protection rather than in supporting more radical protest activities that seem less acceptable for a majority of Germany’s society (taz, 2020). However, in the second half of 2021 debates about a possible radicalisation of the climate movement intensified. FFF leaders in Germany still placed all activities within the range of nonviolent actions, but formats other than mere school strikes – for instance blockades – were discussed more openly than before. Foremost, this debate evolved out of a high level

of dissatisfaction with politics after more than two years of protest activities (taz, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic started a new phase for FFF in spring 2020. While opportunities for public strikes became rare other activities evolved: some protests were relocated to the digital sphere, while others were organised with fewer persons and under strict surveillance of hygienic regulations. Besides this, activists used the time for further (digital) networking, professionalising and an intensified focus on politics and agenda setting. When asked about the effects of the pandemic FFF activists equally point to the problem that many groups suffered from a lack of new students when opportunities to attract younger students became very limited and the chance that a new understanding of critical situations in general and the priority to handle the pandemic over other interests might also lead to new ways to deal with the climate crisis (BR, 2021; MDR Sachsen-Anhalt, 2021). This latter view is also expressed in the slogan “Fight every crisis” that was widely used during the pandemic. Moreover, this slogan points to the interconnectedness of the various crises.

So far only few studies compare FFF with other climate protection groups (Stuart et al., 2020; Gentes et al., 2020; see Almeida, 2019, for an overview on transnational climate movements) and besides the important basis led by the two international surveys in 2019 there is also a lack of studies that compare FFF branches and their respective contexts internationally or of studies that compare FFF with other strike movements by young people, such as school strikes in the context of the Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003 or rallied in the “March for Our Lives” after a shooting at the Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida in 2018.

3. School strikes versus compulsory schooling: reactions from politics and educational administration

From 2019 onward, Fridays for Future could no longer be ignored owing to their chosen form of protest and the growing significance of the movement, while politicians and educational administrators have displayed different attitudes toward FFF varying between outright rejection and (cautious) approval. Disapprobation have most of all become known from FDP (“Freiheitliche Demokratische Partei” – the liberal party) and AFD (“Alternative für Deutschland” – a far-right party) party members. In the case of the AFD the example of a deliberately manipulated photography of a demonstration shows a case of massive defamation. This manipulated photo was meant to prove the students’ alleged “idiocy” with placards now showing spelling mistakes and a faked claim to get rid of all cars (RP Online, 2019). Other conservative parties however did express some guarded endorsement of the cause or sympathy for the young generation’s concern even if they disagree with their protest activities (cf. Sommer et al., 2019, chapter 3.6). Left-wing parties are finding it less difficult to approve – even if this is not always the case – and there are especially overlaps regarding the FFF movement and political objectives of the Green Party (“Die Grünen”). This party developed out of the environmental movement of the 1970s and 80s and its members are usually very open towards (nonviolent) public protest activities for environmental causes. Comparisons of voter behavior also regularly reveal that the Green party has a higher share of young (and female) voters whereas conservative and especially rightwing parties have a higher share of older voters (e.g. Bundeswahlleiter, 2022).

Regardless of the fact that educational politicians and administrators cannot principally endorse school strikes, leeway for coping with the FFF movement is visible. The conflict of school strikes as such is not new in this regard. Already in the 1970s, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) was concerned with establishing a framework for the students' democratic engagement. A balance was sought between the duty to attend school and the right to form an opinion – in the light of safeguarding the schools' mandate to educate the children (KMK, 1973). The KMK made no difference between compulsory schooling and a duty to attend school classes taking a clear position against “alleged school strikes” which it did not recognise as such, strikes being reserved for the world of labour (KMK, 1973, para IX, p. 11 and 12). Accordingly, individual students did not have a right to strike, and a right to demonstrate could only be exercised outside school hours. Still, an escalation of conflicts was to be avoided, and schools were advised to communicate with the students respectively their parents, inform them about the legal situation and act within reasonable limits in the case of repeated violations (KMK, 1973). In the recent history of schooling in Germany, school strikes have occurred that were concerned with the school system itself as well as school strikes relating to other political issues, see the anti-war protests against the Gulf Wars or protests in favour of a better protection of refugees. If cases were resolved in court, the courts took different stances with regard to the school strikes, as Teune demonstrates with two examples from 1991 and 2012 (Teune, 2020, p. 140).

Trumpa has investigated positions of the ministries of education regarding the FFF school strikes and for the first half of 2019, she identified three letters from Schleswig-Holstein, North-Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Wuerttemberg which contain instructions for schools on how to react to the strikes. Nolte quotes two more instructions for this period – one from the ministry of Saxony-Anhalt and one from a subordinate authority of the education ministry in Thuringia– that strongly criticize students' participation in FFF strikes (Nolte, 2019, p. 277; Trumpa, 2020). Given the three examples analysed by Trumpa, the Ministry of School and Education in North-Rhine Westphalia was the most outspoken but according to Trumpa this attempt at governance was little successful. In this case, schools were instructed to inform students and parents about the compulsory character of school attendance. It was unacceptable to grant students leave to go on strike, and the document points out that the teachers' mere recording of truancy time is insufficient (Trumpa, 2020, p. 23 and 29). On the other hand, the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture in Schleswig-Holstein argued in favour of being reasonable and integrating the topic into school instruction even if repeated failure to attend school remains unacceptable, and teachers in Baden-Wuerttemberg are advised to take the students' concerns seriously and integrate the topic into lessons, as well as finding pragmatic solutions to handling the failed attendance (Trumpa, 2020, pp. 22-23).

Trumpa's analysis (2020) corresponds to the impression that handling the matter is rather guided by political yardsticks than a uniform perception of educational administration. It is however noteworthy that by this point in time, most of the ministries did not react at all on the matter either because they did not think it was necessary or because they intentionally chose not to take position. Many schools reflect this stance, trying to seek a “middle position” and balance by issuing a caution or acceptance of truancy, or even accepting sick

notes for students as “conflict-free” means. There are also examples of schools and teachers who actively supported FFF and enabled participation in strike days as well as endorsing a more profound treatment of the climate crisis in lessons. Nolte (2019) and Hanschmann (2019) discuss the legal implications of FFF school strikes from a school administrative viewpoint and both argue in favour of legitimising FFF school strike activities at least occasionally.

Nolte also points to several solutions that could help justifying participation in FFF strikes for example by installing a rotating system of students in and out of school, by adjusting the schedule so that less lessons are missed or by offering additional lessons at different times (Nolte, 2019, p. 279). Already, most of the strike activities affected fringe times of lessons only (Teune, 2020, p. 138 and 141).



Figure 2: Translation “Out of School for Fridays for Future”, FFF Demonstration in Erlangen in March 2019; picture by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

In this regard, it is also interesting to look at Germany’s neighbour country, Austria, where in September and November 2019 the Ministry of Education allowed students to participate in the global climate strikes if participation corresponded with school-related activities. As a consequence, a decree was issued that allowed schools to integrate lessons into the strike activities (Haselwanter, 2020, pp. 3-4). The school authority in New York equally allowed students to participate in the strike week in September 2019 without recording truancy (Spiegel Online, 2019). In this case, the school authority’s decision was linked to the special attention the action received by Greta Thunberg sailing to New York over 15 days and speaking to the UN congregation. It seems likely that this decision was thus very deliberate and would not have been taken for ordinary weekly strike days. Yet, the repeated strike actions are a “trademark” of Fridays for Future.

4. Fridays for Future and the educational remit in school legislation in federal states in Germany

In Germany, school legislation is mandated by the 16 federal states. The school acts in the federal states first refer to the Basic Law of the Federal Republic and their respective state constitution. The outline of each state's concept of a right to education is then followed by superordinate goals, treated in terms of "remits to educate". These objectives concern the construction and cohesion of a society – e.g. education to promote a peaceful, democratic, inclusive society with equal rights as well as objectives promoting individual developmental goals, e.g., the ability to handle conflicts, vocational education skills or media and information education. An analysis of these superordinate educational goals can be found in Wiechmann and Becker (2016).

The educational objectives are formulated in very general terms concentrating on an outline of thematic areas that are deemed relevant, which are however already sketched in relation to the students' envisaged role as the target group (e.g. "students shall be enabled to", school act Lower Saxony, §2). A more concrete formulation of what is to be taught can be found in curricula which, contrary to the general school acts, relate to specific school subjects (cf. Bacia & Abs, 2017).

FFF activists in Germany have referred to the mandate to educate formulated in school legislation when intending to legitimise their protest actions. For instance, the German Fridays for Future website advises participants in the strikes to try and have the strike actions recognised as a school event, using school legislation as an argument basis and quoting examples from the school act in Lower Saxony even if the school acts do not offer any justification for the strikes (FFF Germany, 2021d). The connection FFF evokes between a possible justification and superordinate educational objectives codified in school legislation is subject to a closer examination below.

4.1 Education for democracy, climate and environmental protection in the light of the educational remit formulated in school legislation

In one way or the other the remit to educate children to become democratic citizens is postulated in all 16 school acts (Wiechmann & Becker, 2016, p. 298) – occasionally, this is emphasised by pointing out that the students should learn to confront National Socialism or other forms of totalitarianism (e.g. school act Brandenburg, §4, school act Saxony, §1). In the context of an education for democratic awareness and respective actions on the one hand as well as regarding critical-reflected thinking on the other hand, many educational objectives can also be related to FFF actions, even if they were not formulated with regard to the possibility of school strikes.

The educational objectives of "critically using information, orienting independently towards values, and acting accordingly", as well as the objective to "respect the truth and courageously acknowledge the truth" can be found in school legislation in Bremen (§5) while the objective to "take social and political responsibility and join others to defend common interests" is postulated in the school education act of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (§3). Other school acts also encourage students to "seek comprehensive information and critically use the information" (school act Lower Saxony, §2). The school act in Lower Saxony moreover calls on schools "to offer a space for experience and

creative freedom necessary to fulfil the educational remit” (school act Lower Saxony, §2). In a similar vein, the school act in North-Rhine Westphalia demands to support the “development of individuals, independence of their decisions and actions” (school act North-Rhine Westphalia, §2) to give just a few examples that illustrate the relevance of shaping responsibility and forming the ability to make judgements.

Clearly, the remit to teach democracy has a high priority in educational legislation. Conversely, participants in the global climate strikes in March 2019 voiced their strong interest in politics and in many cases, the under-age participants joined a political action for the first time in their lives. Sommer et al. (2020) therefore assume that the movement “renders an important contribution to raising political awareness of particularly young people and a general strengthening of citizen confidence” (p. 62; cf. Miethe & Roth, 2016). In this context, it is also important to note the authors’ pointing out that students who are politically active early in life will generally continue to show such activities later on (Sommer et al., 2019). Given the sinking participation rates in elections, FFF might thus even turn out to become a pillar of support for the political system in Germany in the future.

The school act of Berlin is the only legal remit to education that expressly mentions climate protection as a superordinate goal. Students are thus meant to “develop an understanding for the causes and effects of climate change and necessary adaptations to the consequences, experience measures to protect the climate and learn about an independent, responsible implementation of such measures in their daily lives” (school act Berlin, §3). Except for the school act in Baden-Wuerttemberg, all the other school acts formulate such an objective at least implicitly by listing environmental protection as an educational objective. This is viewed in conjunction with sustainable actions and a responsibility for future generations (e.g. school act Hesse, §2). The school act for Rhineland-Palatinate demands a “responsibility for nature, environment and the global sustainability goals” (§1), while similar formulations are postulated by a demand to protect “natural resources” (school act Saarland, §1) or to “establish responsibility for nature and the environment and instil willingness to work toward sustaining the habitats of plants, animals and human beings” (school act Schleswig-Holstein, §4). Additionally, Saarland (§1) places the educational objective of environmental protection in a context of a directive for environmental education.

In some cases and in a very broad sense, globalisation is mentioned in the context of environmental education by referring to the “international dimension of all life” (school act Berlin, §3). Besides environmental issues, the topic of globalisation in school legislation is linked to other aspects such as migration, intercultural competencies or international economic relationships. A reference to the PISA 2018 study (PISA = Programme for International Student Assessment) is interesting here, which paid tribute to the growing relevance of the topic by assessing “global competences” for the first time in 2018. Findings indicate a principal awareness for the topic of globalisation in German students who rated their own competencies in this area as being relatively high (Weis et al., 2020).

4.2 Shaping an identity in educational remits between regional and international attribution

First of all, a vague picture is predominant in the school acts regarding international relationships which is fed by an idea of international understanding and a reference to certain worldviews. All of the 16 school acts indicate that education to an international understanding is valuable (Wiechmann & Becker, 2016, p. 298) and in some federal states, such a statement is underpinned by reference to philosophical, theological or historical traditions. In terms of liberal ideals, Christianity is referred to as well as humanism but also antique history – lines of thought that are linked to a transnational European tradition. For instance, the school act in Berlin in §2 indicates the objectives of a “progressive shaping of relationships in society and a peaceful understanding of nations”. In this light, “ancient history, Christianity and all the movements in society that are directed towards humanism, freedom and peace” will be considered (school act Berlin §2). In Lower Saxony, following preschool, school is to further develop “students’ personalities on the basis of Christianity, European humanism and ideas of a liberal, democratic and social movement for freedom” (school act Lower Saxony, §2). Given such wordings, internationalism seems principally an asset of its own which, however, does not exclude other such attributions but is rather supplementary.

Besides educating students in terms of raising a competence for civilian duties, seven federal states – Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Thuringia and Schleswig-Holstein – also relate to the students’ future roles as European citizens in various ways. A rather vague conception of Europe targets Europe’s future given an idea of an “understanding of nations, and a vision of a shared future of nations in Europe, which needs to be grasped and supported, in terms of living together with people from different national and cultural backgrounds”, see the school act Lower Saxony, §2, while the school act in Bavaria refers to a “European awareness” in article 2,1, and the school act in Hesse explicitly mentions the European Union (“schools shall prepare students to exercise their tasks as citizens of the European Union”, school act Hesse, §2). Likewise the school act in Brandenburg (§4) emphasizes students’ taking on tasks at a European level (“preparing for their roles as citizens in a common Europe”).

An expansion of political levels of reference to an increasing opening to regional and international points of reference is particularly distinct in the case of Thuringia (§2), which reaches even beyond the level of Europe, as do some other federal states: “School nurtures a sense of belonging to Thuringia and Germany (original version: “pflegt die Verbundenheit mit der Heimat in Thüringen und in Deutschland“), it advances an openness towards Europe and raises an awareness for responsibility for humankind in the entire world”. On the contrary, the school act of Saxony-Anhalt stresses the objective of “nurturing a sense of esteem for students’ home environments in Europe“. Accordingly, the school is supposed to educate students “to become tolerant regarding cultural diversity and the understanding among nations, to recognise the relevance of their home in a unified Germany and a common Europe” (school act Saxony-Anhalt, §1). In terms of balancing national and international topics, the European Union itself has argued in favour of co-equally treating international and national topics with EU and national reference in the curriculum and daily life at school.

However, the EU has identified a need for a better integration of EU-specific and international topics into the school context (see Veugelers et al., 2017; cf. Abs, 2021). In

this context of overlapping political identities it is also worthwhile to point to a study of Wiseman, Astiz, Fabrega and Baker (2011), which indicates a constellation by which civic education is taught nationally but increasingly deals with values that are not restricted to individual states or singular communities but rather have universal significance (Wiseman et al., 2011). Figure 3 shows the overlap of attributions as it can, for instance, be deduced from the school act in Thuringia.

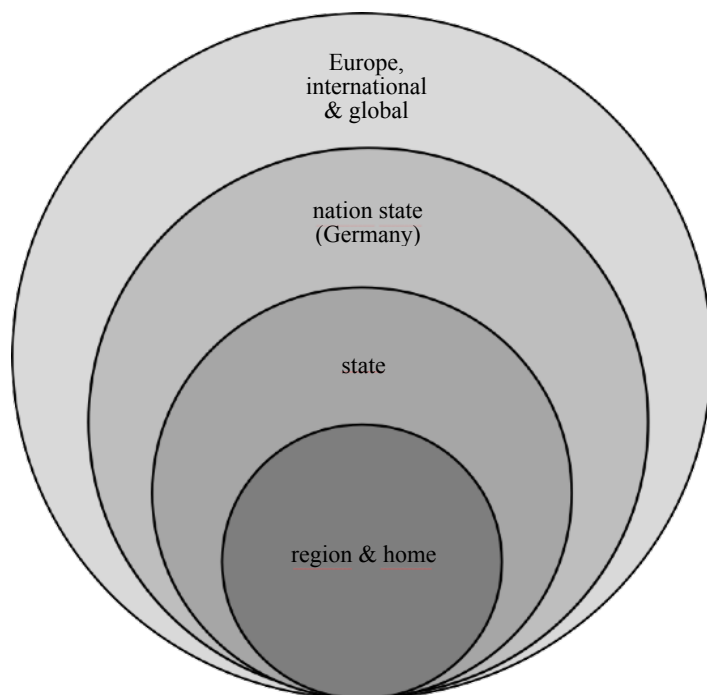


Figure 3 Possible overlaps of different attributions of students in the spectrum of regional to global identifications; the term home refers to the important German term “Heimat” which includes the identification with a geographical area considered as being one’s home.

A direct reference to home and a promotion of a sense of local belonging is mentioned in the school acts of seven federal states (Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia). An implicit reference is made by two other states which refer to regional cultural aspects (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania). In the context of regional cultural reference points, the protection of particular languages and people, e.g., Friesian or Sorb, also plays a role (e.g., Schleswig-Holstein and Saxony). The reference to a local “home” in particular shows that several levels come into play from the regional to the global. This is also established by connecting a love for the region with an understanding of nations, see the examples of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. In Baden-Wuerttemberg, the school act states that students should be raised “to show responsibility toward God, a spirit of Christian charity and compassion, and a love of peace and humankind, demonstrate a love of the nation and home, respect the dignity and the convictions of others“ (school act Baden-Wuerttemberg, §1). The Bavarian school act refers to the duty to educate students “in the spirit of democracy, a love for Bavaria, and the German people as well as towards a reconciliation of nations” (school act Bavaria, article 1). By recurring to a European and international context as well as a clearly regional sense of belonging, the school acts

demonstrate an understanding of identity that pervades ideas of a nation state. At the same time, a more precise definition of terms like “home” or “Europe” is avoided allowing leeway for interpretations. Looking at Fridays for Future, we can see that the movement with its international outlook can be inserted into the framework of internationalism as a superordinate or coexistent category. Yet leaving aside the few references to Europe and the rather global indications of educational remits, there are no concrete points that would encourage an international formation of identity.

Wiechmann and Becker (2019) have analysed in how far references to nation and home made in the school acts are reflected in the self-perceptions of a selected number of young people at the beginning of university. Their findings show that respondents to their study also did not understand the term “home” in terms of a delimitation, but rather in relation to a multidimensional understanding (*ibid.*). The overlap of diverse attributions can be aligned to a concept of nation building as an imaginary cultural construct (Anderson, 2016). Principally, students do not seem to find it difficult to assign themselves several “hybrid” identities, as becomes also clear in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study conducted, in the case of Germany, in North-Rhine Westphalia, where students simultaneously testified a sense of belonging to Europe and to Germany. Accordingly, “findings on a national and European identity reveal that collective belonging does not constitute an antagonistic system where a stronger sense of belonging to one collective would coincide with a weaker sense of belonging to a different category” (Jasper et al., 2017, p. 123). Rather, students who identified strongly with Europe also indicated a higher sense of belonging for Germany (*ibid.*, p. 124; cf. also Machold et al., 2020). Participants from Germany who joined the global climate strike in March 2019 stated a relatively high trust in the EU as an institution (Sommer et al., 2019, chapter 3.6; cf. Huth, 2019). This attitude is reflected in several FFF activities, which aim to put pressure on national states also via EU legislation, see the support for the citizen initiative ECI for Future (FFF Deutschland, 2021e). Huth argues that the rise in voter participation among young people in the EU election in 2019 can be linked to FFF mobilization in general as well as to FFF campaigns labelling the EU election a climate election (Huth, 2019, pp. 11-12).

In the public discussion about FFF activities, the interest of young climate activists in using and influencing political institutions – as already indicated in 4.1 – should be seen equally as a strengthening factor of democracy and as a successful implementation of educational goals. This aspect seems all the more important when taking a look at the further course of climate protection protests by young people in Germany, which can only be treated here as an outlook. As mentioned in section 2.2 in the fall of 2021, the question of an increasing radicalisation of the climate movement entered the public discussion. On the one hand, this discussion was triggered by an interview with the German press spokesperson of FFF Carla Reemtsma (*taz*, 2021), and on the other hand, during the weeks before the federal elections in Germany in September 2021, a new group emerged that uses more radical means than FFF to fight for climate protection. The activities of the group “The Last Generation” began with a hunger strike led by 7 men and women aged between 18 and 27 during the election campaign and subsequently included mainly street blockades – and in a few cases blockades at airports – or actions of a disruptive nature during events and in public buildings, e.g. in museums. Ongoing and explicit public debates about radical

forms of protest began, however, about a year later when “The Last Generation” became widely known and much more visible. It should be emphasised at this point that this group is also aiming at the reduction of emissions and climate protection measures such as the introduction of a speed limit on German highways or cheaper public transport, and although it resorts more clearly to illegal measures, in 2021 and 2022 it has been neither hostile to the constitution nor to democracy. However, this does not prevent parts of the public from ascribing this group terrorist inclinations (for a discussion on this debate cf. Spiegel, 2022; on the term “radicalisation” cf. also Neubauer & Ulrich, 2021, pp. 143-144).

From the perspective of this article, which deals with the Fridays for Future movement, it remains to be concluded that the aspect of education plays an important role in the topic and that education systems should be aware of this role - regardless of how it is then fulfilled by different actors in education. Fridays for Future operates on the ground of education systems and at the same time argues that education systems do not sufficiently prepare for the challenge of the climate crisis. For this reason, FFF also organises its own educational events (FFF Germany, 2023). And on the other hand, the question also arises as to what extent educational actors assume a responsibility in this complex situation. To cite just two examples from this spectrum, education systems are also challenged to equip young people with the skills they need, for example, to deal with (virtual) hostility from climate change deniers or to be able to assess different forms of protest in constitutional states. Against this background, exploring the connection between concerns for climate protection, definitions of democracy, and (international) patterns of identification is a worthwhile undertaking from an educational perspective.

5. Conclusion

School acts of the German federal states reflect topics for which an urgency to act has been identified by Fridays for Future as well as topics that correspond to principles of political action represented by FFF – even if the concrete objective of climate protection is barely mentioned as such. Rather, vague references are made to topics such as globalisation or sustainability that can be linked to a demand for educating minors to become democratically active citizens. This constellation aligns with a clear yet rather undefined attribution of international and transnational points of reference to which the federal German school system positions itself with a clear emphasis on regional and state levels.

The rather general formulations in the school acts have probably facilitated the emergence of a consensus during their creation – while also leaving leeway for interpretation with respect to the educational objectives. Therefore, they do not solve the issue of dealing with school strikes or registration of school events on FFF action days. In terms of moral justification, the educational remits can be taken into consideration but they cannot serve as legal principles of action.

Owing to its size and global nature, the FFF movement which is moreover characterized by repeated actions continually challenges educational politicians and administrators to act: Protest activities don't only take place during compulsory schooling hours, but also shed a new light on some fundamental aspects of education. Referring to the fact that school strikes are illegal actions is a relatively simple way of dealing with the problem, but

it does not do justice to the issue. It remains to be seen along which lines of protest actions the FFF movement will be organised in Germany following the Covid-19 pandemic – and also in how far the campaign will have a lasting effect on the mobilisation of different generations of students. Activities that evolved during the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of a discussion on a possible radicalization of the climate protection movement in general already showed some effects on the movement that might eventually broaden the range of protest formats while FFF also signaled that it follows its former lines of protests as has been demonstrated by FFF during the Glasgow Climate Change Conference in November 2021.

Moreover, the issue should be discussed whether schools should still equate mandatory schooling with the presence of students in the same building – after more than a year of continuing or repeated school closures, or whether it would rather be appropriate to consider new ways of participation in learning in certain cases. Especially in the latter regard, the publication of internationally comparative studies on the conflict between school strikes and the remit for education to democracy would be desirable in the light of protest movements addressing young people.

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Appendix

School acts in the federal states of the Federal Republic of Germany

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- Bavaria, [Bayerisches Gesetz über das Erziehungs- und Unterrichtswesen \(BAYEUG\)](#)
- Berlin, Schulgesetz für das Land Berlin (SchulG)
- Brandenburg, Brandenburgisches Schulgesetz (BbgSchulG)
- Bremen, Bremisches Schulgesetz (BremSchulG)
- Hamburg, Hamburgisches Schulgesetz (HmbSG)
- Hesse, Hessisches Schulgesetz (Schulgesetz - HSchG)
- Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania, Schulgesetz für das Land Mecklenburg- Vorpommern (SchulG M-V)
- Lower Saxony, [Niedersächsisches Schulgesetz \(NSchG\)](#)
- North-Rhine Westphalia, Schulgesetz für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen (SchulG)
- Rhineland-Palatinate, Schulgesetz (SchulG)
- Saarland, Schulordnungsgesetz (SchoG)
- Saxony, Sächsisches Schulgesetz (SächsGVBl)
- Saxony-Anhalt, Schulgesetz des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt (SchulG LSA)
- Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig-Holsteinisches Schulgesetz (Schulgesetz - SchulG)
- Thuringia, Thüringer Schulgesetz (ThürSchulG)