

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a green leaf. A vibrant rainbow spectrum is projected onto the palm of the hand and the leaf, symbolizing hope and environmental care. The background is a soft, warm, out-of-focus light.

How environmental activists negotiate a sense of hope in the face of global threats

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Research framework

Study (work in progress): „Imagination of collective futures in environmental movements“

Methods

- Data collection: problem-centred and narrative interviews, group discussions, documents...
- Data analysis and methodological strategy: Reflexive Grounded Theory

Research partners

- Identification as environmental activists
- Mainly members of the Fridays for Future movement
- Two age groups: young and elderly activists

Hope is one of the extracted categories

Conceptual
con-
siderations:
Hope...

...manifests as a feeling (of trust) accompanied by a more or less vague belief in fortunate future outcomes

...is tied to a certain degree of insecurity



Selected findings of
my qualitative
study

Different facets of hope

Dynamics: constant oscillation between hope and hopelessness, fearful expectation, frustration ...

Perception as more or less plausible and rational

Portrayed as a driver of or a barrier to collective action („blind hope“)

Hope work

Deliberate „hope work“ as opposed to the non-deliberate experience of hope

Limitations of „hope work“

Related to the concept of „emotion work“ (s. Hochschild, 1979)

Psychosocial functions of hope (in the context of environ- mental action)

Enables individuals to become and stay involved in collective action / to avoid resignation

Shared hope(s) as a „glue“ tying activist groups and movements together

- Relational and interdependent character
- A social norm called for in the group discussions

Linked to personal well-being

Ways to foster hope (in the context of environmental action)

Situated experiences

- The „social niche“ as a vital place to restore hope: shared views and activities (e. g. demonstrations, discussions) → collective efficacy

Affirming certain understandings of social change

- General belief in its possibility
- Unpredictability of the future concerning “positive” change
- Gradual and only to a limited degree perceivable
- Interpretation of (recent) history as advancing societal progress

Focussing on specific causes for hope in the present (e. g. “small utopias”) and in the past

Re-defining hope

Conclusion

- Different facets of hope
- Emphasis on „hope work“
- The willingness to engage in hope work is founded on the different psychosocial functions of hope and its status as a social norm
- Variety of ways in which a sense of hope is fostered by the activists





Thank you for your attention!