By2020WeRoseUp

Reflecting about the European Climate Justice movement in looking back at By2020WeRiseUp

"We are living in the countries driving consumption and destruction of humankind and nature, by imposing our models and worldviews on other parts of the world. We commit to take responsibility for our common past, present and future. We will rise up to change a deadly system." – By2020WeRiseUp, [Call Out](#)

Introductory Notes

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who's ever been involved in the By2020WeRiseUp process, who's dedicated any little bit of time or spent months on end trying to make this collective undertaking a reality. It still often feels very unreal how many people attended or worked in those collective spaces, and we are simply so grateful and humbled by it. We hope that whoever has been close one way or another to this process will have benefited at least half as much as we did from it. We learnt so much from and with all of you. Thank you.

A note on this article, and in particular regarding its second part: it is of course a compilation of facts, observations and thoughts that came up over the course of the 2 to 3 years of existence of By2020. It is by no means supposed to be seen as a perfect analysis of what happened, and it will never do justice to the complexity and beauty of all the moments and spaces that were created. We decided to make this article as much about a generalized reflection and collection of thoughts on the nature of the work that was done as possible, in the hope that it could provide some food for thought in a useful and constructive way.

Regarding the laughter, friendships, love, rage, moments of doubts and exhaustion, exhilaration and mindfucks: we have our dear memories, and hopefully several of you are right now smiling while remembering some of those!

Disclaimer: We are aware that the people who have been part of the more day-to-day work of the platform and were involved in the writing of this article stem from a very limited racial and social background, reflecting therefore not only the limitations of the (Western) European climate justice scene but also potentially of the type of approach that was chosen for this campaign. We unfortunately haven't managed nor felt able to go into an in-depth analysis of the roots of such a structural issue in this article, but would very strongly encourage any climate justice organization effort to take the time and energy to reflect and address all the forms of discriminative and oppressive behaviours and practices we reproduce (often unknowingly) in our struggles for climate justice.

What exactly was By2020WeRiseUp?

By2020WeRiseUp originated from the Climate Justice Action network (CJA), which itself is a European networking and skill-sharing space that exists since 2014. The initial idea of By2020 in 2017 was to organise a European campaign for radical climate justice: in 2019, groups would escalate their activities on a regional and/or national level, joining for a mass action or coordinated ones. This would in turn enable escalation at a more international/ interregional/European level in 2020.

During the CJA meeting in Ostrava, CZ, thirty climate justice groups agreed to be part of the campaign kick-off and the name of By2020WeRiseUp was agreed upon. The campaign started to take shape during the first two European Strategy Meeting in March and May of 2019: A call-out was agreed upon as a working basis and as part of it, the common goal of escalating waves of (European) climate justice action. Accordingly, coordination processes and ongoing strategy conversations were established to work toward the initial goal of escalating waves of action.

The four main areas of work and output of By2020WeRiseUp were:
1. Organising a total of seven European Strategy Conferences – four in 2019, three in 2020. The last two were held online due to the Covid-19-pandemic. The high-point undoubtedly was a European grassroots summit that was co-organized with CJA and COP-26-countermobilisation in early spring of 2020 with up to a hundred attendants from at least 23 different countries. Looking back, the diversity of European countries and regions represented was more often than not very high.
2. European Strategy Calls took place about once a month. Throughout the calls were integral to building the platform. Attendance fluctuated and most notably peaked during the first months of the Covid-19-pandemic while of course trailing off towards the end of the campaign.
3. Over the course of the campaign, several requested resources for climate justice action were created. Examples include a list of action ideas (that was later built on for a pandemic action-toolkit), an advisory on demands and several resources for external communication such as press work.
4. There were four attempts at coordinating waves of action: a first wave in the autumn of 2019 (mainly riding on an already massive amount of climate justice action), a second wave in February 2020 targeting the finance industry (anchoring itself around the call for a protest march targeting the WEF) and the Climate Care Uprising in the autumn of 2020 (the coordination effort was challenging due to the Covid19 pandemic but worked quite well for the circumstances). An intended and planned mobilisation in the spring of 2020 was made impossible by the Covid-19-outbreak in Europe.

Interest and support for actions coordinated on a European level was continuously expressed but rarely followed through, independently of pre-existing plans. These pre-existing "anchor" plans around which more actions would then be decentrally organized proved a very important factor.
The By2020WeRiseUp campaign concluded at the end of 2020. On the one hand, the intention was to avoid turning the platform into an institution for it's own sake. On the other, the facilitation team did not have the capacity to overhaul and update the platform to suit the movement's needs.

What can be learned from By2020WeRiseUp as a movement platform?

The following section is not supposed to detail how By2020WeRiseuUp worked. Instead, it focuses on lessons learned around how it is possible to keep such a movement platform running. Four aspects are analysed: (1) the idea, (2) the internal work, (3) the relationship between the platform and the participating groups, as well as (4) the relationships between participating groups.

The idea of By2020WeRiseUp was developed into the direction of a coordination platform: there were no requirements for attending a European strategy conference and groups were not bound to their decisions. This was the correct (and probably only) way to establish European

coordination at the time. It made the platform both accessible and avoided concerns about a powerful super-structure. However, groups not having to commit to the process led to them stepping in and out of it, based on how far they deemed coordination to be useful. More on this in the next sections.

The internal work of By2020WeRiseUp differed significantly between European strategy conferences and the interim periods. During the conferences, a facilitation team facilitated dozens of participants working together in working groups and plenaries. This work included debates, skill-shares, brainstorming, elaborating on existing thought as well as decision making for the waves of actions. The European strategy conferences also had to confirm and re-new the mandate of the facilitation team each time.

Between the European strategy conferences, the facilitation team followed up on previously-made agreements and prepared the next steps. This was organised through internal communication channels like a mailing list or messenger groups but most importantly, weekly calls. Most work was done in several working groups on topics as diverse as conference planning, outreach or tech development and support.

Internal work suffered from a lack of capacities – a problem that is well-known to almost all political groups. Two points are worth mentioning nonetheless. Firstly, there was a continuous lack of committed groups and people contributing to this internal work. The meta-level of a movement platform seems to have been hard to identify with. Secondly, the internal working process focused on the output of the platform and neglected to establish a sustainable work culture. For instance, too little work was put into on-boarding and skill-sharing for new people.

We also often felt that people could sometimes hesitate to engage with internal platform work not so much out of a lack of interest or time, but out of the feeling that the task was beyond them, that they weren't qualified or knowledgeable enough to do something that might have seem too big. A word from our side: no one ever is qualified enough, nor not enough qualified. What we do, we don't learn it at school nor at university (for most of us). What we learn, we learn from practicing with others, observing others' work, trying our hand at tasks we usually shy away from, asking questions and welcoming constructive feedback. Honest and non-violent communication, emotional sharing, trust-building, skill-sharing, clear structures and task assignments (enabling delegation along with the building of trust and skills) within a group are, in our joint field of practice, probably more important tools than any degree! Same as the fact that no technological tool has so far replaced the power of feeling good within a group and acting with like-minded people.

The relationship between the platform and the participating groups was extremely successful in large parts. The already ambitious idea of coordinating climate justice grassroots groups across Europe was over-accomplished: grassroots groups of a broad variety, NGOs, and even some representation of social justice groups from all over Europe were part of the conversations. Especially in-person conferences were a fruitful space for learning and connecting.

Three main problems of this relationship are worth pointing out nonetheless. First of all, it remained challenging to construct decision-making spaces as well as reach decisions within them. This was less so because of the non-hierarchical and horizontal structure of the platform itself but more so because most of the participating groups had horizontal structures within themselves and struggled to delegate decision power.

Second of all, delegation itself faced a vicious cycle: many people hesitated to attend the coordination spaces due to feeling uncomfortable about representing their whole group or not

feeling competent enough to do so. The few people who did feel comfortable in these roles, tended to amass them and be overworked. Part of the problem undoubtedly was that many groups did not have or reserve the capacities for coordination work.

Third of all, there was an ongoing tension between work put into the platform and its output. A recurring criticism of By2020WeRiseUp was that it required too much work to participate and/or offered too little output for participating groups. For example, it was hard to follow the process without being semi-continuously engaged in it. At the same time, the facilitation team was constantly below capacities and had to compensate for limited engagement by participating groups. Differing political environments, groups' focuses, and theories of change contributed to these tensions. What also aggravated them was that the process moved ahead and became too ambitious too quickly as objectives were prioritised over capacities. This constituted a clear tension between the twin asks of more clear action plans and a simpler, slower process.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this third point: On the one hand, coordination processes need to be easily understandable and accessible at every stage. On the other hand, if groups are serious about engaging in coordination beyond short-term mobilisations, they need to reserve a certain amount of capacities to building and contributing to these spaces.

The relationships between participating groups depended largely on their willingness to engage in coordination. In some regions of Europe – groups started to coordinate and collaborate on a regular and intensifying basis. In other regions, coordination efforts were never attempted or quickly abandoned. It is difficult to single out reasons why the idea of coordination grew more strongly in some geographies than others; the local history of (climate) justice movements, the state of national political affairs, personal connections, the dynamism of specific groups, the existence of a specific time-consuming local struggle, and many others reasons could be mentioned as potential factors. Interestingly, the bigger the scale, the less useful coordination seems to have been deemed: local coordination seemed almost self-evident, regional or national coordination became a regular occurrence, transnational coordination remained comparatively rare. Two important factors in this were most likely the pre-existence of networks and the possibility for regular in-person meetings.

Additionally, the more practical the coordination, the more likely it was to happen – this goes especially for concrete projects like a specific action. The conclusion that only spontaneous or superficial coordination was therefore worthwhile is a false one nonetheless. They did and do not allow for actions on the basis of a thought out and consequent strategy. Neither do they hold the potential for a coherent and self-reinforcing escalation of practices.

Closing the gap between analysis & action

One of the main impulses behind By2020 was to close the gap between analysis and action. Did we manage to do that or did we at least move in that direction?   We could say that chronolo-gically two analyses succeeded (and complemented) each other, and also obviously led to different attempts at closing the gap: the By2020WeRiseUp call-out was very much about walking our own talk.

Analysis #1: lack of impact. That original analysis, or underlying feeling and longing came from within the framework of CJA. It led to calling for the establishment of a campaign co-created by multiple grassroots groups and was jointly led by those very same actors at least in the first phases of the construction of the By2020 campaign.

Analysis #2: need for coordination and strategy. After officially launching the platform, it became clear that many groups were struggling in their work with understanding how to

achieve increased (or perceived as sufficient) impact, and/or how to do so in the framework of a (European) call to action.

It also appeared that the disempowerment experienced by many groups was connected to a lack of visibility of our actions and collective power. It was equally connected to difficulties in understanding how power is created and change achieved. The hope was that coordination and meetings could help address parts of these key (mental) hindrances. Coordination could for instance open up the imaginary for complementarity between actions along with the space for more strategic planning thanks to the combined strength of a multiplicity of actions and experiences coming jointly into play from different directions.

A platform format thus offered the space for coordination and strategy to be (1) jointly learnt (2) discussed (3) implemented.

Did we close all the gaps? By no means. But the practical gaps we were faced with, we did our best to address them. While the platform existed, the practice of closing those gaps was at the core of everything people and groups involved worked on.

Did we close the original gap of the discrepancy between our achievement and our perception of what would be needed to secure climate justice? We didn't achieve climate justice or stop climate change, no. Emissions are still rising, capitalism is still ruling. But we are keen to believe that the tools, practices and connections created through hard work brought us closer to our goals.

Some reflections on what developed to be the three key central notions of the By2020WeRiseUp platform: coordination, escalation, strategy.

Today, **coordination** is something that is spreading and practiced as a normal part of the climate justice environment. Groups talk to each other before an action, they take other groups' dates and messaging into account, they are careful and caring for relationships between groups. We don't perceive ourselves as activists in silos; our hearts (and often energies) are all of the battles, because all the battles are to be fought to bring this system down. The understanding that this system underlines and creates all of them is widespread – and the acknowledgment that so much more unites than divides us feels very anchored and practiced (with bumps on the road, of course). This means that the pre-conditions and mindset for coordination are well established and practiced to the point of the existence of coordination. The need for it has become increasingly self-evident and less a point of divide.

Nonetheless, at the end of the day, what creates change remains the same: a group of people knowing and trusting each other, ready to take action together in the same geography. This is the fundament without which no work is possible at all.

Coordination is a practice that requires additional or dedicated capacities, which often comes up as an issue. The „why" behind coordination keeps however on being a difficult question; should we coordinate to increase our impact, achieve greater empowerment, pool our resources, all of the above and more? We are not ones to argue against coordination; but its healthy practice might often benefit from an analysis of why it makes sense in a specific context. Some degree of coordination always exists between groups and individuals – but the strategic, dreamt of, impact-multiplying capital C Coordination is one that has a price (time, capacities, longer-term commitment to a process…).

Escalation is ongoing (more so in targets and intensity than in tactics, although that conversation is intensifying as well). Today's escalation is very much a practice. Groups are not staying put, comfortably happy with what they are doing and achieving; within and between groups, intense discussions and plannings are often (if not always, at least in the back

of our minds) underway. Escalation as our joint practice is a lot about learning from each other, and taking action based on this learning to get closer to our goals.

One could argue that some of the trickiest aspects of escalation are tactics, processes and positioning. All of them are limited by the limitations of our collective imagination. We struggle to go beyond the reality and ideas offered to us by a system we were born in, therefore often leading ourselves to deep dissatisfaction as to our overall or perceived impact.

As everything escalation also has many faces. To take a simplifying (and thus binary) approach, one could argue that escalation can be „organic", as in applying isolated ideas or learnings received from other groups or contexts. It can however fall more in the realm of „planned or strategized" escalation. In this case it is designed on the basis of a specific analytical effort. The nature of practiced escalation usually seems to very much depend on capacities more than on aspirations. Aspirations are also dictated by previous knowledge or analysis having been created or passed-on. Jump at some point in the circle of things, and enjoy the ride!

Strategy was, in the context of By2020, very much connected to the notion of escalation, for escalation can easily be understood as a strategic undertaking. Finding the space, time and energy to dive into those concepts in a content-satisfying way proved however usually challenging. A need for discussions or basic learning around strategy was regularly voiced in different spaces and that need brought people to meetings such as the By2020 conferences and calls. But differences between groups' nature and their types of experience made it difficult to reach concrete enough outcomes to the taste of some groups that sometimes ended up disengaging. Organizing a space delivering skill-sharing as well as strategic planning and coordination did prove to be a challenge, the varying types of expectations and experience present in the room adding to the complexity of the task.

The definition or understanding of strategy itself was also a point that floated around without ever truly being addressed. It mostly circled around the hypothesis that if we could get to some degree of joint analysis and understanding of our struggles and choices, we could increase the sustainability and impact of our work.

We could even say that the notion of strategy is often more of a mental picture streaming from a collective imaginary than an actual practice to which learning time is dedicated. That is not to say that this is the wrong way to go at it! Visions, imaginaries, shared practices are what drive us, and one could easily argue that, without them, we wouldn't be anywhere today. Quite possibly, had we not had them, we might have stuck (even more) to an understanding of change as taking place only through mass movements and would have destroyed all spaces of creation and innovation within our movements. And the usefulness of (additional) analysis or reflection around these directional concepts does depend on the nature of the space in which a group evolves, the aspirations of that group, and how the group instinctively understands impact.

This relatively loose understanding of strategy kept on surfacing and shaping the work around the By2020 platform, be it as a guiding organizing principle of the European conferences, or as the yearning and drive for a more effective analysis and orientation than what some of us might have up to then experienced.

Contrary to escalation, one could argue that strategy was more of a framework than a practice. It was understood as a directional tool for more impact, as a way to think the regaining of control and empowerment, as a blind spot in organizing and/or as a practice to be discovered and implemented in our respective parts of climate justice work.

Some general reflections drawn from By2020WeRiseUp

Concrete targets prove the most empowering and attractive. Don't be shy to state the name of a target and go for it (in solidarity with other struggles) – the power of the example is never to be under-estimated. Practicing an example means giving it a reality, more than any meeting ever will. Don't wait until it's perfect, but make sure you don't reproduce or perform oppressive or extractive patterns.

But also, don't shy away from taking a honest (albeit kind) look at your impact, your role in the ecosystem of movements around you, from asking trainers' groups for answers or tips for literature that will help you grasp basic/fundamental questions. This can help reduce mental workload, burnout, turnover, physical exhaustion, feeling of powerlessness or the same path being explored a thousand times over before someone digs up the lessons from one of the previous attempts and helps the rest of us to move on.

On the constant tension between horizontality and verticality within and between our movements: it is real, but also a binary understanding of what the practice of working for climate justice means. We cannot find a perfect fix or reality, for this one will come out of the process, and it will look (very) different from anything we could have imagined, because no one's single imagination can embrace all the possible outcomes, and for our imaginaries are dictated by a system we are all trying to dismantle.

The process is the key; the process will create the new realities we cannot yet conceive, because many of us were born and grew up in authoritarian, trauma-based and/or capitalist regimes. If we focus solely on goals without minding the process, we use the tools and reproduce the mindset we grew up in and will therefore keep on reinforcing the very thing we try to destroy.

But that reality does not have to be mutually exclusive with another reality, which is that we do need to rethink our practices to some extent. In our work, we tend to get swallowed by the very real constraints of a capitalist society we evolve in and, pressed by those constraints, imaginaries and fears, we often reproduce its very patterns of oppression, hence depriving ourselves of some key tools we have to change the world: free spaces, care, time, brain capacities.

We argue and feel that we do need to include in our struggles a more established practice of strategy discussion, of collective learning around social movements history and the nature and traps of our current social realities, of implementation of tactics as part of a bigger "us".

Our diversity is another key to a successful struggle; we complement each other in the diversity of our practices and interests, we are driven by different groups of friends or targets that hit home. However, the system we face can be much more organized and thorough than those of us who fight it. Of course: it has defined to its advantage the rules of the game we are all forced to play. That being said, how do we then strike the balance between avoiding the reproduction of directional, patriarchal models, and using for the best our capacities around organisation and analysis? Planning and organizing do not have to be synonymous with rigid structures and top-down approaches. It is not one or the other. We can strive for a greater impact and reduced burn-out in our movements while at the same time keeping the space free of oppression and capitalist patterns. We can be focused and do our bit as part of a greater ecosystem without forgoing our ideals or the identity of our groups. We can decide to be responsible for organising as smartly as we know how to, and dedicating our time and energy where we think it'll be most useful to the overall struggle for climate justice.

For as ever, the necessity here is climate justice and, connectedly, the end to all forms of oppression. The road to climate justice will make this vision a reality. How well we walk or wheel it, that's up to all of us.