

Working paper on Ethical issues involving positionality, bias

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Climate, Inequality & Democratic Action:
The Force of Political Emotions



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Climate, Inequality, and Democratic Action: The Force of Political Emotions

Working paper on Ethical issues involving positionality, bias

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Executive Summary

Ethical considerations have become a central aspect of contemporary social research. This is particularly true when investigating polarizations, conflicts, and the collective moods and emotions associated with them. Such studies often raise critical questions about the researcher's positionality, potential biases, and the mediating role they may need to adopt when emotions run high. This deliverable, drawing on reflections from the diverse empirical contexts of the CIDAPE project, presents a comprehensive ethical memorandum tailored to CIDAPE's research. It also serves as a potential resource for anyone designing social and policy research that involves emotions, polarization, and contentious policy issues. The document begins by outlining the significance of bias, positionality, and reflexivity in social research focused on emotions. It then provides concrete examples from CIDAPE's research, illustrating these principles in practice and offering actionable insights for navigating similar challenges in other contexts.



1 Ethical dimension of the objectives, methodology and likely impact

In social research on democracy and polarization, emotions are both items of analysis and part of social practices intervening in data collection, fieldwork and presentation of the results. We take the latter as a centre of the present reflection. Assessing emotionality of others, requires reflecting upon the own positionality. This involves questions of potential bias that might affect coding practices going beyond the usual ethical consideration of data collection (see the debate e.g., in: Lunshof, Church, and Prainsack 2014; Tzortzatou-Nanopoulou et al. 2024) as well as general reflection on how collective moods, proceed by sociopolitical circumstances of research, impact the research design and the choice of methods. While some of these issues are commonly addressed in ethical guidelines of universities and public institutions providing infrastructure for social research, we summarize here some useful aspects of dealing with emotions during social research, tailoring the ethical issues to the needs of multi-method social research inquiry more specifically. We bring some specific issues that emerged and have been dealt with in the CIDAPE project in the second part of the paper.

The role of emotions in research on politics has been often reduced to discussions of emotions as mere impulses (McVeigh et al. 2024), motivations for action (Marcus 2022), or negative aspects of political debates (Maor 2016; Perl, Howlett, and Ramesh 2018) placing emotions on the opposite side of political rationality (see the critique of this approach in: Durnová 2019; Yordy, Durnová, and Weible 2024). In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic was a global multi-level political event bringing emotions to the forefront of political decision-making, prompting greater demand for research into how emotions influence policies (Orsini 2021; Weible et al. 2020). The climate debate and the related polarization are further areas making visible the demand for research in to how emotions enter the process of democratic politics (Hoffman, Versteeg, and Hajer 2024), shaping the way actors enter the political debate, react on citizen demands etc.

Social research on polarization linked to climate change involves a range of emotions: such as rage, anger, hope frustration (see the overview in: Neckel and Hasenfratz 2021). To begin with, the research design aiming at understanding the role of emotions in democratic politics involves the position that emotions are not disturbing political action but forming it in the first place. This means, from the very start, to contextualize what emotions mean in a particular situation, rather than assessing and quantifying what kind of emotions are present in political debates. According to Durnová et al (2024), social research always involves a dynamic interaction with the field including its sociopolitical tensions. From this point of view, emotions are a useful lens to make visible how researchers contextualize their research questions within collective moods, encapsulated in sociopolitical circumstances impacting the research design. Sociopolitical circumstances create the background for the research design, such as the call to analyse the role of emotions in democratic politics reflects the larger collective mood to be able to react on and do something about the rise of populist movements, protests moods and polarizing rhetorics. All this creates not only a certain need for research but also contextualizes this need of research within a specific collective mood: i.e., we need to do something about these emotions, we need to tame them, get hold of them, etc. This is important because it creates assumptions about the field positioning emotions as something to be tamed, controlled rather than embraces.

Reflecting such a set of assumption – as we do in CIDAPE – does not mean to contest the need to control emotions but allows to make visible that there are important epistemological processes that place emotions on the opposite of rational political actions (Durnová 2019) and that these epistemological processes need to be unpacked in the social inquiry in order to provide nuanced understandings of where all the emotions come from, how they are embedded in values and specific cultural context (see details in Deliverable 4.2). Assessing the emotionality of the climate debate requires openly reflecting on the challenges associated with designing both data collection and analysis methodologies. For instance, Work Package 5 employs “narrative go-along interviews” that deliberately steer away from directly discussing current polarization involved in the Green Deal, focusing instead on the nuances of everyday life of famers. This methodical setting allows participants to lead the interview, choosing the path (literally and metaphorically) and deciding what aspects of their experiences they consider important. This dilutes the power dynamics between researchers and participants, fostering a more egalitarian relationship and minimizing researcher-imposed biases. WP4, to bring another example of a similar procedure of reflection, deliberately avoids using terms like “climate change” or “climate crisis” when communicating with research participants and recruiting them for interviews. “Climate crisis” may be seen as a polarizing concept. Thus, WP4 adopts more neutral language, such as “changes to the environment”



to ensure that participants' subjective interpretations and references to climate-related issues emerge inductively, without the influence of predefined meanings or suggested interpretations.

Recent scholarship on ethics, emotions, and positionality in social sciences highlights the importance of reflexivity and ethical considerations in qualitative research, particularly when studying vulnerable populations. Researchers emphasize the need to articulate and manage emotions during sensitive research (Shaw et al. 2020) and conceptualize research as a process of care and negotiation (Moralli 2024). The ethical implications of researchers' positionality, whether blending in or standing out, are explored in relation to fieldwork experiences (Holmes 2021). Susceptibility toward emotions are recognized as a valuable tool for gaining ethnographic understanding, with researchers' personal experiences and shifting positionality offering insights into the life-worlds of their interlocutors (Rocca 2019). These studies underscore the importance of considering emotions, ethics, and positionality in qualitative research methodologies to ensure respectful, safe, and meaningful research practices that benefit both researchers and participants.

Works on positionality and overall quality of research in qualitative methods have also brought emotions to the centre of the debate (Knight and Zempi 2020). Finding the appropriate research attitude and revealing potential limitations and biases does bring emotions in, not only as items to observe and analyse but also as instances that interact with researchers and impact their analysis. Useful inspiration, in this regard, are works on ethnography and qualitative methods that highlight difficulties and ambivalences linked to fieldwork (Van Maanen 1988), in particular those that bring forward the need to situate the engagement of the researcher in the field and their impact on the research process. Shehata, to illustrate this dimension, views the researcher as a "positioned subject" (Shehata 2006, 246). This means that research always need to be aware of their position that affects the way they get access to the field, to research participant. However, the identity of the researcher impacts the entrance to the field, not in the sense of disturbing the research, but actually improving it because the researchers are able to see implicit meanings and values that might have stayed under the surface of the positioning had not been addressed. As Shehata outlines: " (...) It has always seemed to me that the most important questions in the social sciences are not about macro structures, large processes, or social institutions – but about people: living, breathing, flesh and blood, real people who, it turns out, whether intentionally or not, produce structures, set processes in motion, and establish institutions" (Shehata 2006, 244). In a similar vein, Stodulka makes the point about the role of emotions during fieldwork more explicit. In explaining his own subjectivity in the field, he discusses how, in his research, he needed to overcome the initial need to differentiate between "the real fieldnotes" and the emotional ones. He kept two research diaries: one being reserved to his feelings during the fieldwork. However, during the process of the research, he realizes that these so-called emotional notes, noted in a separate research diary, contain essential information about the values structuring the field and giving thus a more plastic picture of the identity of those whom he has been researching (Stodulka 2014).

Examples like these are embedded in the broader discussion in social research regarding the role of reflexivity and insider epistemology, which ultimately tie back to the analysis of emotions embedded in diverse social structures and societal dynamics. Insider epistemology, a classical tool in social research, emphasizes intentional investigation of perspectives, comparing data, and critically examining the researcher's own standpoint (Fay, 2005). This can be achieved by examining diverse perspectives on the policy issues studies, including the researcher's own, using self-reflexivity as a tool for deeper analysis and comparison. Similarly, Richardson (1994) advocates for integrating the "narrative of the self" in research writing to enhance reader engagement and reveal underlying political or ideological agendas in the presentation of data. Self-reflexivity, in that regard, involves presenting data transparently, revealing sociopolitical circumstances during the research process. This does not mean to enter the ever-returning debates about the relation between scientific inquiry and politics, but more a sensitivity toward the political debates amid the research is situated. If reflected, it can enhance readers' understanding of the social impact of the issues being analysed (see: Durnová, Hejzlarová, and Muralová 2024 for the discussion).

These discussions have recently gained prominence in feminist research on emotions (Ahmed 2013; Patterson and Larios 2021), which stresses the importance of situating research, making the researcher's positionality more visible in both the design and discussion of the analysis (Blakely 2007). For instance, Capurro (Capurro 2021) describes the researcher in the field as a *negotiator*, mediating both the emotions of others and their own. This perspective is particularly compelling as it brings forward emotional work done by researchers and centres the discussion on the needs of researcher themselves (see the overview of the debate, e.g., in: Finlay 2002) which is relevant for research infrastructures that should acquire ample time for data collection



phases so that researcher can also recover from the emotional work and can plan the research in an emotionally sustainable manner. Such reflections also intersect embodiment aspects in ethnographic research (van Amsterdam 2015). Researchers' embodied identities may position them as insiders (for example sharing a common identity with participants) or outsiders (differentiated by status, culture, or race), shaping what participants share and how they act during the research. Furthermore, emotions can trigger shifts in consciousness, challenging assumptions about the field and raising questions about inter-subjectivity and ethical considerations in fieldwork interactions (Wilcock 2024).

CIDAPE research involves all these questions in different ways and addresses them through different methodical skills. The following section explains in detail how we are addressing potential ethical issues and data management needs¹. In the subsequent sections, the ethical dimension of the different work packages (hereinafter referred to as WPs) within the project are explained in detail.

2 Compliance with ethical principles and relevant legislations

CIDAPE involves human participants who are volunteers for social science research. Participants are recruited on a purely voluntary basis, and consent is and will be discussed before any research activities commence. In the turbulent political times we currently live in, particularly with regard to environmental issues, the group(s) studied are vulnerable insofar as they may be subject to on- or offline abuse; however, since the research takes place in democratic EU countries, they are in a relatively safe and protected environment. Their vulnerability would not obstruct their ability to be fully informed about the nature and objectives of the research or to give or reject consent. Nevertheless, we will take extra care to protect the rights, values, and interests of the research participants.

- Inclusion is based on participating in a particular event. It is important to make clear to people that they are in no way obligated to participate by virtue of their involvement in the event.
- We are including participants regardless of sex and gender, although we attempt to include an equal number of male and female participants. Third or transgender participants will also be included. We include participants regardless of age, although we attempt to recruit across a range of ages and there is a minimum age-limit of 18 to avoid ethical issues, and because the perspective of minors is not necessary for this research. We explicitly seek to recruit people from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

Free and fully informed consent needs to be always obtained. This means that participants are fully informed about the nature, risks, and benefits of the research. We request that all participants sign a consent form before any research activities take place. Given the methodology employed, e.g., ethnography, it is necessary to make clear that consent would be given to use all observations and conversations over the designated period of fieldwork, and not just formalized interviews, unless the participant requests that a particular interaction is not to be used for research purposes. During fieldwork, we repeatedly provide oral reminders and re-request oral consent, however, the consent form in principle, allows us to store all observation and interaction as data. In some cases, it might be impossible to obtain written consent from all participants, for example, when we attend large gatherings as observers. In these cases, we usually obtain written consent only from speakers (if relevant), and attendees will be informed of the researcher's presence and given a written or oral summary of the research, with an option to refuse access and to contact the researcher directly. In other cases, one-off

¹ CIDAPE needs data from social media, activists, stakeholders, and citizens. We scrupulously protect confidentiality of our respondents and ensure that these datasets are and can only be used for the exact purpose of the respective study. Personal data will never be published other than in an aggregated and/or anonymous form in order to protect the privacy of those concerned (in interviews, focus groups, and group discussions). CIDAPE research follows EU guidelines as well as the ethical guidelines of all consortium partners. All the work packages and institutions handling data, comply with the following EU, national, and university-wide legal and ethics requirements: General Data Protection Regulation No 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which offers guidelines on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing and free movement of personal data; the Codes of Conduct for Research Integrity of all the consortium Member countries; and the Code of Conduct and Policy Framework for Research Data of respective Research institutions. The research involves the collection of sensitive data (social and political identity), and the University Ethics committee have authorized its processing and handling not later than before setting up the fieldwork.



interactions with people who are not formally participants would be used as data only when oral or written consent has been obtained.

Research in CIDAPE involves personal data collection. Data is collected through observation, conversation, and casual interaction; focus groups; interviews; and video. All data is either stored in written field notes, digital recordings, or video. All data is made anonymous as soon as it is processed, i.e., in all written and recorded data names are immediately removed or replaced by pseudonyms. Besides names, any other potential identifiers would immediately be deleted or would not be included in field notes or audio data. All written data, audio data, and transcripts are saved on a Virtual Server as made available by the Research institutions. The data will be conserved for ten years on encrypted files, after which the data will be given back to researchers. This data transition will be executed by procedures based on the ISO/IEC 27002:2013 norms. For internal communication, for instance, communication regarding data between researchers involved in the fieldwork, their institutions' intranet (secured access) is used. Any unused video data will be deleted, while the finished video product will be made publicly available.

Every effort will be made to avoid causing unnecessary psychological harm or feelings of vulnerability potentially caused by participation in research on sensitive issues. Efforts include sensitive questioning, being upfront about the theoretical framework, and at all times allowing for the co- construction of interaction and interviews.

The collection of sensitive data is essential because it concerns a study of people's emotions; and a study of people's emotions is necessary and justified to understand how to make better environmental policy. To ensure that such policies resonate with people's lived realities, rather than relying on technocratic processes, one must collect sensitive, personal data on values, attitudes, and opinions from the diverse array of people that will be impacted.

The research has a potential for misuse of the research results, although this is a small possibility and only when research results are deliberately used to cause harm. For instance, data could be used by companies or individuals that are opposed to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Data may be used to mischaracterize those involved in one or another activity. We address this issue, firstly, by anonymizing and safely storing all data as described above. Secondly, we will only include sensitive data in any public material, including the documentary, where it is necessary to meet the objectives of the research as described above. Where we publicise sensitive data, we will ensure to never cause an unnecessarily negative representation and to never publicise sensitive data out of its context. However, we cannot entirely avoid that the data we publicise may be used to misrepresent and cause harm to groups. We maintain that the potential benefits of the research (developing inclusive policy processes) outdo the potential harm that may be caused by a potential misuse of the research results, and that hence the research remains justified.

Further to this, a data management plan was provided (in the form of Deliverable D1.2, see details there) to ensure that the data of the current research comply with FAIR principles and Open Science. In consultation with the data privacy expert at the respective institutions of the consortium members, we make sure that the personal data are being protected based on the GDPR guidelines in the collection, analysis, and publishing phases of this research. WP8 oversees and coordinate this.

3 Ethical dimension of the different Work Packages within CIDAPE

Research and data collection just as all project activities are structured into work packages (WPs) within the CIDAPE project. All WPs have obtained the necessary ethics clearance: involved were Charles University; Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna (for WP1, WP3, WP4 and WP8); Council of Internal Evaluation at the Metropolitan University Prague (for WP5) the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht (for WP7); University Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences (for WP6). Below we outline the most important specific point that require particular attention.

3.1 Work Package 2

For Work Package 2 (WP2) we collect posts by specific public actors, e.g., politicians, political parties, NGOs, and media. These posts are intentionally directed at the public and are designed to influence public discourse, making their analysis a matter of significant public interest. Our research approach is underpinned by a strong commitment to ethical standards. We ensure that the data collection process respects the boundaries of publicly available information while maintaining transparency about our positionality as researchers. By



critically engaging with these materials, we aim to provide insights that contribute to a nuanced understanding of political communication dynamics, ensuring that our work respects the dignity and rights of all stakeholders involved.

3.2 Work Package 3

Work Package 3 (WP3) analyses specifically citizens' climate change communication on social media. We applied, and have been granted, data access for research purposes through platforms' official channels, in this case TikTok and Reddit, to make use of their automated channels, APIs, and store anonymized data without personal identifying information. Through the TikTok Research API, we can request data about posted content for a list of pre-defined accounts or a list of specific keywords. We can further collect comments for specific posts or meta-information for accounts. The data is stored at secure cloud storage provided by the University of Vienna². The study keeps with the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which suggests a contextualized, case-based approach considering eventual or probable harm and risk, grade of vulnerability, and respect for persons (Franzke et al., 2020; Markham and Buchanan, 2012).

WP3 offers a very important example of how to handle ethics in quantitative data analysis and computational approaches more specifically. Computational approaches are used to analyse large volumes of digital communication on different platforms. Computational approaches are also validated via manual coding. Ethical considerations concerning the protection of social media data who post contents as well as the protection of human coders who view and code parts of the collected data are briefly outlined:

Protection of Social Media Users

Data minimization: WP3 collects and processes only data essential to the study's objectives, avoiding storage of metadata or content beyond what is strictly needed for analysis.

Data access: Data access is strictly limited to authorized team members through secure access protocols.

Data collection: Data is gathered using platform APIs designed for academic research, which typically restrict access to publicly available information (e.g., no private chat groups or private profiles). To ensure that only data from public profiles is included, we will regularly refresh API data and delete any information no longer available through the API. Data collection is conducted by specifying a) lists of relevant public accounts, groups, or pages, b) keywords related to climate change discourse, and c) posts with their associated comments.

Informed consent: Ideally, each social media user would provide explicit consent to use their data for research. However, given the scale of data required, this is rarely feasible. Instead, GDPR Article 9(2)(e) permits processing public data without explicit consent if it is "manifestly made public by the data subject."

User types: Data collection from public-interest accounts (e.g., politicians, media outlets, NGOs, or accounts with large followings) typically include richer metadata. For individual users, however, API restrictions limit metadata access. Additionally, to protect individual users' privacy, identifiable data such as usernames and locations are pseudonymized in compliance with GDPR guidelines.

Data storage: Data is stored on a cloud server at the University of Vienna.

Data processing: For manual data processing, each data unit (e.g., text, image, video) is assigned a unique ID, with coders having no access to metadata such as usernames or locations, to protect social media users' identities.

When considering computational processing via third-party services (e.g., machine translation through DeepL, language models like GPT via Open AI), we ensure compliance with each platform's Terms of Use. Additionally, we select third-party services that implement strong data protections, storing data only temporarily to complete the processing task before promptly deleting it.

Data publication and data deletion:

For Deliverable D3.2, WP3 will publish select portions of the data in compliance with each platform's Terms of Use. This dataset will likely include aggregated data and specific metadata permissible for research sharing. Access to this data will be restricted to researchers.

All other social media data, aside from sharable or aggregated parts, will be deleted once it has served its purpose at the project's conclusion.

² Attending to any copyright restrictions, we will publish our research open access and also deposit in institutional repositories for long-term digital preservation.



Frequent Compliance Checks: WP3 regularly reviews data handling practices to ensure ongoing compliance with legal and ethical standards as well as the latest best practices for data privacy in research.

Protection of Human Coders

To validate computational methods, human coders will manually code selected data based on predefined variables. Although the focus on climate change, a relatively “mild” topic, and platform guidelines make disturbing content (e.g., extreme narratives or hate speech) unlikely, such material may occasionally arise. To support coders, we’ve implemented several protective measures: coders are fully briefed on the task before agreeing, can pause or discontinue work at any time, and are encouraged to discuss any unsettling content encountered during the process.

3.3 Work Package 4 and Work Package 5

The project was reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna and approved by December 1, 2023.

In Work Package 4 (WP4), semi-structured interviews are conducted with respondents from various class backgrounds in Norway, Slovakia, Spain, and Austria. The recruitment and interview process began in the fall of 2024 and is ongoing. Some of the ethical challenges encountered during these initial stages and the measures implemented to address them, are detailed in the following.

Central to the ethical considerations was ensuring participant comfort, maintaining confidentiality, and adapting to situational constraints. Participants varied in their familiarity with interviews. Some had prior experiences in educational or activist contexts, which enabled them to share their perspectives more openly. Others, particularly those unfamiliar with interview settings, expressed a certain degree of uncertainty about their responses. They required reassurance that their contributions were valuable and valid. For all participants, creating a supportive environment and emphasizing that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers were critical. Concerns about job security and the anonymity of shared information emerged as challenges. Some participants were defensive about discussing sensitive topics, such as workplace dynamics or behaviours, fearing potential repercussions. This concern was articulated especially in cases where participants knew one another, such as employees and their supervisors. To address these issues, the research team emphasized before each interview that all data would be anonymized to ensure neither individuals nor workplaces could be identified. Participants were assured that their information would only be analysed at a structural and abstract level, with no connection to specific organizations or personal details in published findings.

WP4 placed emphasis on the adaptability of logistics, while conducting interviews. Workplace interviews, while convenient for participants, sometimes faced interruptions or privacy challenges, particularly in shared spaces. Ensuring closed, private rooms and pausing recordings during interruptions, especially when sensitive information such as patient data arose, were critical steps to maintain confidentiality. Scheduling challenges with high-demand participants required us to condense interview questions without compromising the study's depth in some exceptional cases. Similarly, logistical issues, such as delays in participants reaching the venue, demonstrated the importance of flexibility in planning and conducting interviews. Researchers of WP4 made sure to prioritize participant well-being and ensure confidentiality measures throughout the process.

Work Package 5 (WP5) undertakes interviews and field research among farmers in Czechia and Italy to explore how they emotionally make sense of the climate crisis. Focusing on small farmers and agricultural workers from vulnerable agricultural regions, WP5 pays particular attention to individuals who often express dissatisfaction and distrust toward governments and other authorities. These dynamics require a careful and ethically sound approach to how their personal information and data are collected, stored, and used. The research proceeds transparently and adheres to GDPR standards and established good research practices. Farmers are introduced to the project, its aims, and the researchers’ roles as scientists. Informed consent sheets clearly outline the researchers’ identities, contact details, and the CIDAPE project’s affiliation and website. Participants are assured of the anonymization of their information unless they explicitly request otherwise in writing. Data, including recordings, are securely stored on a protected server operated by the Metropolitan University Prague and shared exclusively within the WP5 team. These measures ensure that farmers’ trust is honoured, and ethical standards are maintained. This ethical framework is crucial. At the same time, given the context of the agricultural sector, which is among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts such as extreme weather events, prolonged droughts, and shifting crop viability it is necessary to ponder the emotionality of the issues as well. The emotionality involves the polarizing context of the agricultural sector, within the climate change debate as well as the political efforts regulating it. Farming contributes significantly to global



carbon emissions, positioning the sector as both a victim and contributor to the climate crisis. Recent protests across Europe, notably before the 2024 European Parliament elections, highlight growing dissatisfaction with policymaking that many farmers feel ignores their lived experiences and emotional realities.

WP5 approaches farmers' dissatisfaction by focusing on their everyday experiences, rather than directly addressing topics like the Green Deal or climate politics. This deliberate choice acknowledges the emotional sensitivity of these issues while offering a valuable opportunity to understand how tensions around agriculture arise and evolve. Through narrative walk-along interviews conducted in the farmers' working environments, researchers gain insights into how they emotionally interpret and respond to the material impacts of climate change. By situating the conversation in the rhythms of daily life—rather than framing it around political debates—this method reveals not only the values and beliefs that guide farmers' actions but also how their lived experiences shape their perspectives on broader societal and environmental challenges. This grounded approach provides a nuanced lens into how emotional and practical concerns intersect, offering a deeper understanding of their engagement with climate and agricultural politics.

A critical dimension of WP5's approach is reflecting on the positionality of the researchers themselves. Engaging with farmers in their lived contexts—walking with them through fields or vineyards and entering their spaces of labour—requires researchers to navigate the dynamics of trust, empathy, and shared vulnerability. Positionality, including how researchers are perceived as insiders or outsiders, directly impacts the narratives that farmers feel comfortable sharing. Discussions of emotionally charged topics, such as frustration, loss, or hope, are shaped by the relational dynamics between researcher and participant. The subsequent narrative analysis focuses on how participants position themselves and others within their stories. This provides insights into their cognitive and social maps, highlighting their subjective experiences and reducing the risk of researcher misinterpretation.

By amplifying the voices and emotions of farmers, WP5 contributes to a deeper understanding of how these individuals experience and respond to climate change. This co-construction of knowledge, shaped by the emotional and subjective experiences of both participants and researchers, provides critical insights for policymakers. Including these perspectives can foster more inclusive, empathetic, and practical climate policies that reflect the lived realities of rural communities. Ultimately, WP5 demonstrates how a focus on ethical practices and researcher positionality can enhance the study of emotions in social research, ensuring both methodological rigor and meaningful engagement with those most affected by the climate crisis.

3.4 Work Package 6 and Work Package 7

In Work Package 6 (see details in Deliverable 6.1.), we aim to examine how climate emotions intersect with feelings of inequality and gender identities within the context of climate activism. Using deliberative focus groups as our primary methodology (see Harris 2019), we create structured spaces where participants can engage in peer-to-peer discussions about complex emotional and political issues. The focus groups include fictional protest scenarios designed to elicit thoughtful deliberation, allowing participants to co-produce knowledge and reflect on their own emotional reactions and values. This approach empowers citizens by democratizing expertise and fostering inclusive discussions that integrate diverse experiences. It also enables researchers to observe how emotions are framed and reframed through group interactions, providing deeper insights into the relational and embodied nature of political emotions.

Ethical considerations are central to the research design of WP6, given the nature of the topics discussed and the diverse backgrounds of participants. Ethical challenges can arise from power imbalances, participant discomfort, and the risk of reinforcing biases. Moreover, the positionality of researchers—their socio-political contexts, values, and assumptions—can influence how scenarios are framed, discussions are facilitated, and findings are interpreted. To navigate these challenges, WP6 adopts a robust framework to ensure ethical integrity.

First, transparency is maintained by fully informing participants about the purpose of the study, the nature of the deliberative activities, and their rights, ensuring voluntary and informed participation. Second, moderators are trained to facilitate discussions neutrally, ensuring all voices are heard and respected. Neutral facilitation helps prevent undue influence from the moderators and encourages balanced contributions from all participants. Third, regular reflection sessions among the research team are conducted to critically assess any potential biases and the impact of the researchers' positionality on the research process.

To further safeguard ethical standards, participant data is anonymized, and stringent data security measures are implemented to ensure confidentiality. During the focus groups, scenarios are deliberately crafted



to be open-ended, allowing participants to interpret and engage with them based on their own perspectives. This approach ensures that the research reflects authentic participant experiences rather than being shaped by preconceived researcher biases. Additionally, facilitators encourage participants to voice their emotional and critical reactions, creating a dialogue that respects the complexity of the issues discussed.

By embedding these practices, WP6 ensures that its research not only adheres to the highest ethical standards but also authentically captures the diversity of perspectives and experiences. This commitment enhances the validity and reliability of the findings while contributing meaningfully to the discourse on climate emotions, inequality, and activism. Through these measures, WP6 demonstrates how rigorous ethical protocols can be seamlessly integrated into innovative research methodologies to produce robust and socially responsible outcomes.

Work Package 7 (WP7³) explores how emotions connecting climate change and inequality surface and are dramaturgically channeled in live settings representing the state of the art in citizen engagement. WP7 combines approaches from sociology, political science, theatre studies, religious studies, and anthropology to provide a “total” analysis of citizen engagement events. It also proceeds in a transdisciplinary fashion, involving collaborations between academics, policymakers, artists, activists, and direct actors, drawing on alternative understandings of knowledge and action to provide a tangible policy intervention.

Data collected during the WP7 experiments will be stored in an encrypted cloud service for the duration of the project. The backup of the data will be stored at encrypted offline data storage. Data types include: the demographic variables of all participants, presenters and facilitators; transcription and recording of presentations and Q&A sessions provided by civil society members; transcription and recording of participants' discussions with facilitators; a final document written by members of research involving group discussions.

WP7 experiments with an alternative format of engagement, participatory research tools, that provide clear lessons for policymakers. This means that reflexivity and transparency about research positionality are key to its success. By embedding reflexivity and transparency into every stage of the research process, WP7 aims to critically evaluate the role of researchers as facilitators and mediators in highly charged emotional settings. This entails acknowledging and addressing potential biases, as well as fostering an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives can be authentically represented. WP7 seeks to develop and refine participatory research tools that not only enhance engagement but also ensure that the voices of underrepresented and marginalized groups are meaningfully integrated. Ultimately, WP7 aspires to translate CIDAPE's findings into actionable insights, offering policymakers evidence-based recommendations for designing citizen engagement practices that effectively bridge divides, amplify collective understanding, and inspire transformative action on climate change and inequality toward an emotionally sustainable democratic environment.

³ The research plan of WP7 was submitted to the Ethics Review Board – Faculties of Science and Geosciences at the University of Utrecht in December 2024. The board's review standards are derived from codes of (professional) conduct and applicable legislation and regulations.



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