Nature Conservation and Opposition to Wind Power in Rural Germany: Divergent Views on (In)Justice and Environmental Crises in the Anthropocene

Mario Krämer
Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne

Abstract: The extension of wind power and the installation of wind turbines in the low-mountain regions of Germany against the background of the national transition to renewable energies is meeting with opposition from some nature conservationists, who perceive a conflict between climate protection and nature conservation. This article illustrates the nature conservationists' views on questions of (in)justice and the various environmental crises in the Anthropocene. I argue that their opposition to wind power is based on at least three different aspects: commitment to species protection, concern for the aesthetic value of landscapes, and a plea for a degrowth paradigm. In addition, the supposed indifference of the state and national government towards these objectives leads to resentment and is developing a rural consciousness. Methodologically, the article shows that collaborative research in contested settings might have the transformative potential to spin a conversational thread on the urgent question of what is due to whom in the Anthropocene.
[anthropocene, justice, nature conservation, wind power, renewable energies, traditional impulse, rural consciousness, collaborative walking, Germany]

Introduction

What do nature conservationists living in rural areas perceive as (un)just in terms of the various environmental crises in the Anthropocene, and what motivates them to preserve the non-human environment?[1] What values and norms of justice, what kinds of subjects and objects of justice and of responsible agents do they envisage? Or to rephrase it in the editors' words (see Zenker and Wolf, this issue), what is due to whom with regard to human-environment relations in the Anthropocene from the perspective of rural nature conservationists? I address these questions by focusing on the intensifying conflicts over nature conservation and wind power in rural regions of Western Germany against the background of the enormous extension of renewable energies expected in the coming years.

1 I am particularly indebted to my collaborators for their companionship during our collaborative walks and for making time to educate me in their views on nature conservation and (in)justice in the Anthropocene. All names of interlocutors mentioned in this article have been anonymized. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers and Ute Dieckmann and Felix Lussem for their insightful comments.

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In the agreement underpinning the so-called 'traffic-light coalition' (*Ampelkoalition*) consisting of Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FDP) and the Green Party (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen) from November 2021, the rapid extension of renewable energy sources takes a prominent place. The agreement is titled 'Daring to make more progress' (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen*),[2] as the coalition intends, for example, to double the number of wind turbines in Germany from about 30,000 in 2022 to 60,000 in 2030 in order to increase the share of renewable energy sources in total energy use to 80% in the same year. In the agreement, the coalition states that the extension of renewable energy sources is a central project of the national government, that the latter plans to speed up the extension drastically, and that it will 'clear all hurdles and obstacles out of the way' (Koalitionsvertrag 24.11.2021:56). The war in Ukraine that started in February 2022 increased the perceived urgency of transforming energy production and the sharpness of the rhetoric still further. The Minister of Finance, Christian Lindner, rechristened renewable energy sources as 'freedom energies' (*Freiheitsenergien*), and the extension of wind and solar energy production has become a question of national security according to the so-called 'Easter Package' (*Osterpaket*)[3] of the ruling coalition. Eventually, the adoption of the 'EU Emergency Decree' (*EU-Notfallverordnung*)[4] by the cabinet in January 2023, which simplifies licensing processes substantially to accelerate the construction of wind turbines, met with opposition from a specific milieu of nature conservationists I have been collaborating with since 2021, as well as by members of the Green Party itself.[5] In May 2023, the *Naturschutzinitiative*, one of the newest nature conservation organizations, lodged a complaint about the German government's renewable energy legislation in the Court of Justice of the European Union.[6]

Against the background of the rise of renewable energy production worldwide, anthropological studies on wind power have started to increase in number in the last few years (see, for example, the 'duograph' by Boyer 2019 and Howe 2019 on wind power in Mexico). However, there have been few on Germany so far (for one of the earliest publications, see Krauss 2010), unlike studies in energy social sciences more broadly

2 Koalitionsvertrag zwischen SPD, Bündnis90/Die Grünen und FDP (24.11.2021) Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit.

3 Deutscher Bundestag (07.07.2022) Osterpaket zum Ausbau erneuerbarer Energien beschlossen. https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw27-de-energie-902620, accessed September 29, 2022.

4 Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz (30.01.2023) Kabinett beschließt Beschleuniger für Wind- und Netzausbau. https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Pressemitteilungen/2023/01/20230130-kabinett-beschliesst-beschleuniger-fur-wind-und-netzausbau.html, accessed February 6, 2023.

5 Krumenacker, Thomas (22.11.2023) 'Der Naturschutz wurde niedergewalzt': Innerparteiliche Opposition will Öko-Wende bei den Grünen. *RiffReporter* https://www.riffreporter.de/de/umwelt/gruene-naturschuetzer-klimaschutz-fokussierung-schutzgebiete-windkraftausbau, accessed November 24, 2023.

6 Naturschutzinitiative e.V. (02.02.2024) EU-Beschwerde gegen die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: EU-Kommission rührt sich bisher nicht! https://naturschutz-initiative.de/aktuell/neuigkeiten/eu-beschwerde-gegen-die-bundesrepublik-deutschland/, accessed February 8, 2024.

(see among many others Müller and Morton 2021 and Kerker 2022). Since right-wing populist movements in general and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany in particular explicitly position themselves against wind power extensions, the anthropological and social science literature on the politics of renewable energy and the far-right is also proliferating (see, for example, Lockwood 2018, and Shoshan 2021). What most of these studies do not consider, however, which is also the main focus of this article, is to explore divergent perceptions of (in)justice and environmental crises in the Anthropocene and the potential clash between climate protection and nature conservation in particular.

In the following, I elaborate on the concept of 'traditional impulse' and the origins of nature conservation in Germany. The second section introduces the case study, while in section three, I reflect on the methodological approach with a focus on collaborative walking as a key method. The fourth section deals with the perspectives of nature conservationists on what is due in terms of human-environment relations in the contemporary anthropocenic crises, while in section five, I examine the repercussions on perceptions of (in)justice, resentment and rural consciousness. Section six, finally, discusses conflicting perceptions of the human being and its relationship to non-human beings, and the clash of scales in preserving the environment and nature in the Anthropocene.

Traditional Impulse and the Origins of Nature Conservation in Germany

In contrast to most anthropological studies that deal with environmental activism and environmental justice (for a brief overview, see Tassan 2022), the focus of this article is on nature conservationists who are inspired by what Peter Marris (1986) called a 'conservative impulse' (see also Waldmann 2017). Marris originally developed this concept when interviewing widows who had lost their husbands and were forced to cope with this radical and irreversible change. He then compared it with other instances of *Loss and Change* (the title of his book), for example, the forced expulsion of lower class people from their neighbourhoods in the course of urban restructuring and the rise of ethnonationalism in postcolonial Nigeria. According to Marris (1986:67), rapid change (social, cultural, political, technological) threatens familiar relationships and the meaningfulness of life, which catches people in an inherent, sometimes irreconcilable conflict: 'neither to bury the past, nor be buried in it' (ibid. 83).[7] Several decades before Marris, Karl Mannheim (1964:412–416; my translation) distinguished

7 More recently, the German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2021) rediscovered Marris and argues that experiences of loss are constitutive for an understanding of 'modern societies'.

between 'conservatism' and 'traditionalism' and argued that the latter refers to a scepticism about innovations, the 'dogged holding on to the traditional', which in his view constituted a 'general human characteristic'. According to Mannheim, traditionalism is a basic anthropological disposition, a 'formal psychological characteristic which is inherent in more or less every individual human being'. Following on from this, Mannheim characterized traditionalism as 'an almost pure reactive behaviour', whereas the term 'conservatism' refers to a more or less elaborated political ideology.

In further developing the ideas of Mannheim and Marris, I argue that what I refer to as a 'traditional impulse' in the following constitutes a basic anthropological characteristic to hold on to and preserve the existing. I further argue that this traditional impulse becomes particularly evident in times of perceived rapid and drastic change. I prefer the adjective 'traditional' to 'conservative', since the impulse is not necessarily linked to conservatism as political ideology, as I try to make clear in this article. In contrast to Mannheim, I do not claim that the traditional impulse is merely a reactive behaviour to change, but rather maintain that it characterizes a broad spectrum of affects, attitudes and practices which in its extreme form may become firmly entrenched as exclusive, conflictual identities. In other words, the 'traditional impulse' serves as an analytical concept and not as a normative term. When I argue that the nature conservationists I collaborate with are inspired by a traditional impulse, this does not mean that I am pigeonholing them as 'traditionalist' or 'repugnant others' (see Harding 1991).

In order to assess the relevance of what I refer to as a traditional impulse, it is crucial to trace the origins and trajectory of nature conservation in Germany since the nineteenth century. I argue that nature conservation was based both historically and contemporaneously on the perception of loss due to rapid, drastic change. I also find that the traditional impulse manifests itself today in at least two ways: in the opposition to innovations (for example, wind power) and in the revitalization of the past (for example, the reconstruction of an 'unspoiled' and 'aesthetic' landscape). According to the historian David Blackbourn (2008), the inherent and aesthetic value of landscape was the key driving force of the nature conservation movement in Germany. Whereas the *Conquest of Nature* (the main title of Blackbourn's excellent book) was central to human-environment relations in the Enlightenment, resulting in often disastrous consequences for humans as well as the non-human environment, the perception of nature and landscape started to change in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ernst Rudorff's essay *'Ueber das Verhältniss des modernen Lebens zur Natur'* ('On the relationship between modern life and nature', published in 1880) was the symbolic beginning of the nature conservation movement in Germany, but Blackbourn claims that even in the decades before then feelings of loss proliferated and people projected these feelings from the individual human being on to nature (Blackbourn 2008:225). Rudorff and parts of the traditionalist educated middle class rejected further industrialization, technological change and utilitarian thinking. For them, the aesthetic value of the landscape was key, and the foremost objective of nature conservation was to protect and conserve a landscape that was perceived as edifying, unspoiled and beautiful. Ac-

cording to Karl Ditt (1996:12), the movement intended 'to preserve nature and the countryside as an alternative world, as a place of refuge from the "nervous", "materialistic" and "superficial" life of the city'. Whereas their focus was on the protection of the local and regional landscape and of particular species, Rudorff and his contemporaries also adhered to a 'cultural nationalism, based on the belief in a symbiosis of nature, people and culture' (Ditt 1996:13). A few decades later, and owing to this ideological affinity, many nature conservationists supported the Nazi regime, only to find that ideology and legislation were at odds with practice and that 'the natural landscape was encroached upon more than ever' in the Nazi era (Ditt 1996:20).

After the Second World War, the nature conservation movement in the Western part of Germany put forward a critique of excessive economic growth and materialism. The idealized image of an aesthetically valuable landscape remained the point of reference, but from the 1960s onwards the terms 'environment' (*Umwelt*) and 'environmental protection' (*Umweltschutz*) entered the public discourse. Most interestingly for the purposes of this article, a crack between two different movements came to the fore in the 1970s: on the one hand, the traditional nature conservation movement continued to protect local and regional landscapes and species. The new environmental movement, on the other, had far-reaching objectives, pleading for a fundamental socio-economic transformation, and widening the focus from the local to the global. It also started to shift the perspective from an anthropocentric to a biocentric approach. One could therefore argue that the 'multispecies' and 'more than human' turn in anthropology (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Tsing 2015; Haraway 2016) is a more recent development that originated from the original environmentalism paradigm of the 1970s.

Case Study and Collaborators

Since September 2021, I have worked with nature conservationists in rural areas in the western part of Germany. My focus is on a rural area in the low-mountain regions of Rhineland-Palatinate, which for the most part has been a landscape protection area (*Landschaftsschutzgebiet*) since 1968. I conduct fieldwork with a citizen's action group (*Bürgerinitiative*), several of whose members describe themselves as nature conservationists. I have expanded my research site in the meantime and have started to work with representatives of other citizen's action groups in the wider region, as well as conducting interviews with nature conservationists in other regions of Germany. Most of my interlocutors are more than fifty years old, typically come from a middle-class background, including some academics (mostly with a degree in the natural sciences), and the majority are male. Interestingly, quite a number supported the Green Party in the past and pinned their hopes on the Party's commitment to nature conservation, which were dashed in their perception. That is, my focus is not on people living in rural areas or nature conservationists per se, but rather on a specific milieu of rural actors

who are committed to the original, 'traditionalist' idea of nature conservation that can be traced back to the late nineteenth century in Germany, with a focus on preserving 'nature' and 'the landscape'.[8]

The citizen's action group was established in 2015 when one of the founders became aware that a wind power company planned to build fifteen wind turbines near the local villages. The group was able to prevent the building of the wind turbines for many years, but a decision by a Higher Court in 2023 cleared the way for their construction, which is about to start soon. Two ornithologists in the group register the existence and movements of endangered species such as the red kite, black stork and different kinds of bats in their area. Together they compile detailed annual reports on the occurrence of endangered species in the projected wind turbine areas, reports that were key to preventing the construction of wind turbines until recently. In the low-mountain regions of central Germany, wind turbines are often constructed in forests today. German federal states have different regulations on the necessary distance between a wind turbine and a settlement, which is why wind power companies avoid building wind turbines close to villages or small towns in order to avoid delays by court action. Forest areas that are situated at a sufficient distance to human settlements are thus the preferential sites for the construction of new wind turbines. Another key criterion is the wind potential (*Windhöffigkeit*), which differs substantially in different parts of the low-mountain regions. The new generation of wind turbines is more than 250 metres high, and their construction in forests requires the cutting of trees on a site of about 0.8 hectare for each turbine, sealing the surface with concrete, and constructing access roads through the forests. That is, forests and non-human species are considerably affected by the extension of renewable energy sources, and nature conservationists claim that these effects are insufficiently dealt with in public and academic debate.

Collaborative Walking in Contested Settings: Methodological Reflections

My methodological approach is not activist but educational (Ingold 2018) with collaborative elements (Zenker and Vonderau 2023). That is, my intention is to have an edifying conversation with the nature conservationists, to learn from them (and hopefully also the other way round) and to understand what people think and how they act. In addition to everyday informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, participant observation of community meetings and analysing and evaluating newsletters, blogs and nature conservation magazines, one key method in establishing a rapport with

8 For a different approach, one focusing on the spatial dimension of wind energy politics and the local arena (in Eastern Germany), see Müller and Morton (2021).

the conservationists is what I call 'collaborative walking', that is, joint walks and hikes with my collaborators during which I learn a great deal about ornithology, forestry and nature conservation in general. Originally, I applied collaborative walking as a stopgap due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its limitations in conducting participant observation and interviews, but soon I learnt to appreciate the edifying and productive aspects of collaborative walks. Lee and Ingold (2006:83) argue that walking can be 'a practice of understanding' and that the shared bodily engagement and rhythm of walking could be an edifying experience that establishes a common ground, whereas face-to-face interaction (as in interviews) could be 'more confrontational and less companionable' (ibid.:79–80). 'Walking gives the opportunity to be together, where sharing a rhythm of movement is the basis for shared understanding of each other in a holistic rather than ocularcentric manner [...]' (ibid.:82). The edifying aspects of the collaborative walking approach became most apparent in a joint day's hike involving representatives of the citizen's action group with students on my Master's course in June 2023: although the political and normative views of both groups, and particularly their perspectives on what is due in terms of the anthropocenic crises, differed considerably, the shared assessment at the end of the day was to have learnt unexpected insights from each other which gave both groups pause for thought.

However, my educational-cum-collaborative approach is accompanied by at least three challenges. First, and in contrast to activist research on the subaltern (Spivak 1988), I am working in contested settings and with people whose political and normative viewpoints I do not necessarily share. My research means walking and stumbling (physically) not only in nature but also (symbolically) in difficult political terrain. For example, at the beginnings of my research I felt that my interlocutors underrated the consequences of climate change and restricted their attention to nature conservation. This initial assessment of mine has changed over time, and the collaborative walks especially helped me to experience and to better understand my interlocutors' viewpoints. Hence, one objective of this article is to make these perspectives and the underlying assumptions of what is due in terms of human-environment relations more visible and comprehensible. In doing so, I address a frequently voiced complaint by my interlocutors that they are supposedly allocated to the 'complicated and right-wing slot' when voicing their criticisms of or opposition to wind power.

Second, another challenge of my methodological approach is to balance giving sufficient space for the nature conservationists' viewpoints with maintaining my autonomous stance as researcher.[9] For example, after reading a draft of this article, one of my interlocutors criticized me for placing nature conservationists in a 'traditionalist slot'; but based on my current empirical findings, I am convinced that at a substantial number of rural nature conservationists' perceptions and actions is indeed inspired by a

9 This is definitely not a problem which only concerns my research, as it is even more prevalent in a research context with extremist actors, as the 'Teitelbaum controversy' (Teitelbaum 2019 and the following comments) so aptly illustrates.

traditional impulse, which I understand analytically and not normatively, as explained already. A third challenge arising from my educational-cum-collaborative approach is to negotiate a tricky balance between sympathy and empathy. Zenker and Vonderau (2023:149) argue that researchers position themselves very differently in collaborative and publicly engaged research, 'ranging from sympathetic closeness, via empathetic distance to instrumental understanding'. In my experience, collaborative walking is a methodological device for preventing instrumental understandings and for facilitating temporary empathetic closeness. Rather than associating empathy with distance, I argue that empathy is characterized by constantly negotiating a balance between affective closeness and analytical distance for which collaborative walking and experiencing nature together – despite potential normative and political differences – is emblematic.

Ultimately, collaborative walking as a practice of empathetic understanding has a transformative potential. Taking others seriously in joint walks and thus showing a willingness 'to be educated by them' (Ingold 2018:14) is particularly important against the background of frequently voiced complaints by nature conservationists that they find it unjust that their perspectives on the various anthropocenic crises are under- and misrepresented in the public media and in political discourse. As Georg, one of my key collaborators, put it in March 2022 during one of our collaborative walks: 'It makes me feel good if someone listens with interest to the remarks of a nature conservationist'. That is, giving a voice on a highly contested matter may stimulate a necessary debate in times of escalating anthropocenic and political crises. However, this certainly does not mean avoiding conflicts or ignoring our own normative and political positioning as researchers, but rather understanding that to differ with others in empathy is also a means to taking others seriously and accepting them as a fellow human beings.

What is Due to Whom? The Perspectives of Rural Nature Conservationists on Human-Environment Relations in the Anthropocene

From the perspective of the rural nature conservationists I collaborate with, what is due to whom in terms of human-environment relations in the Anthropocene? In the following, I distinguish three main perspectives on the basis of my empirical findings, mostly taken from the collaborative walks and interviews, but also from opinions voiced in newsletters, blogs and nature conservation magazines. These perspectives are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive but often interlinked. However, I argue that these three perspectives make it clear how the nature conservationists assess the various anthropocenic crises, how they perceive the role of humans in relation to the non-human environment, and why they are by and large opposed to wind power extension. I thus differentiate between these three key perspectives for purposes of conceptual clarity.

Nature Conservation and Species Protection

In brief, the perspective on nature conservation and species protection illustrates that nature conservationists perceive themselves as concerned actors and endangered non-human beings as the subjects of justice. From this perspective, non-human beings have an entitlement to an individual right to life as stipulated in the *Bundesnaturschutzgesetz* (federal nature conservation law) of 1976 and in European nature conservation legislation more widely. To protect non-human beings is a core value of nature conservationists, and the responsible agents for implementing and upholding protection measures are humans in general and state officials (legislators, administrators and the judiciary) in particular.

For most of my interlocutors, nature conservation and species protection are central aspects of their professional occupation and private lives (which often intermingle). Many of them spare no effort to register the occurrence and movement of endangered bird species, they commit themselves to the preservation of moors, and they mobilize for the establishment and expansion of nature conservation areas. In the course of one of our collaborative walks through the forests and rural landscape in January 2022, Georg explains to me that for him the conservation of the environment is not synonymous with climate protection. Georg is one the four leading figures of the civil action group and works in a local high school as a biology teacher. He grew up near the potential construction sites of the wind turbines in a comparatively remote rural area and has been engaged in nature conservation since his youth. Georg was a compassionate hunter for many years but became more and more interested in ornithology in the course of time. In his view, the public debate in Germany is restricted to climate protection, as nature or biodiversity conservation receives less than its fair share of public and political attention.[10] Georg's statement points to different ways of evaluating and weighing up the significance of the various anthropocenic crises. As we look at a forest where several wind turbines are likely to be built in the coming years, Georg explains to me that he sees himself as a wind power critic but not as a strict opponent. In his view, the often voiced argument of climate activists that climate protection is equivalent to biodiversity conservation takes no account of the problem that the current and future extension of wind power in forest areas jeopardizes conventional nature conservation efforts.

The extension of wind power in the low-mountain regions means for many nature conservationists the continuation of what Blackbourn (2008) called the conquest of nature by other means, and it contradicts one of their main objectives: to safeguard nature from extensive human interference. They engage passionately in multispecies care (see Schroer et al. 2021), but what distinguishes them from the multispecies and more than human turn in anthropology is the fact that they allocate an exceptional position

10 For a natural science perspective which supports this argument, see Legagneux et al. (2018).

(*Sonderstellung*) to humans who are perceived as being responsible for non-human species care. In other words, the nature conservationists with whom I collaborate have turned away from the modernist paradigm of conquering nature and see humans as responsible for safeguarding it. However, most of them hold on to a hierarchical and authoritative[11] but nevertheless protective rather than exploitative relationship between humans and non-human beings.

The red kite (*Milvus milvus*) is probably the most symbolic figure of the conflict between species protection and wind power extension in the low-mountain regions of Germany. About 50% of the world's existing red kite population lives in Germany, and nature conservationists argue that the German state must assume a particular responsibility for protecting the species. The revised version of the so-called *Helgoländer Papier* by the Working Group of German State Bird Conservancies (*Länderarbeitsgemeinschaft der Vogelschutzwarten*) deals with, among other issues, the use of wind power in forests and recommends minimum distances of wind turbines from bird areas and breeding sites and points out 'the need to keep areas of high densities of large bird species free of wind turbines due to potential impacts at the population level' (Länderarbeitsgemeinschaft der Vogelschutzwarten 2014:15). § 44, section 1, no. 5 of the federal law on nature conservation (*Bundesnaturschutzgesetz*) regulates that individual species are not allowed to be killed (the so-called *individuenbezogenes Tötungsverbot*), but section 5, no. 1 prescribes an exception in so far as the intervention does not result in a significantly higher risk of injury or killing of individuals of the respective species.[12] According to the *Helgoländer Papier*, the red kite has a high risk of collision with wind turbines because the species lives on the borders of forests and pastures and shows no avoidance behaviour (*Meideverhalten*) of the turbines. Mating flights and the search for food occur at about the same height as the rotors of wind turbines, which makes red kites potential and actual collision victims (Länderarbeitsgemeinschaft der Vogelschutzwarten 2014:26–27). Therefore, the registration of red kites and other endangered bird species in a specific bird registration app is one important aspect of my collaborative walks with nature conservationists.

Ontologically, nature conservationists implicitly relate to birds and other animals as 'companion species' in Haraway's (2003) words, but without being aware of or being interested in the multispecies literature. For example, during our joint monitoring of woodpeckers on the basis of a registration module by the umbrella organization of German ornithological associations (*Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten*) in March 2023, Georg eventually spots a lesser spotted woodpecker (*Dryobates minor*) after being unsuccessful at the preceding observation spots in the early morning. Georg becomes excited when we watch the small woodpecker with our binoculars high up in an oak tree, and he whispers: 'We've made him wild, now he wants to show us who's the master of his territory!' Somewhat later, when we pass a seemingly deserted nest in

11 See Popitz (1992) on the meaning of 'authoritative power' (*autoritative Macht*).

12 http://www.vogelschutzwarten.de/windenergie.htm, accessed August 9, 2022.

another tree, Georg explains to me laughingly that 'stock doves (*Columba oenas*) always construct their nests in a slipshod way', in contrast to one of his favourite bird species, the red kites, who 'reuse and refurbish their nests every year.' A few days earlier, Georg's Whatsapp status showed a photo with red kites returning from their yearly migration to the south with the caption 'my friends are returning'.

This common practice of relating to birds as companion species (or 'animated beings' in Dieckmann's 2023 words) implies a co-constitutive relationship and contrasts sharply with the regulations proposed in the 'Easter Package' by the national government. Therefore, it is not surprising that this legislation raised an outcry among many nature conservationists. The 'Easter Package' proposes a paradigmatic change from the protection of individual non-human beings (*Individuenschutz*) to the protection of the entire population of a species (*Populationsschutz*). The national government thus basically intends to speed up the construction of wind turbines and reduce the opportunities for nature conservation organizations to successfully sue wind power companies in court for endangering individual birds. Most nature conservationists reject what they perceive as a serious reduction in bird protection standards and find it unjust that individual birds should be deprived of the right to physical integrity and the right to life. In an article in the *Naturschutzmagazin* by the chairperson of the *Naturschutzinitiative*, for example, the government is accused of a 'betrayal', and the new legislation is condemned as a 'frontal attack' on nature conservation (Neumann 2022:4).

Landscape Protection: the Aesthetic and Affective Values of Landscape

In essence, the nature conservationists I collaborate with perceive themselves as responsible agents in a world faced by severe ecological crises. A key motivation for their commitment to nature is to safeguard the human entitlement to an aesthetic, edifying and non-industrial landscape. From this viewpoint, an 'unspoiled' landscape and its aesthetic and affective values constitute a refuge for human and non-human beings from what is criticized as the relentless conquest of nature.

The inherent and aesthetic value of the rural landscape is often highlighted in conversations with or in writings by nature conservationists. Given Blackbourn's (2008) assessment that the concern for landscape aesthetics constituted the beginnings of the nature conservation movement in Germany, it is hardly surprising that the remodelling of the landscape in the low-mountain regions by means of the construction of wind turbines and solar panels is a concern for most nature conservationists I work with. For example, in an article in a special volume on the 'Easter Package' by the *Naturschutzinitiative*, the landscape architect Werner Nohl (2022, my translation) voices the concern that the planned doubling of the number of wind turbines by 2030 would result in a 'country without landscape'. His main argument is that the landscape has an intrinsic, aesthetic value and that the conversion of landscapes into 'energy-industrial production spaces' (ibid. 2022:39) puts an end to the aesthetic and essential enjoyment of nature. In other words, the author claims that conserving the landscape means safe-

guarding a vital aspect of humanity. Conserving the landscape is often equated with protecting the local or regional *Heimat* by my interlocutors, which is largely sensed in an affirmative manner. Shoshan (2020), however, demonstrates that the term *Heimat* is heavily contested in German political discourse due to its instrumentalization in and significance for German nationalism in both the past and present, and he emphasizes its ambiguous meanings. On the one hand, it refers to local forms of belonging and may serve as an alternative to far-right nationalism (ibid. 2020:130). 'It summons sensorial images of familiar landscapes, vernacular dialects and linguistic expressions [...] or flora and fauna, waterways and topographies, seasonal patterns and agricultural cycles' (Shoshan 2021:45). On the other hand, Shoshan stresses the disquieting potential of *Heimat*, as it might link concerns for the natural environment with nationalist and exclusive forms of belonging (ibid. 2021:48).

In an online interview with Lothar, one of the nature conservationists I work with, in November 2021, he tells me that he deliberately moved from the city to the rural area where he currently lives several decades ago in order to experience the unspoiled countryside. By 'unspoiled', Lothar means spaces as close to nature as possible and with a minimum of human interference – 'the Canada feeling', as he calls it in our interview. Since the 1960s, Lothar and his wife have lived in this landscape protection area in the low-mountain regions of North Rhine-Westphalia, but in his words 'not a damn soul' cares about the protection of these areas anymore. After retiring, Lothar invested plenty of his time and energy in nature and landscape conservation, for example, in local projects to prevent the extinction of rare butterfly species, but also in educational projects for children because he perceives the alienation from nature as a key problem of contemporary society. Together with his wife, for many decades Lothar was a leading member of the regional *Naturschutzbund* (NABU), one of the main nature conservation organizations in Germany, but nowadays he feels alienated from the national organization's shift towards a pro-wind power policy.

Lothar tells me that he rejoices at the splendid view of the forests and hills surrounding his rural home. He does not argue that the landscape is timeless and purely 'natural', but rather sees it as man-made – as a cultural landscape, in other words – with the aim of balancing the entitlements of humans, animals and plants. However, for a few years now a fear has crept in that the beauty of this landscape and what Lothar perceives as indispensable for human well-being might well be destroyed by the construction of wind turbines on a large scale. And with the 'Easter Package' his fear might become fact: due to the comparably high wind potential in this rural, low-mountain area, numerous wind power companies have applied to construct wind turbines on the mountain ridges. Given the background of Lothar's decades-long engagement in nature and landscape conservation in his region and his deliberate decision to settle in the countryside, the recent and upcoming transformations in Germany's energy production are a prime example of what Marris carved out in his investigation of rapid change and perceived loss. In Lothar's case, the recent developments have led to despair, feelings of injustice and resentment, to which I turn below in more detail.

Energy Consumption and the Degrowth Paradigm

In sum, the degrowth perspective, which is arguably the most radical form of opposition to wind power among nature conservationists, maintains that both human and non-human beings are entitled to modest, self-sufficient lives. From this perspective, only a drastic reduction in energy consumption may produce a more just and sustainable world. Renewable energies in general and wind power in particular are, however, perceived as a continuation of the conquest of nature by other technological means and are therefore rejected.

For some of the nature conservationists I work with, a degrowth paradigm and a critique of neoliberal capitalism take centre stage. Several of my interlocutors have become doubtful in recent years whether the current levels of energy consumption are sustainable in the long run, while others are totally convinced that they are not. The citizen's action group I collaborate with initially started its mobilization with the sole focus on preventing wind turbines in the region. The group was founded in 2015, and initially it was very successful in mobilizing the local population to its cause, and it attracted quite a large membership. But within the last five years (and speeded up by the COVID-19 pandemic), this support fizzled out, to be replaced by contradictory views on the main purpose and objectives of the citizen's action group. Whereas the majority obviously wants to prevent wind turbines in the vicinity of their villages (partly for aesthetic reasons, as described above), one of the main protagonists, Bernd, tries to divert the initiative into a local degrowth movement and questions the compatibility of economic growth with ecological sustainability per se. In other words, Bernd comprehends the relationship between sustainability and growth as a 'double bind' in Bateson's (1972) sense, his perception being that it is 'impossible to have it both ways' (Eriksen 2016:24).

At one of our first meetings in September 2021, Bernd tells me that for him wind power is 'reactionary' because it gives industrialization new force, to the detriment of the rural landscape and both humans and non-human beings in his view. Bernd aspired to an academic career in the 1980s but decided to leave urban life behind and moved to a remote rural area, where nowadays he owns a small farm. Bernd tries to live as self-sufficiently as possible: he has his own well, cultivates food for his and his wife's own consumption, has no car and instead rides his bike. For him, it is unthinkable to take a plane. Bernd is unemployed, and he is very critical of wage labour and consumption as such. Therefore, he deliberately leads a modest life in a materialistic sense. Bernd is also strictly opposed to renewable energies such as solar and wind power, and he rejects a possible return to nuclear energy, which is currently and controversially being discussed in parts of the nature conservation milieu. Bernd's key argument for his rejection of renewable energy sources is that the planned reshuffle from energy production based on coal, oil and gas would not solve the fundamental problem, which, from his perspective, is excessive human energy consumption and the underlying economic growth paradigm. In contrast to most nature conservationists I work with, Bernd is neither a

wind power critic nor a sceptic but an outright opponent. Therefore, by 'reactionary' he means that wind power is a continuation of the old, disastrous growth principle by new means which nevertheless continues to harm human and non-human beings, as well as nature and the landscape. Therefore, Bernd also rejects any form of modernist 'Green Deal' as envisaged by the European Commission. In allusion to the term 'military-industrial complex' by Mills (1956), he calls the planned extension of wind power in Germany an 'eco-industrial complex'. A logo on one of the flyers of the citizen's action group reads 'no wind power industry in our forests!'

In other words, the extension of renewable energies is seen as a continuation of the conquest of nature by other means, instead of turning away from what is perceived as a ruinous growth paradigm. Interestingly, there is some convergence with a leftist, anti-capitalist critique of the wind power industry in the Global South (see Boyer 2019; Howe 2019), which considers it as 'the juggernaut of high-energy modernity' and pleads for 'communal models of renewable energy oriented to humbler kinds of sustenance' (Howe and Boyer 2020). The difference, however, is that, whereas Boyer and Howe perceive renewable energies as necessary for mitigating climate change and reject the underlying neoliberal economic model, Bernd and the few like-minded nature conservationists who urge a strict degrowth paradigm criticize the supporters of wind power production for holding on to the illusion that growth and sustainability could proceed hand in hand.

Perceptions of Injustice, Resentment and Rural Consciousness

As indicated in the three perspectives outlined above, many of the rural nature conservationists I work with reject the renewable energy policy of the 'traffic light coalition', and some are pronouncedly resentful of it. Their resentment is mainly directed at the Green Party and established nature conservation organizations, which are accused of betraying a formerly common cause, that is, the conservation of nature and the landscape. The national policy of expanding wind power on a large scale and doubling the number of wind turbines to 60,000 by 2030 thus evoked considerable feelings of injustice and resentment amongst many nature conservationists.

What does injustice mean? Drawing on ideas by Nancy Fraser (Dahl et al. 2004), Carolan (2020) argues that rural grievances are often grounded in perceptions of injustice that fall into three dimensions: first, unfair economic redistribution; second, unjust political representation; and third, insufficient cultural recognition. In a programmatic article on 'authoritarian populism' in rural regions worldwide, Scoones et al. maintain that, in order to address such perceptions of injustice, it is crucial to forge a new politics which combines

> … concerns with redistribution (and so concerns with class, social difference and inequality), recognition (and so identity and identification) and representation (and so democracy, community, belonging and citizenship). (Scoones at al. 2018:9)

Perceived injustices might culminate in resentment, that is, 'a feeling of anger or unhappiness about something that you think is unfair' (according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) or 'a feeling of anger because you have been forced to accept something that you do not like' (as defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary*). Resentment thus has a strong affective dimension and can aggregate into what Cramer (2016) calls a 'politics of resentment'. In the recent literature on authoritarian populism, resentment is discussed in terms of an illiberal backlash resulting from globalization, neoliberal policy reforms, and rapid change in rural areas in the last few decades (Mamonova et al. 2018). It is argued that perceptions of injustice and feelings of marginalization express themselves in a 'rural reawakening' (Woods 2005) and exclusive rural identities. In her study of the rural-urban divide in Wisconsin, Cramer argues that politics in rural areas is characterized by resentment and a 'rural consciousness', that is,

> [a]n identity as a rural person that includes [...] a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic. (Cramer 2016:5)

During a community hall meeting of the citizen's action group I attended in May 2022, some participants expressed a general sense of resentment against the wind power industry in particular, as well as against the Green Party and local and national state institutions such as planning authorities and courts. One speaker called wind power companies 'a brutal and unscrupulous industry' and criticized the fact that the 'Easter Package' aims to annul democratic procedures. In his view, its key objective was the elimination of nature conservation, and it thus contradicted both German and European law. Moreover, some nature conservationists read the current conflicts on the extension of renewable energies as the manifestation or deepening of a rural-urban divide. For example, Lothar maintains with despair that the construction of wind turbines in the immediate vicinity of his home would destroy his dream of a lifetime. What he finds unjust is that German society declared several decades ago that the landscape had a value of its own and that this public consensus was prescribed by law in the *Bundesnaturschutzgesetz*. But this social contract has been terminated by the ruling 'traffic-light coalition', Lothar maintains indignantly. He claims not to be against renewable energies per se, but what he finds unjust and what he resents is that energy consumption is the highest in urban areas, whereas renewable energy production predominantly affects nature and the landscape in rural regions. Lothar's argument is basically that 'the rural' bears the cost for excessive energy consumption by 'the urban'. One could read this statement as reflecting a rural-urban divide, but it is also a critique

of the growth paradigm and of the refusal to question 'high-energy modernity'. In a more radical manner, Bernd maintains that political parties and public officials are principally oriented towards an urban clientele and that the extension of wind power is tantamount to 'structural violence', as he calls it, against rural citizens. He speaks of an imperialist politics of 'the urban' and 'the state' against 'the rural' (see also Batel and Devine-Wright 2017 on 'energy colonialism' in the UK).

Divergent Views on Anthropocenic Crises

What distinguishes the rural nature conservationists' perspectives from publicly and academically more acknowledged views on human-environment relations and on the various anthropocenic crises as interpreted by environmental and climate protection movements? The main differences relate, first, to a divergent assessment of what constitutes 'the human' in relation to the non-human environment; and second, to the question of which cognitive and political scales matter most in human-environment relations in the Anthropocene.

In terms of the first aspect, one objective of the Special Issue is to rediscover human subjects in the Anthropocene (see Zenker and Wolf, this issue) and thus to critically discuss the current multispecies and more than human turns in anthropology. The case study of rural nature conservationists complicates this discussion in the sense that, on the one hand, my interlocutors take the position that the conquest of nature (Blackbourn 2008), which is seen as one of the unintended and devastating consequences of the Enlightenment, has to be brought to an end, but on the other hand they are mostly indifferent to the more than human paradigm (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015) and rather continue to place the human being at centre stage: they perceive humankind as being exceptional, but at the same time as responsible for protecting and preserving 'nature' and 'the landscape'. For example, by referring to and elaborating on Jonas's (1984) 'imperative of responsibility', Epple (2009) criticizes the common utilitarian thinking on human-environment relations and pleads for a non-anthropocentric ethics that extends the moral community (*Moralgemeinschaft*) to non-human species. Although he claims that all human and non-human beings have the same right to live, Epple assigns an exceptional position (*Sonderstellung*) to humanity because it is responsible for safeguarding this fundamental entitlement.

Second, the nature conservationists I collaborate with and environmental activists who focus on climate protection clash in their assessments of the cognitive and political scales which matter most, that is, the local and regional versus the global and planetary scales (see also Eriksen 2016, and Shoshan 2021). This means that the question of what is due to whom in the Anthropocene is at the same time a conflict about different forms of belonging and increasingly irreconcilable identities. Whereas climate activists are generally concerned to preserve the global environment, rural nature conservationists

focus – not exclusively but mainly – on preserving their immediate surroundings, that is, the local nature and landscape and what my interlocutors refer to as *Heimat*. In essence, the scales on which perceptions of justice apply, as well as the underlying norms and values, the kinds of subjects and objects of justice, and the responsible agents, differ significantly between the two groups. Despite all these divergences, however, they at least share a common concern for the non- and more than human environment.

Concluding Remarks

This article has illustrated and discussed what nature conservationists living in low-mountain regions of rural Germany perceive as (un)just and due in terms of the various environmental crises in the Anthropocene. Against the background of perceived rapid and drastic change, and inspired by what I refer to as a traditional impulse, they focus on the preservation of the non-human environment and cultural landscapes and express their opposition to the extension of wind power in at least three ways: as a commitment to nature conservation and species protection; as a concern for the aesthetic and affective values of local and regional landscapes; and as a plea for the reduction of energy consumption and a degrowth paradigm. The article also shows that perceptions of injustice in the transition to renewable energies may produce resentment and a rural consciousness in opposition to what is perceived as indifference towards and neglect of local concerns. Ultimately, the key but unsettled question is whether the divergent views on what is just and due (nature conservation versus climate protection) on different scales (local versus global) constitute a typical double bind which cannot be resolved, or whether different views on future-making may be integrated to tackle the various anthropocenic crises. The normative goal of my methodological approach and of this article is therefore to shed light on the transformative potential of collaborative research in contested settings and to spin – rather than disrupt – a thread of conversation on what is due to whom in the Anthropocene.

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