



## *Climate Activism*

What is activism? The answer is, typically, that it is a form of opposition, often expressed on the streets. Skoglund and Böhm argue differently. They identify forms of ‘insider activism’ within corporations, state agencies and villages, showing how people seek to transform society by working within the system, rather than outright opposing it. Using extensive empirical data, Skoglund and Böhm analyse the transformation of climate activism in a rapidly changing political landscape, arguing that it is time to think beyond the tensions between activism and enterprise. They trace the everyday renewable energy actions of a growing ‘epistemic community’ of climate activists who are dispersed across organisational boundaries and domains. This book is testament to a new way of understanding activism as an organisational force that brings about the transition towards sustainability across business and society and is of interest to social science scholars of business, renewable energy and sustainable development.

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# Climate Activism

How Communities Take Renewable Energy  
Actions Across Business and Society

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## *Foreword*

This book delivers important insights on an often overlooked driver of transformation towards a more sustainable world by its focus on the changing political landscape for climate activism. Skoglund and Böhm critically analyse how ‘activism’ is emerging through forceful ‘epistemic communities’, shaped in collaborations between citizens, businesses and state actors, who share the ambition of decarbonisation. The empirical context is the renewable energy sector and the authors investigate how various forms of ‘insider’ and commercial activism speed up a political agenda that has so far only moved slowly by the assistance of national and international organisations.

Skoglund and Böhm move the long-standing strands of environmental activism from an activity that is happening ‘outside’ political and business organisations – and oftentimes ‘against’ these organisations – to something that occurs ‘inside’ with ‘support’ of organisational constituents.

By advancing theory on the organisational force of knowledge movements, the book offers an important new and balanced perspective on a phenomenon that transcends prevailing studies of transformative change. At the same time, the authors acknowledge the substantial commercial interests that are at stake when ‘non-partisan’ citizens are stimulated to become activists in relation to renewable energy, and they critically point to how climate activism goes beyond old ideas of deliberative democracy when ‘the will of the people’ is increasingly detached from the democratically elected governors. While they do so, they also point our attention to how activism is animated ‘from within’ small towns, villages and among employees, and, importantly, take climate adaptation to a new level of climate action across organisational boundaries.

This book is a much welcomed contribution to the Business, Values Creation and Society. I hope it will serve to stimulate future debates on the different roles of activism to drive the social and environmental transformation of contemporary society.

*Mette Morsing*

## *Preface*

It is spring. The leaves have just come out on the branches that hang gently over the narrow and muddy gravel road that leads to Decarbonised Living Project in Farmers Village (pseudonyms), deep in the countryside of south-west England. We pass custom-made signs with elaborate names of various sized estates behind closed entry gates. A mix of farmers, relatively rich landowners and people with summer houses live here. We get closer to the location where we are to meet a group of pensioners and a farmer who have got together with the ambition to decarbonise their village. After parking the car we walk slowly up the road to take some photos on the way. The first thing we encounter is a road sign in the shape of a snail, warning drivers to reduce their speed on account of the children who, during the week, attend a small, alternative school in a little round house, just in front of the old, renovated farm building where our meeting is to be held. The farm is used as a venue for parties, such as weddings and corporate team-building events. There are at least forty pairs of wellies, some hung on a wall and some spread on the floor, for guests to use in case there is an activity arranged in the muddy fields. We are guided around the property in the warm, soothing spring sun before being offered coffee and raw milk on the first floor of the damp and chilly stone barn. It is freezing indoors, and therefore hard to enjoy the conversation fully. Our hosts try their best to make us feel very welcome, and we are informed that the raw milk can only be given away as a gift, since the local farmer, who is part of the voluntary group, does not yet have a licence to sell it. They start to chat with us immediately about their life decisions and how they have come together to keep busy, make friends and belong, and as one of them enthusiastically summarizes:

Well, what happened, I mean, we were interested in renewable energy straight away and we'd have people talk to us about wind turbines. Community Energy Network certainly came and talked to us about, you know, wind turbines. And I remember going down to meetings at Community Energy Plus with Thomas and probably Peter, where they also talked to a

wider audience, because they were keen on getting wind turbines started up here. And then, in late 2009, the government set up a challenge called the Decarbonised Living Challenge. And they were offering the people, or the communities that applied, half a million pounds, and there were, I think, twenty-four villages that, you know, got this.

So, I think, yeah, it was probably Thomas that said ‘Well, yeah, we’ll do this’, so even though it seemed a bit ... yeah, you know, as a transition town movement that started in 2008 we hadn’t been involved for that long. But we were able to say that, you know, we have been engaged in the whole exercise through some energy surveys, and we were able to put down enough things. But anyway, Community Energy Plus were keen, because you had to do it through an organisation, like Community Energy Network.

So we then had to put the bid in, so it was all a very rushed job of getting, you know, people who would be interested in having solar panels on their house and you know, other things. I think the idea was that it would be an example of all the different types of renewable energy installation available at the time. So, ground source, air source, hot water panels, PV, turbines. And one of the conditions was that all the work had to be done by the end of the financial year. So everything had to be done by March 31st. We had to get all the solar panels on the roofs, we had to get the wind turbine bought. We had to have bought all and have the wind turbine on site I think, even if it wasn’t erected. And we had to get planning permission!

But we didn’t manage to do all the installation we intended to do, because the people, we had people quote for this and well, I think they’d have to quote before we put the whole scheme in, so that we could say we could do it for half a million. And we had people rushing around here, you know, whole groups of contractors turned up mob-handed. I mean, one of the places to end up with a solar panel was my place, which is a converted barn. We had about five groups of people turning up there, because they’re competing with each other to get the business anyway, you know.

We were going to take all the feed-in tariffs and renewable heat incentives, if they ever came, and use those to do further installations. So, that was the whole concept. The model that we adopted was to actually give these solar panels to the people, so that they took ownership and they wrote a contract with us, and our liability was to keep them maintained, in return for all the feed-in-tariffs coming back to us. Because we took the income, we could then roll it over into more insulation. So it is, I think, nearly unique in the community, and was pretty complex from a legal point of view. I think this is why we are unique, yeah, the fact that we’ve got a revenue stream, we are able to go well beyond what a lot of the transition groups have become, which is just talk shops. We’re able to action initiatives on the ground; I think that’s been key to probably the reason why you’re here talking to us today.



Figure 0.1 Wellies for collective walks in mud, Farmers Village. Photo: Annika Skoglund

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Various academic colleagues have greatly contributed to our thoughts about climate activism in this book. On 14 September 2018, we organised the workshop ‘Prefiguring Activism: Free Spaces of Socio-Ecological Change’ at the British Academy in London. We would like to thank all speakers and participants who helped to make this an enjoyable day full of creativity and debate. Mike Zundel, David Sköld, Johannes Stripple, Chris Land and Oscar Fitch-Roy very kindly commented on earlier versions of this book. Their comments and the comments from the anonymous reviewers, have been very helpful during the various revision stages. Our thanks also extend to the editors of the Cambridge book series Business, Society, and Value Creation, Mette Morsing, Jeremy Moon and Ed Freeman, who enthusiastically supported our project. The commissioning editor, Valerie Appleby, and her colleagues at Cambridge University Press have kept us on a straight line. Thank you.

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*Acknowledgements*

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activism. It has been a pleasure to learn from your rich experiences and devotion to various renewable energy technologies and, not least, the ‘belonging’ these have facilitated.

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