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Values and Democratic Deliberation in Urban Climate Politics —the Case of the Climate-Departure Erlangen

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Abstract

Values are often considered to be more stable than they actually are. Liberal theories locate them in individual decision-making processes, poststructuralism reads “values” as structural or discursive effects of power, and a communitarian perspective sees values as existing in the traditions that communities uphold and maintain. I seek to show how values are flexible and (re-)created in the process of democratic deliberation, which is an ongoing and dynamic struggle over policies and social practices in morally charged situations that arise in political life. The article analyzes an initiative launched by the German city of Erlangen, titled Climate-Departure Erlangen (Klima-Aufbruch Erlangen, roughly renderable as “going on a journey together for the climate”). A citizens’ assembly and a stakeholder group were mandated to develop a catalogue of measures by which the city could achieve “climate neutrality” by 2030. The catalogue was submitted to the city council for decision. The entire process was examined using methods of deliberation research to analyze its quality, its content, as well as the interactions and constellations of the various actors involved. The analysis demonstrates that the widespread view that deliberative and consensus-oriented processes lead to depoliticization and result in post-political expertocracy does not apply in this case. Instead, through the associated negotiations over the values guiding urban politics, the process had a substantially politicizing effect on climate politics.

Keywords deliberation, democracy, citizens’ assembly, climate politics, urban politics, values, moral geographies

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1. Introduction

Assigning sharply delineated research topics to geographies of morality is difficult, as it can be argued that social geography generally proceeds from the ethical question of social justice (Hopkins, 2021) and also considers a range of different domains and scales (Fraser, 2010a). We might say that moral geographies focus specifically on comparative questions of responsibility and justice by examining different locations, as well as analyzing variations in moral beliefs and practices across spaces and places (Lee & Smith, 2004; Korf, 2006; Smith, 2000). In political terms, the relationship between space, ethics, and power is of considerable relevance to moral geographies, raising issues of political responsibility, particularly around the matter of who takes decisions and who finds their voices silenced (Barnett, 2010; Fraser, 2010b). This article engages with praxeological accounts that explore the role of values and norms in practices of evaluation, justification, and accountability and processes of democratic decision-making (Barnett, 2012).

Currently, two key perspectives on values predominate in the German political landscape. The conservative CDU/CSU¹ two-party alliance regularly calls for a German *Leitkultur* (guiding culture), which they imagine would authentically reinforce German values that have allegedly fallen victim to neglect. Other actors argue that priority should be given to freedom as a specific value; they include the liberal FDP² in particular, and frequently all other parties, where the value of freedom aligns with an argument they wish to make. These two distinct positions correlate with the controversy between communitarianism and liberalism (Brumlik & Brunkhorst, 1993; Honneth, 1993) that can be considered to have acquired seminal status. Communitarians regard community as good in itself, arguing that communities are based on more or less closed, established sets of values that provide moral orientation (Smith, 2000). Communitarian thinkers have accused liberal thinkers of being too individualistic and ahistorical in assigning to each individual the responsibility of creating their own set of values. Liberals, for their part, accuse communitarian thinkers of conservatism stemming from an inability to conceptualize processes of social change. They contend that, because established sets of values do not allow for individual freedom, communities constitute an oppressive force (Fink-Eitel, 1993). This is consistent with poststructuralist accounts that perceive values as established in discourses (Williams, 2014).

It is notable that this debate appears to cast values, whether they be “traditional” values or the value of freedom, as more or less fixed entities.

Insights from theories of deliberative democracy, and in particular from empirical deliberation studies, may serve to improve these understandings of the role of values in political processes. Empirical deliberation studies have been developed in response to the criticism that the communication-oriented impetus of deliberative democracy theories is unrealistic. These studies aim to observe whether and how thoughtful discussions on issues occur in real-world settings (Bächtiger, 2016; Landwehr, 2012). In empirically analyzing the proceedings of the *Klima-Aufbruch Erlangen* (Climate-Departure Erlangen), which entailed a citizens’ assembly and a stakeholder group drawing up a catalogue of measures for enabling the German city of Erlangen to achieve “climate neutrality” by 2030, I have been able to identify the implicit role of values in current debates and how they become flexible in the negotiation of political solutions. I will show how the deliberative processes that took place during these proceedings created a surplus that transcends conventional positions and allows for post-traditional value consolidation, later explained as *Werteschöpfung*. Alongside its contribution to moral geographies, this article confirms central findings of empirical deliberation studies (for a brief summary, see Dryzek et al., 2019) and challenges the dichotomy frequently assumed to exist between deliberative and agonistic politics. Both instead occur in parallel to varying degrees and extents. In retracing the participatory deliberative process that took place during the Climate-Departure Erlangen and its creation of a critical and politicized public, this article demonstrates the capacity of deliberative democracy to politicize—a capacity that theories of radical democracy, in particular, do not perceive it to possess (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2005). The fact that values were implicitly at the heart of the negotiations was key to the highly emotional character of the debate around the potential implementation of the process’s results in the political sphere and to the diversity of the methods and media via which this debate proceeded. In the intense public mobilization and political awareness, it inspired the Climate-Departure process ultimately to establish not a consensus, but a vision of a community’s will to identify and put in place a collective way forward.

2. From the Communitarian Debate to Deliberative Werteschöpfung?

The idea that community is a fundamental value of human life is rooted in Ferdinand Tönnies' (1887/2005) concept of *Gemeinschaft* (community), which speaks to people's day-to-day lives, their dependencies on one another, their perceptions of this shared life and what defines it, and the familiarity, support, and orientation they draw from it. Tönnies' theory assigns the term *Gesellschaft* (society) to broader, organized structures. The instrumentalization of *Gemeinschaft* by various social movements, and particularly by the National Socialists in Germany, has caused scholars to refrain from its use (Brumlik & Brunhorst, 1993; Schäfers & Lehmann, 2018), except in the Anglo-American academic tradition, where *community* lacks this association, being more closely associated with ideas of democracy (Dewey, 1925, 1927; Joas, 1993). The traditional connotation of community with broadly positive values has been challenged by a liberal perspective that views community as an oppressive force (Fink-Eitel, 1993). According to John Rawls, freedom is a fundamental value for progressive change, particularly in advancing justice, and he sees it as preferable to conservative traditional values that tend to reinforce established power relations (Honneth, 1993). Nonetheless, it is worth considering that *freedom* has increasingly become a cause célèbre across the political spectrum, with populist groups, in particular, invoking a highly truncated concept of freedom. An understanding of this now-classic controversy between communitarianism and liberalism remains essential; as indicated above, its conflicting positions are still widely held.

2.1 The Classic Controversy: Freedom and Deliberation

Communitarians view communities as social units that have evolved over time, developing binding systems of values. Individuals are always embedded in particular geographical and historical contexts. Communitarians argue that liberalism neglects the importance of community-based practices in shaping individual identities, opinion formation, and moral orientation. In doing so, they claim, liberalism adopts an ahistorical stance, overemphasizing rights and leading to reductionist implications for justice (MacIntyre, 1981; Sandel, 1987; Walzer, 1984). They contend that justice systems must be underpinned by established values, and that judgments made by a jus-

tice system will be better publicly accepted if they are based not only on abstract laws and individual rights, but also on a shared understanding of social goods at the community level and on a general sense of duty and responsibility. Sandel and MacIntyre argue that traditional notions of the common good should take priority over rights as formulated by the liberal tradition, which they regard as constituting an unconvincing dualism between freedom and community (Gutmann, 1985).

In contrast, the connection between communities and values proposed by communitarianism links it to conservatism (Gutmann, 1985). Liberals argue that it is only by prioritizing freedom in its specific liberative character that societies can overcome outdated traditions and address injustices in social statuses and power relations. An individual's right to self-determination (positive freedom) can become illiberal if someone exercises this right in such a way as to restrict the options of others. Accordingly, in a liberal account, only the idea of being free from external restrictions (negative freedom) can serve as a means of guaranteeing justice (Berlin, 1958/2002). It is precisely this minimal definition of freedom that generally underlies today's political rhetoric in defense of freedom, particularly where it is directed against policies proposed by other political parties. However, viewed from a communitarian perspective, the idea of negative freedom appears as a very tenuous concept, as due to their socialization, individuals have "inner obstacles" that may cause them to fail to recognize restrictive constraints as such because they see them as commonplace or natural (Taylor, 1979).

The need for a third notion of freedom, alongside positive and negative freedom, is therefore evident. This concept of freedom would address how individuals might overcome their inner obstacles—the over-willing belief in the correctness of realities shaped by cultures and traditions. Such freedom cannot emerge from any one individual alone; social organization and established processes of opinion formation must create it, with the goal of supporting individuals' ability to reflect on themselves and, in doing so, take control of their own lives (Honneth, 2015; Sen, 2000). For individuals to achieve this "political" freedom, they must have guaranteed access to life's basic necessities, transparency regarding career and life options, as well as opportunities to engage in public, participatory deliberative processes that enable them to mobilize their opinions and engage in self-reflection.

It is these processes of deliberation that are key to the arguments I will advance in this article. Again, liberals and communitarians have differing ideas about where in society deliberation should take place and who should be mandated to discuss the political issues of the day. The communitarian classic controversy can also be understood as reflecting a contention between a deliberative and a liberal understanding of democracy (Benhabib, 1993; Brumlik & Brunkhorst, 1993). Accounts of deliberative democracy see democratic legitimacy as directly connected to a public political sphere that respects individuals' civil rights and rights to direct political and societal participation. By contrast, according to the liberal stance of John Rawls, societal organs such as parliaments, councils, and courts are the principal arenas of democratic negotiation and rational decision-making. The primary responsibility for upholding liberal principles is conferred upon elites and experts. No matter where we locate deliberation, today, it appears uncertain whether freedom alone, as a political value, suffices to safeguard and uphold a liberal democratic constitution. It is thus essential for progressive societal change to happen, to ask what additional values should accompany freedom in a post-conventional society—that is, a society capable of overcoming outdated traditions and conventions while preserving those that remain useful (Honneth, 1993).

2.2 The Flexibility of Values and Critique

Further exploring the role of values in deliberation leads to the theory of values put forward by John Dewey (1929, pp. 392–394), a key theorist of deliberative democracy, who has inspired several generations of scholars in this field, two examples being Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. Dewey regards the classical philosophy of values as creating a *realm of values* detached from lived experience, effectively cataloguing values as precious, immutable treasures. To reconnect the theory of values with practical life, Dewey makes use of the distinction between primary and secondary experience. Primary experience refers to the fact that we are constantly surprised by life. The direct experience of a new, unexpected event is directly linked to immediate value judgments as it astonishes, disturbs, excites, or inspires individuals to a degree that familiar processes are not capable of.

First and immature experience is content simply to enjoy. But a brief course in experience enforces reflection; it requires but brief time to teach that some things sweet in the having are bitter in after-taste and in what they lead to. (Dewey, 1929, p. 398)

This phenomenon is directly tangible, to name an example, on the morning after excessive alcohol consumption; it also shows that solitary reflection in many cases is not sufficient for the formation of reliable secondary experience, as individuals do not experience the late effects of specific actions, such as—in this example—alcoholism, until, perhaps, it is too late. The formation of values, then, is a communal process, one that begins when a value judgment is deemed to be a problem. “As a problem, it implies intelligent inquiry into the conditions and consequences of a value-object; that is, criticism” (Dewey, 1929, pp. 398–399). To Dewey, values are thus the gateway to critique. What he means here is not a critique that attempts to build up political opposition, but rather a critique that seeks to mediate its specific points of view in shared debates around value judgments. Such criticism draws on assessments of current conditions in society and proposals for their reform, calling people's existing views into question; communal life, then, is a constant challenge to reflect on and to discuss values, and it constitutes democracy as a deliberative project. “Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself” (Dewey, 1929, p. 148). Lived judgments on whether something is right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly make up the emotional character of life in human association, and the discussion of situational judgments and around identifying the moral precepts that should underlie such judgments is at the heart of democracy. More generally, for Dewey, criticism always takes place when a distinction is made between goods and values. The possession and use of goods go hand in hand with value judgments which, however, require continual consideration and reflection to increase their durability:

Continued perception, except when it has been cultivated through prior criticism, dulls itself; it is soon satiated, exhausted, blasé. ... Cultivated taste alone is capable of prolonged appreciation of the same object; and it is capable of it because it has been trained to a discriminating procedure which constantly uncovers in the object new meanings to be perceived and enjoyed. (Dewey, 1929, p. 399)

Dewey, therefore, does not consider values to exist in isolation, encapsulated in concepts such as “honesty”; instead, he sees them as existing in and as social practices that are always linked to sets of what might be called “incremental” values or moral principles that form complex and contradictory value-objects. Social practices can never serve all moral principles simultaneously. In real-life situations, they always create some conflict between their inherent principles. As they grow culturally and provide people with orientation in their lives, social practices themselves have the status of values in their own right, and criticism, in the Deweyian sense, fuels the debate around them.

Joint reflections on immediate value-objects, which result from primary experiences, generate social practices based on ulterior value-objects that reflect the former (Dewey, 1929, p. 402). For a broad societal basis to understand, ulterior value-objects need mediation that explains their abstraction from lived experience. However, this does not mean that they are less emotionally charged or that they generate less binding value commitments in individuals. Once established, plausible explanations can make them comprehensible in a different, deeper sense, so that they become cultural premises, not without the risk of becoming dogmas due to their individual indeterminacy. Understanding the conexus of such value-objects can trigger emotions during an exciting moment of insight. Such insight can fuel hope for a better-structured society by providing a greater understanding of an existing societal institution—or by offering a critique of it. This strengthens an individual’s emotional attachment to the respectively underlying value-objects. The creation of values is thus a reflection on lived value judgments. Political deliberation, then, can be understood as a function of exchanging views on specific aspects of social practices according to the value judgments made of them as good or bad, desirable or damnable, acceptable or unacceptable. This is the core of Dewey’s notion of critique that shows that agonistic politics, which is solely concerned with the assertion of power, fails to achieve this function. “We are criticizing, not for its own sake, but for the sake of instituting and perpetuating more enduring and extensive values” (Dewey, 1929, p. 403).

I noted above that values give rise to dilemmas. Social practices do not incorporate any coherent value-objects or value systems that can apply to all possible situations. Two or more equally valid values, equally established by traditions, may stand in contradiction to

one another. An example might be the conflict between transparency of information and loyalty to an employer, as manifested in various instances of whistleblowing. Change in urban settings, a key theme in this article’s consideration of the Climate-Departure Erlangen, involves multiple clashes of values. For instance, the use of photovoltaic technology to reduce emissions often contradicts the preservation of historic buildings. Similarly, the intent of European Union procurement legislation to prevent corruption is in conflict with communal interests in establishing stable long-term relationships with high-quality, reliable service providers in the area. Increasingly, the state-stabilizing power division of federalism counteracts the pressing need for rapid transformation. All the values that underpin the different interests are valid in their own right, however, situational and contextual needs place them in opposition to one another. Moral dilemmas are thus a fundamental feature of community life and at the heart of political debates. Political debates are rarely explicitly framed as debates about values, but revolve around actual or possible value judgments in the course of political decision-making. Resorting to a conservatism based solely on immutable “values” would simply perpetuate the problems in the political context, that is, the current climate emergency, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. To bring about social change, emotional affirmation needs to be kept agile, keeping value judgments subject to continual processes of adaptation as we also face a constantly evolving set of societal issues and the concomitant need for socio-ecological transformation³.

2.3 Werteschöpfung and Advances in Deliberation Research

In this spirit, we would do well to understand public deliberation as a process of societal reflection, not on values in the strict sense, but on actual social practices that have become problematic; a process that calls into question the character of these practices as values in the broader sense because their evaluation as good or appropriate has become questionable. In a shared process of finding consensus on current societal problems, values are challenged, defended, and reflected upon, and when decisions take place, an implicit process emerges whereby a new configuration of values becomes consolidated and publicly magnified. We might use an adaptation of a German compound noun here to term this process *Werteschöpfung*. The word has associations with the verb *schöpfen* (the

act of ladling a liquid or making paper) and the noun *Schöpfung* (creation, in the sense of the origin of the world), giving it a special charisma of creativity, agency, and newness. An analogous term, *Rechteschöpfung*, signifies the process in mediation settings through which the participants (mediants) develop legal contracts by defining their remits, duties, and powers, and stands in opposition to jurisdiction, that is, an authoritative ruling upon a dispute, issued by a judge (Mähler, 2005). Similarly, Werteschöpfung points to the creation of advanced value systems through deliberative political processes in which various values of different groups and actors are challenged.

Such an understanding of democracy as entailing open, consent-oriented political debate has been challenged by three arguments (Bächtiger, 2016). First, there is the objection that politics is primarily about the agonistic assertion of interests and power, and not about understanding. Second, there is the observation that much of the many things that are said in debates can have numerous unplanned effects that ultimately influence majority decisions more than rational arguments do. Third, there is the concern that processes of political deliberation may disadvantage less privileged groups. Chantal Mouffe (2005) has been a particularly strong critic of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens' idea of *reflexive modernity*, which posits that societies need to rationally analyze the unwanted effects of their activities and develop reasonable strategies for mitigating them. In her view, the targeted use of think tanks and lobbyists to provide political authorities and established media organizations with convincing rational strategies had the effect of depoliticizing politics and helping neoliberalism to triumph worldwide. Mouffe had in mind the Rawlsian view, to which I referred above, that situates deliberation within bodies of experts charged with rationally reflecting on and correcting societal maldevelopments with the aim of creating a more just future. Theories of deliberative democracy contrast with this perspective, centering on the formation of public opinion and opportunities to create public spaces for post-conventional decision making via dialogue (Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1962/1991).

Studies of deliberative democracy have responded to the critique, and, commencing in the early 2000s, have systematically taken an empirical turn. The field of empirical deliberation studies focuses not on defining rules for communication, as discourse ethics has done, but on analyzing debates in terms of how they

work, the opportunities they create, the limitations they evince, and key factors influencing them (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013; Landwehr, 2012).

Research confirms the power of deliberative communication, finding that participatory processes and public opinion formation can result in political decisions of greater epistemic quality that meet with higher public acceptance than decision-making procedures (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013; Dryzek et al., 2019). Findings show that a majority of people are willing to engage in participatory processes, that “ordinary” people are capable of high-quality deliberation, and that the effects of social disadvantage on deliberation are less marked than skeptics have claimed; also, that participatory processes can counteract polarization and division within societies and can make people less susceptible to uncritical acceptance of populist discourse. Citizen deliberation, further, has the capacity to create a sense of community, as public debate brings about a “move from the for-me-for-you to the for-us, the move into public space” (Taylor, 1989, p. 168). Provided it is deliberative, that is, centered on creating understanding of the issues, any political expression of opinion always constitutes an appeal to those involved in the debate to reflect on the relevance of what is being said to the common good. Contributions to the public discourse within a deliberative process are not monologic statements or instances of personal self-expression; their speakers refer to previous statements in the debate, seeking to confirm or refute them; in this way, the act of public debate, and of the speakers' reciprocal references to one another's contributions, constitutes a shared *we* (Honneth, 2015). There is no deep structure of meaning in community, only the *we* as the essence and origin of the community (Nancy, 1996/2016).

The empirical shift within deliberation studies has challenged the strict distinction between communicative and strategic action drawn by discourse ethics, which deems only communicative action to be ethical, whereas “in strategic action one actor seeks to influence the behavior of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratifications” (Habermas, 1983/1995, p. 63). Researchers examining actual political debate note the use of different communicative styles by different kinds of politicians and find that self-interest does not render communication unethical, but indeed is necessary for prompting people to engage in communication (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013; Holzinger, 2001; Landwehr, 2010), notwith-

standing variations in the quality of debates and the ethical stance in communicative styles (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Other scholars have attempted to reinstate ethical perspectives on political deliberation and suggest reflection on *democratic or post-traditional Sittlichkeit* (Honneth, 2011; Jörke, 2003). *Sittlichkeit* describes a person's attentiveness to their social context coupled with their sense of obligation to align their actions with a general social responsibility or duty that they and others hold. This includes, for example, adhering to agreements and not speaking with deceptive intent or telling deliberate untruths. In a broader sense, democratic or post-traditional *Sittlichkeit* in a democratic polity calls for individuals to adopt community-minded attitudes incorporating an active willingness to reflect upon their own views. It further requires positive regard toward individuals who hold differing opinions and engagement in practices of deliberation upholding the awareness that democratic politics needs a plurality of views and ultimately depends on people being willing to place their own interests second to well-deliberated decisions taken by the community. It will later be shown that the concept unerringly describes the limits of democratic processes. Without delving too deeply into the theory of community, it can be said that the findings of empirical deliberation studies are basically in line with alternative conceptions of community, such as indigenous South American or African democratic politics (Kuppe, 2013; Wiredu, 2015), as well as philosophical accounts that question the dichotomy between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (Nancy, 1996/2016).

In the following, it will be shown how the participatory process of Erlangen's Climate-Departure, flanked by a robust public communications strategy, created a shared public sphere of opinion formation which, against the assumption of agonistic democracy, resulted in significant politicization and critical reflection among Erlangen's citizenry and politicians. It will also demonstrate how values drive deliberation, how they become modeled, and ultimately how policy decisions emerge as the products of *Werteschoepfung*.

3. The Climate-Departure Campaign in the German City of Erlangen

Between March and October 2022, the city of Erlangen, located in the German federal state of Bavaria, conducted a thorough participatory process with the

aim of developing a way to become climate neutral by 2030. On the basis of a rest-budget calculation (Sachverständigenrat für Umweltfragen [SRU], 2020), an organization working in the area of energy and environmental research, the Institut für Energie- und Umweltforschung Heidelberg GmbH (ifeu) had created a catalogue of measures necessary for attaining net zero emissions by that date. This catalogue was subsequently handed to a citizens' assembly of 25 randomly selected⁴ individuals and a stakeholder group comprising representatives of organizations, institutions, offices, and civil society initiatives with influence in the city's public life. The discussion of the measures took place at a series of meetings facilitated by the consultancy Green City Experience GmbH, using a variety of participatory and decision-making formats. Between meetings, ifeu and Green City reworked the catalogue of measures in accordance with the suggestions and comments made and the issues raised by the citizens' assembly and the stakeholder group; participants were additionally able to submit suggestions online. Stakeholders were asked to write a proposal outlining what they are doing or intend to do to fulfill their commitment to climate protection. The final catalogue encompassed 41 measures, each of which the citizens' assembly and the stakeholder group voted on, largely showing markedly high rates of approval for each point. In September 2022, the catalogue of measures went to the city council, and the city administration, along with the political parties, subsequently created a draft proposal encompassing 12 so-called beacon measures and two additional measures. At a meeting in October 2022, accompanied by public protests, the city council officially adopted the proposal and ceremoniously signed a "city climate memorandum" setting out its commitment to all 41 measures.

4. Methods

Erlangen's city administration had commissioned me to independently evaluate the deliberative processes of the Climate-Departure; this meant I had access to all relevant information material, a press review, planning documents, and background information which were subject to document analysis. This gave insight into the internal organizations and the communication strategies, media coverage, and public events relating to the campaign. The meetings were covered by documentary observations. With a student assistant trained in the method, I attended and documented all

the meetings held during the participatory process. The Discourse Quality Index (DQI; Steenberger et al., 2003), as developed for analyzing records of parliamentary debates, was not suitable here but provided orientation for the creation of a semi-systematic protocol containing specific criteria for documentary observations, including general aspects of the meetings, such as attendance, objectives, their form, and atmosphere. The focus was less on content than on the proceedings themselves and the extent to which democratic deliberation brought about change in the content of discussions and the formation of opinions. We recorded any exceptional occurrences during the meetings' course and various facets of the deliberative processes, such as the dynamics of the discussion, the quality of the argumentation that took place, instances of participants working together, and the quality of facilitation, using scales to rate them. The protocol also provided the opportunity to note down summaries of the meetings and ample capacity for detailed observations or contextual information in the form of ethnographic notes. After the meetings, we reflected on our observations and drew together a joint document. If we had any questions, either about the ideas expressed or about an individual's perceptions and assessments, we used informal conversations with the participants. A list of participants was filed in which we characterized not all of them but those who seemed to have a particular influence or attitude. As we were unable to attend all the group discussions at the meetings, some of which took place at the same time, we chose one particular issue, mobility, as the most controversial throughout the process. All meta-observations were supplemented with sequential content analysis regarding the development of the opinions expressed and the way the measures for the catalogue evolved. Therefore, in addition to our own observations, the internal process documents on the changes of the measures were particularly useful. Towards the end of the process, some significant public events developed, which were also attended and integrated into the analysis.

5. A Chronicle of Politicization

As outlined above, the Climate-Departure Erlangen comprised a series of meetings⁵ facilitated by Green City Experience. The citizens' assembly and the stakeholder group met separately, with the exception of one shared meeting. The discussions proceeded from the starting point of a catalogue of proposed actions

for achieving climate neutrality by 2030, drafted by the ifeu Institute. At every stage of the proceedings, those involved engaged actively and critically with the measures; processes of opinion formation and advancement in knowledge were perceptible among the participants. The facilitation team took careful notes, and the scientific team of the ifeu incorporated suggestions arising from the participants' discussions into the catalogue of measures; the participants mentioned this positively in discussions in which they reflected on the experience of the process. Throughout the duration of the process, smaller working groups and the full group discussed changes to the measures; those approved were subsequently incorporated into the catalogue of measures, from which some points were removed and others added as new ideas.

The dynamics of the discussions differed between the two groups. The stakeholder group consisted predominantly of men in late middle age, mostly holding positions with leadership responsibility within their organizations. Particularly in the early sessions, they expressed well-founded expert opinions on the proposed measures and made direct reference to issues that might potentially arise. They argued at a sophisticated level, but made few references to the views other participants had expressed. As the process continued, however, an increasingly collaborative atmosphere developed. It is possible that this was due to the participants' evolving familiarity with the process, the quality of facilitation, and the participants' experience of having their suggestions actually incorporated into the catalogue of measures. The citizens' assembly featured a much more relaxed atmosphere from the outset; people's contributions to the debate were significantly shorter, and participants sought more actively to develop their understandings, listened to one another, responded visibly to one another, and showed changes in their own views. In another contrast to the stakeholder group, the citizens' assembly featured considerable heterogeneity in terms of verbal articulacy. While the participants generally held positive attitudes towards the proposed measures, they were also critical, frequently asking the experts of the ifeu Institute to explain their views and back them up with evidence. Overall, citizens expressed high readiness to accept restrictive measures if politics would decide about such.

5.1 Values and Deliberation

To illustrate how values play into discussion and negotiation around action to be taken, I will now set out a brief report from a working group on mobility at the second meeting of the Citizens' Council on 13 May 2022. The facilitator from the ifeu Institute had proposed the topics "Living in the neighbourhood," "Public transport," and "Parking management" for debate. The atmosphere was pleasant and friendly. All participants took part in the discussion, reacted perceptibly to the contributions of others, and often referred to them in their own contributions. The participants' contributions appear in summary form in the minutes of the meeting and are reflected in the level of detail in Chapter 5.4, "Mobility," of the Climate-Departure's final report. (Bergk, et al. 2022, pp. 123–125).

The participants in the workshop proceedings at no point called the aim of achieving sustainability into question in principle but rather supplemented it with other values, resulting in a complex web of arguments. Examples of topics discussed included the permitted speed limit in residential districts, impacts on quality of life caused by motorized traffic, and the implications of various different speed limits, such as 40 km/h, 20 km/h, and walking speed. The arguments put forward all focused on some form of common good, such as the protection of children or pedestrians more generally, or the attractiveness of the area. By contrast, the issue of parking permits for residents revealed the operation of vested interests in the debate, as in the objection that the cost of permits was too high given the fact that parking spaces were overbooked and often no space was available. Other participants, citing the need for parking fees that take account of people's socio-economic situations, similarly contended that those who make a payment should receive something of equivalent value for it. Overall, the participants were aware of fairness in many dimensions. One woman remarked that trams are much more comfortable than public buses, not least because the drivers often drive too inconsiderately, which led to a discussion around the need to improve the comfort of public transport. Various participants regarded a good standard of public transport to be vital to broad public acceptance of any move away from the primacy of cars, making particular reference to the accessibility of stops, a comprehensible system of fares, pricing, and comfort. Moments of critical self-reflection also occurred; one woman, for example, observed

that she would have to walk longer distances to her car if neighbourhood parking garages were set up, but that this might also motivate her to drive less. There was not unanimous support for the idea of eliminating on-street parking spaces alongside establishing neighbourhood garages; participants pointed out the need for loading bays, short-term parking zones, and accessible parking spaces for people with disabilities.

The contributions to the discussion are not always evidently linked to specific fundamental values. Without exception, however, they are motivated by the speakers' feelings regarding specific aspects of the current arrangements that they perceive as negative or by a fear that the upcoming changes could have undesirable or detrimental consequences. "Demands stipulate what ought to be and what ought not to be, and this normative character puts them at the center of discourse ethics" (Steenberger et al., 2003, p. 27). Values are mostly implicit in contributions to the discussion. They underlie, for example, situational narratives, such as the example of an elderly person who related struggling to hold on to her walking frame because of a bus driver's driving style. It was very often the case that speakers did not call for the positive realization of values, but rather wanted to avoid violations of values that they perceive to be present or fear would be the result of what others suggested. This gave rise to oft-cited, symbolic instances such as the case of a nurse finding herself virtually unable to use public transport to travel to her very late-evening and early-morning shifts. This example combines the socio-economic disadvantage—in the form of low pay—of some workers in the healthcare sector with the need for a car, the result being a dilemma, a convergence of conflicting factors. Perceived in this way, the debate appeared not to be about values per se, but rather to revolve around various clashes of values experienced under the existing conditions or expected to arise through the changes under discussion. The discussion of complex value-objects, such as public transport or car parking, incorporates the deployment of value-motivated arguments as suggested contributions to their improvement.

5.2 Agonists' Public Attempts to Undermine the Process

Some single participants in the stakeholder group did not commit to the process and to the rules and values laid out at the beginning (i.e., confidentiality while

the process is ongoing). I noted a particular blockade mentality against actions concerning mobility among representatives of associations of tradespeople, industrial, and commercial businesses. Although various suggestions for mitigating the impact on businesses were made, such as specific exemptions from restrictions, these proposals did not appear to lessen these actors' resistance to the proposed measures, which I observed as manifesting visibly in their body language as well as in their verbal utterances. These stakeholders did not submit the "Commitment to Sustainability," which all stakeholders were asked to file, and which should have included details of the actions they would take. Other stakeholders regarded this refusal as unacceptable, in response to which the former argued that, as representatives of business associations, the submission of such a commitment would amount to an unauthorized statement on behalf of all their members.

Local media subsequently carried statements from these actors calling the city's plans for climate neutrality "unrealistic" and "non-constructive," and explaining some of the measures incorrectly and out of context. Advertisements opposing the plans likewise appeared. These actions violated the agreed terms of the proceedings of not communicating contents to the public as long as the discussions were still in progress and there was yet to be consensus on any specific outcomes. Possibly prompted by lobby interventions, the Bavarian Minister of Interior wrote to Erlangen's mayor, warning him to avoid jeopardizing the city's economic stability. Numerous participants perceived the actions of those driving aversive media coverage as an attempt to damage the whole process. The team managing the process responded calmly and did not engage antagonistically with these participants. Other stakeholders and citizens, however, issued counter-statements in support of the process.

5.3 Politicization—Interventions and Decisions

The presentation of the final catalogue, comprising 41 measures, to Erlangen's city council by the city's administration, Green City Experience, and the ifeu Institute (Bergk et al., 2022) was followed by a political debate with an unusually high number of contributions. A member of the city council stated that he had the impression that everyone on the council felt the need to have their say and indicate their attitude towards the plans. Politicians from parties with strong

track records of environment-centered policies were emphatic in advocating the council's approval of the proposals. Representatives of liberal and conservative parties, in particular, while expressing, in more or less unambiguous terms, their commitment to combating climate change, noted the impossibility of actioning all the measures at once and the need to set priorities. Parties with a social democratic tradition expressed concerns that the plan might divert public funds from social welfare. There were frequent calls for a review of the plan's compatibility with economic interests and for consultation with business associations. The ifeu Institute repeatedly emphasized the ultimate invalidity of economic arguments against the plans, insofar as the cost of investment in helping to limit global heating would be lower in the long term than the cost of losses and damages incurred from the impacts of unchecked climate change. The council determined to use the weeks following the meeting to hold consultations and discussions within and among the political parties on the council, while mandating the city administration to create and submit a draft resolution to be decided upon in a subsequent meeting. During the period that followed, while discussions accordingly took place behind closed doors, the city administration worked on a draft resolution. Rumors spread that the city planned to exclude some of the measures from the vote. Various actors tried to intervene in the debate. A citizens' meeting was arranged in which citizens demanded the city council to adopt all 41 measures. The city's Chamber of Industry and Commerce issued an open letter to the council in which it was highly critical of the proposed plans; an initiative on climate change was similarly damning, considering the draft resolution would fall far short of what was required. Political parties centering on environmental policy filed motions to amend the draft resolution.

The city council's meeting on 27 October 2022 experienced disruption from demonstrators who had gathered outside the city hall and, once the meeting was underway, entered the council chamber, chanting for climate justice and robust action on climate change (see Figure 1). The draft resolution, created from the catalogue discussed during the deliberative process, encompassed 12 "beacon" and two additional measures that promise a quick and high reduction in CO₂ emissions and motivate other players within urban society to also take action. Furthermore, the idea of drafting a city climate memorandum as a commitment to the future implementation of all 41 measures from the original catalogue was put forward. The way

the decision went suggests that a three-line whip was applied. The council rejected all motions proposing amendments; the city administration was commissioned to calculate the cost of implementation, and the signing of the city memorandum took place subsequently to this. The city memorandum is a commitment by the city to all 41 measures and a statement of its willingness to successively tackle them all, provided resources are available.

Figure 1 Demonstrators Disrupting the City Council Meeting, 27 October 2022



Note. Source: Photograph taken by the author.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This article speaks to moral geographies by showing how values were challenged, defended, and reflected upon in deliberative argumentation and by explaining the ultimate consolidation of a new configuration in Erlangen's catalogue of proposed climate measures, and their public magnification in the city council's decision and the city memorandum. I was able to observe, during the Climate-Departure process, expressions of value judgments being listened to, often taken up by other speakers, and responded to. Deliberative processes activate values because the demands, suggestions, or comments challenge the values of others. The participants were able to develop an awareness of the diversity of their positions; they revised or adjusted their own views and facilitated the consensus-centered process of creating the catalogue of measures. This amounts to a process describable as Werteschöpfung. The fact that deliberation can enable this process is one of the key findings of empirical deliberation research (Bächtiger, 2016; Dryzek et al., 2019). Further, I was able to confirm other central findings from this

field; the possibly most emphatic observation I made in this context was that, in general, the quality of deliberation among citizens is higher than the quality of deliberation taking place among politicians in parliamentary debates (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013). The quality of deliberation among the randomly chosen citizens who took part in the process under study here was high from the outset, with the stakeholders needing time to improve their deliberations by gaining confidence in the process, a phenomenon described as *deliberative drift* (McLaverty & Halpin, 2008). The public debate on the Climate-Departure measures in the city council meetings differed from this, featuring a series of statements, each establishing the speaker's position, but making very little reference to the points put forward by other speakers. With the exception of speakers representing parties that prioritize environmental policy, the contributors each began by stating, in more or less convincing terms, their commitment to protecting the climate before setting out various concerns around the measures and detailing their perception of obstacles to their implementation. I noted that representatives of conservative and liberal parties recommended consultation with those actors that had previously placed limits on their engagement in the participatory process; this may indicate that these organizations had lobbied the parties concerned.

Neither theories of deliberative democracy nor theories of agonistic politics alone give the full picture, but empirical deliberation research has led to a greater understanding that deliberative and non-deliberative (agonistic) behavior are both part of real negotiations and that they are somehow intertwined. Contrary to agonistic-theoretical assumptions, the deliberative format of the Climate-Departure fueled politicization within the stakeholder group, the city council, and the wider public. Strategic efforts to damage the process became transparent, as did the concomitant violation of fundamental values of the process, such as the centering of the common good, or of the rules of the process originally agreed upon by all involved, such as confidentiality as long as the process is still ongoing. Especially the latter fueled politicization. The exceptionally high number of statements made in the city council debate is also indicative of this politicization and how it placed pressure on each member of the city council to take up a stance on climate issues. Public awareness emerged from the evidently environmentally problematic character of political actors' reluctance to change their position in this area. Ultimately, possible ways forward were deliberated in various

different circles, including meetings of party groups on the city council, citizens' meetings, local media, activist groups, and protest events. This confirms the contention of deliberative systems theory (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012) that not every format of deliberative democracy needs to improve all normative aspects of negotiations equally, but that deliberative democracy does improve democratic decision-making overall because different political and civil society arenas give primary emphasis to different normative criteria.

Empirical research is generally unable as yet to precisely assess a participant's degree of deliberative or strategic attitude (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013). In this case, however, the attitude of the business associations was evident in their demonstratively limited engagement. Although their influence remained in place to a certain extent, they did not succeed in damaging the overall process. Their strategic action is describable as a non-communicative style that aimed at preserving the status quo, employing deception through disingenuous or even false arguments and showing no interest in understanding-oriented communication. By doing so, they might have achieved that some measures were postponed. However, they could have also taken a different approach to the process, conceiving of it as an opportunity to co-design Erlangen's action on climate change and communicate it to and discuss it with their associations' members. They could have made constructive contributions for the purpose of making their concerns heard and ensuring their influence on the measures or the identification of viable alternatives, taking account of their needs. Arguably, indeed, these actors had a responsibility as leaders of business associations to gain a sense of impending future developments as impacts and consequences of climate change and prepare their sectors for change (*responsibility-as-duty* in contrast to *responsibility-as-accountability*, Mounk, 2017, p. 30). Refusing or placing restrictions on collaborative efforts and trying to circumvent the participatory process are not immoral acts in the view of liberal philosophy, as they do not violate any laws. However, such a course of action can be considered highly unethical, or, more precisely, *unsittlich*—that is, in contravention of *Sittlichkeit* as defined above—due to the refusal to take part in the democratically made decision to implement the deliberative, participatory Climate-Departure process and the violation of rules of the processes initially agreed upon by all involved.

All this said, the Climate-Departure process did represent a genuine arena of deliberation, that is, the formation of individual views and public opinion, essentially unimpeded by the complexity of the issues at stake and the limited time available for the process. In other words, it represented an instance of democratic Werteschöpfung. The adaptation and readaptation of value systems while designing the measures gave rise to new potential practices intertwined with the evolution of more sustainable values. The 41 measures may not all have resulted in immediate action, but they stand as a roadmap for Erlangen's development going forward. The comprehensive public relations and media strategy that accompanied the process created public transparency around the proceedings, which is likely to boost approval of the process even where the political decisions taken do not always fully follow the proposals put forward by the citizens' assembly. This case study thus appears to confirm the capacity of deliberative democracy formats, carefully thought through, to inspire and advance open and inclusive discussion, promote civic engagement, enhance public understanding of complex issues, and provide for the consideration of a diverse range of views. Deliberative democracy can thus result in informed decision-making and robust policy outcomes, as well as counteracting populism and societal polarization.

Declaration of Interests

There is no conflict of interests to declare. The city administration of Erlangen commissioned me to produce an independent evaluation report on the Climate-Departure process; it is in the course of this work that I conducted the empirical research set out in this article. The city administration only provided funds to cover the expenses and granted permission to also use the data for academic purposes. The Gothaer Stiftung provided funding for publication in the context of the *Klimawandel-Wohnen-Gesundheit* research project.

Notes

¹ The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU).

² Liberal (*Freiheitliche*) Democratic Party (FDP).

³ It is not necessary to engage with transformation theory, as a variety of notions of transformation can be discussed in democratic processes. For the present purpose, it is important to recognize the need for change in the face of

global change.

⁴ Of the initial random selection of 750 citizens of Erlangen, 144 agreed to take part; from this group, the final citizens' assembly of 25 was chosen to be representative of Erlangen's population in terms of gender, nationality, district of residence, and age. The sample contained a slight bias towards younger people, in consideration of the greater long-term impacts they are likely to suffer from climate change.

⁵ The initial meeting took place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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