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Article:
Gardner, Peter Robert, Carvalho, Tiago and Valenstain, Maria (2022) Spreading rebellion?: The rise of Extinction Rebellion chapters across the world. Environmental Sociology. ISSN: 2325-1042

https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2022.2094995

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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rens20

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To cite this article: Peter Gardner, Tiago Carvalho & Maria Valenstain (2022): Spreading rebellion?: The rise of extinction rebellion chapters across the world, Environmental Sociology, DOI: 10.1080/23251042.2022.2094995

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2022.2094995

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ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2022.2094995

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Spreading rebellion?: The rise of extinction rebellion chapters across the world

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an analysis of social movement transnationalisation, using Extinction Rebellion as its case study. In order to investigate the temporal and geographical dynamics of Extinction Rebellion's transnational diffusion, and the interaction of these dynamics with protest events, we draw on two primary datasets: one describing where and when all 1265 of the movement's local groups emerged globally, the other containing all major protest events with which it is associated. We contend that although Extinction Rebellion has been impressively international from its early stages, the highest density of local groups – or 'chapters' – is found in Western Europe and the Anglosphere. Drawing on della Porta's theory of 'eventful protest', we argue that peaks in the creation of new local groups across the world followed major protest events. Hence, we argue that Extinction Rebellion protests were instrumental in the movement's own transnational diffusion. The data also reveal that the period from early 2020 to June 2021 (the time of data collection) represented a nadir in new chapter creation, indicating a possible COVID-19 effect in the movement's diffusion.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 21 January 2022
Accepted 24 June 2022

KEYWORDS
Environmental movements; eventful protest; contentious politics; transnationalisation

Introduction

Social movements have become increasingly transnational since the 1970s, accordant with a growing recognition that many political, economic, and social issues transcend the state in scale (Smith 2013). As the current climate emergency represents one of the most truly global – and globally urgent – problems to face humanity, calls for supra-state responses have been building since at least the late 1980s (Moser 2010). Since then, the harbingers of a truly transnational climate activism have been building (Giugni and Grasso 2015; Almeida 2019). Although grassroots mobilisation increased through the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a step change appears to have occurred in 2018 with the creation of social movements such as Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, and Earth Strike. However, precisely how transnational this more recent wave of climate contention is, and what aids in such a movement's diffusion across the world, remains unknown.

In this paper, we trace the temporal and geographical dynamics of the spread of one such movement: Extinction Rebellion. Specifically, we do so by focusing on the emergence of local activist groups or 'chapters' associated with this movement. Drawing on two primary datasets – one containing geographical and temporal data about all 1165 Extinction Rebellion Chapters registered from its inception to the point of data collection (June 2021), the other documenting major protest events associated with the movement over the same period – we explore not just the extent of the movement's transnationalism, but also the dynamics of its diffusion over space and time, and the potential impact of mass protest events on these patterns of diffusion. In light of institutional and political failures at the global level to put in place policy changes commensurate with the scale of the problem (IPCC 2022), there is an urgent need for effective, transnational environmental activism. Understanding how and why such movements diffuse is therefore also crucial for environmental sociology, as it allows for an understanding of how globalised the overall climate justice movement has become.

Using Della Porta's (2008) theory of 'eventful protest', we argue that Extinction Rebellion protests events were able to positively impact the movement's transnational diffusion. Our analysis suggests that peaks in the creation of new chapters coincided with the movement's most successful protest campaigns. Hence, we contend that its transnationalisation is, at least in part, a result of their own protest actions that resonated with other potential activists around the world.

As would be expected of any new, impactful social movement, the academic literature on Extinction Rebellion is relatively sparse but expanding. Scholarship in the area has explored the movement's repertoires of action and organisation (Berglund and Schmidt 2020), social composition and attitudes (Saunders, Doherty, and Hayes 2020; Bell 2021), tactics (Ginanjar and Mubarrok 2020; Matthews 2020),

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discourse (Gardner and Carvalho forthcoming), and culture (Westwell and Bunting 2020). Both Morgan (2021) and James and Mack (2020) have provided excellent qualitative reflections from activist-scholar perspectives on the construction of Extinction Rebellion chapters in settler-colonial contexts, describing Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada, respectively. However, this paper offers the first analysis of the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters across the globe.

The paper starts by outlining the key literature on social movement transnationalisation and eventful protests. After briefly clarifying our main unit of analysis, the 'chapter' in Extinction Rebellion, and describing the methodology of the study, we outline our findings in relation to (1) the geographical dynamics, (2) temporal dynamics, and (3) the impacts of eventful protests on the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters worldwide.

Transnational social movements

The term 'transnational social movement' (TSM) encapsulates a relatively diverse range of phenomena, from solidarity movements (such as the anti-Apartheid movement) and networks of social movement organisations working in concert (see Luthfa 2017) to the international spread of affiliated demonstrations (such as Black Lives Matter protests: Mundt, Ross, and Burnett 2018) or the spread of a social movement organisation (such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). Transnationalism involves some form of tie or diffusion across – or transcending – state boundaries. However, this diffusion does not necessarily require formal association, 'only that challengers in one country or region adopt or adapt the organizational forms, collection action frames, or targets of those in other countries or regions' (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005, 3).

Since the 1970s, social movements have been becoming increasingly transnational in character; that is, they have become progressively more likely to involve the mobilisation of people across national and state-level boundaries (Smith 2013). Such movements transcend mere multi-nationalism, rather building complex networks and undertaking contentious political activities around shared aims that define 'interests and identities in ways that go beyond the traditional nation-state borders' (Smith 2013, 2). As political decision-making structures in general have become increasingly global, with the emergence of new transnational centres of power, movements have adapted and collaborated worldwide in line with this shift, transforming themselves into important players that can pressure international organisations (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005) in what can be understood as a scale shift in the sphere of action (Smith 2013).

In recent decades, we have seen several waves of TSMs. Feminist movements transnationalised in the mid-1980s, developing globally interconnected networks of activists and organisations (Moghadam 2005). Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, major protests associated with the Global Justice Movement erupted around the world, including the 'Battle of Seattle', the massive worldwide protest events against the War in Iraq, and the various World Social Forums since 2003 (Della Porta 2007; Hadden and Tarrow 2007; Pianta and Marchetti 2007). Despite this trajectory and the global nature of the issues at hand, activist responses to the Great Recession that began in 2008, such as Occupy and the anti-austerity mobilisations in Southern Europe, largely framed their action around domestic-based claims that targeted the State rather than international organisations (Della Porta 2015). Nevertheless, transnationalisation remains a global trend in social movements in the post-WWII period, rising notably in the mid-1980s and in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Smith et al. 2018).

Environmentalism has been ascendant among TSMs over the last five decades. Whereas 10.2% of TMSs were associated with environmentalism in 1973, this figure had risen to 27.1% by 2013, rendering it the second most prominent cause behind Human Rights (Smith et al. 2018). Meanwhile, TSMs with their headquarters in the Global South have seen an equally dramatic turn toward environmentalism, increasing from 3.9% to 21.8% over the same period. Nevertheless, Doherty and Doyle (2006, 698) point out that the 'new environmentalism' that has emerged since the 1970s, despite being 'global in its analysis', has in fact demonstrated 'very little evidence of global environmental protest action or of groups working effectively across borders'. Organisations such as Greenpeace remained highly centralised, institutionalised, and based in the Global North. It is, however, important not to limit the scope of environmental activism to organisations. Taking a more expansive definition, Rootes (1999, 2, 6) contends that it should also include the 'broad networks of people and organisations engaged in collective action in the pursuit of environmental benefits', from the 'highly organised and formally institutionalised to radically informal'. Yet even Rootes concluded in the mid-2000s that the British environmental movement, though more transnational than in previous decades with broader audiences and partnerships, was nonetheless a 'limited transnationalisation'. He writes: 'it is striking that so many of the efforts and resources of even the most internationalist of British [environmental movement organizations] are devoted to particular campaigns within Britain, targeted at British governments and corporations about essentially domestic issues' (Rootes 2005, 41).

In their analysis of climate change-related contention, Almeida and Chase-Dunn contend that successive waves of international environmental movements since the 1980s have intensified as the contradictions between capital and the environment have accumulated (Almeida 2019; Chase-Dunn and Almeida 2020). The 1980s and 1990s were characterised by mobilisation 'from above', led by international institutions and scientists. A new phase of mobilisation emerged in the early 2000s, with the rise of more grassroots protest activities associated with the Global Justice Movement. This phase reached its apogee in 2014 and 2015, with the Global Days of Climate action witnessing participation in 'up to 75% of all countries on the planet with at least 1.5 million participants in each campaign' (Chase-Dunn and Almeida 2020, 81–82).

A step change has occurred in global climate mobilisation since 2018 with the emergence of new players such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays For Future. While drawing on many of the frames and repertoires of the past four decades, these movements 'introduced new life and energy into the transnational movement … with a series of even broader globally coordinated actions with high levels of youth participation' (Chase-Dunn and Almeida 2020, 82). In comparison to prior contention on climate change, these movements appear – at least qualitatively – to have become more conspicuously global in character, with eagerness for supra-national approaches being regularly vocalised by climate activists (De Moor 2018). These movements have also been notable for their particularly 'disruptive and dramatic tactics' through which they have been able to garner considerable public visibility (Chase-Dunn and Almeida 2020, 75). As we argue in this paper, for Extinction Rebellion it was precisely the radicalness of their tactics and repertoires that precipitated the movement's rapid transnational diffusion.

Eventful protest

The growing internationalisation of environmental movements can, to some extent, be considered a result of the opportunity structures of a globalised world. A thriving social media culture afforded the youth of the late 2010s considerable capacity for building transnational networks, increasing the availability of influential allies (Tarrow 1998; Boulianne, Lalancette, and Ilkiw 2020). Furthermore, in the UK at least, Extinction Rebellion also emerged at a high-water mark of contentious politics, in the midst of a decade of protest (Bailey 2020). Nevertheless, the political opportunity structures of the last decade would appear to only partially explain the pace and direction of environmental TSMs in recent years. At least when it comes to describing the spread of Extinction Rebellion, we contend that major protest events were also instrumental in its transnational diffusion. In theorising the connections between major Extinction Rebellion-related protests and the global spread of local chapters, we use Della Porta's (2008, 2014) theory of 'eventful protest'.

Drawing on William H. Sewell's argument that events can 'significantly transform structure', della Porta suggests that contentious political events themselves create opportunities for the expansion of social movements and associated forms of activism (Della Porta 2020, 520). She writes,

> [E]specially during cycles of protest, some contingent intense events tend to affect the given context by fuelling mechanisms of social change: organizational networks develop; frames are bridged; personal links foster reciprocal trust. In this sense, some protest events constitute processes during which collective experiences develop through the interactions of different individual and collective actors, taking part with different roles and aims (Della Porta 2014, 6–7).

Whereas many – perhaps even most – protest actions are more or less banal and routinised, others are impactful, triggering 'critical junctures, producing abrupt changes which develop contingently and become path dependent' (Della Porta 2020, 559). These eventful protests 'have a transformative effect and introduce innovations during the cycle, putting forward new repertoires, players, frames or claims, or even building alliances' (Carvalho 2022, 47; Portos and Carvalho 2019). In this paper, we argue that Extinction Rebellion's major protest events were impactful in this sense, precipitating the creation of new local chapters globally.

Background: the chapter in extinction rebellion

The 'chapter' is a core feature of Extinction Rebellion's organisational structure. These are 'local groups that share most demands, though with a degree of autonomy in strategies and priorities', that are aligned in their dedication to nonviolent, radical ecological protest (Burgess and Read 2020; Smyth and Walters 2020, 622). However, to conceptualise the chapter only in organisational terms is too reductionistic. Rather, we argue that the chapter functions in three key ways: (1) as an organisational strategy, (2) as an imagined community, and (3) as a brand.

First, the chapter is an organisational strategy. Extinction Rebellion chapters are, at base, small-scale and localised activist assemblies. The movement's founders' hope was to build a movement that was participatory, highly democratic, locally rooted, and horizontal in its power structure (Berglund and Schmidt 2020). With its proliferation of local, semi-autonomous groups, each able to discuss key issues, create forums at which members can voice ideas and

make collective decisions, build senses of community, and organise protest actions, the chapter-based organisational structure has allowed for many of these aims to be realised. This decentralised organisational structure also permits the movement to maintain momentum, strengthen activist self-efficacy and identification with the movement, and take action on a broad variety of issues from the local (such as XR[1] Nottingham's specific action against plans to replace the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station with an incinerator) to the global (the two International Rebellions in 2019) (Carvalho 2022; Bosi and Zamponi 2020; XR Nottingham 2021). The fact that fully 85.4% of those who participated in Extinction Rebellion's London-based protests in April and October 2019 were members of a local chapter would appear to indicate that this organisational strategy has been effective (Saunders, Doherty, and Hayes 2020).

Second, as Extinction Rebellion does not have a 'membership' so to speak, chapters offer a means of building identification with the movement. They appear to allow activists to cultivate senses of belonging and loyalty associated at the local level. At the global level, however, being part of a local chapter permits identification with the wider imagined community of the movement. These activists thus exist in a world of chapters, their own local group a single node in a constellation of chapters globally. In this way, local chapters help to form the idea of Extinction Rebellion as a whole, despite individual activists having never met most others in the movement and despite actual experiences and local realities of being associated with the movement being rather diverse in practice (Anderson 1991; James and Mack 2020; Morgan 2021). Hence, the spread of chapters across the world indicates, at minimum, a spread of a sense of Extinction Rebellion as an imagined community.

Third, in many ways, the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters represents a diffusion of a brand of sorts. With its distinctive cultural features (such as regenerative culture; see Westwell and Bunting 2020) and spectacular repertoires (including the use of painted sailing boats, Red Brigade performances, and dramatic protest art), taking on the 'Extinction Rebellion' label allows activists from XR Delhi to XR Hawaii to adopt common practices, performances and aesthetics. Describing Extinction Rebellion as a brand is not mere allegory: the movement's website makes available for download a wide range of material, including flags, roadblock banners, and placard designs (XR 2021). With local groups worldwide using the same symbols, objects, and even fonts, Extinction Rebellion has been able to create 'a unified, easily identifiable appearance' (Shiels 2019); a visual declaration of unity spanning all continents. In reality, however, local contexts may give rise to rather different realities on the ground, and actual ties to movement elsewhere in the world may be weak in practice (see Morgan 2021). As such, for some chapters the 'spread' of Extinction Rebellion may essentially mean an adoption of a brand by activists in the region.

In this paper, we trace the temporal and geographical dynamics of the diffusion Extinction Rebellion chapters worldwide, describing when and where these local groups emerged and analysing peaks in chapter creation in light of major protest events. While doing so provides us with some productive insights into the nature and contours of the movement, we are careful not to over-extrapolate our findings. The connections and relationships between chapters and protest actions associated with the movement ought not to be assumed, and are largely yet to be explored. However, it is worth noting that, at any given 'Extinction Rebellion protest', the demonstrators may not all be part of an Extinction Rebellion chapter, not all chapters in the region may be represented, and a variety of other organisations may be involved in the planning, organisation and running of the event (Saunders, Doherty, and Hayes 2020). Hence, and in light of our conceptualisation of the chapter above, we are cautious of uncritically equating the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters with the spread of Extinction Rebellion protest; or even of Extinction Rebellion itself. Rather than tracking its spread as a social movement organisation per se, we consider this to be a study of the spread of *a form of organising associated with* Extinction Rebellion.

Methods

Methodologically, this paper involved creating and analysing two datasets: (1) the Extinction Rebellion Chapters Dataset ('Chapters Dataset' herein) and (2) the Extinction Rebellion Protest Events Dataset ('Protest Events Dataset').

First, the Chapters Dataset consists of geographical and temporal information about the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters globally. The movement's website (rebellion.global) makes available a map of all currently registered chapters across the world. This website also provides information on the location, type of chapter, contact details, and links to social media websites for each. Due to Facebook's transparency policies, we were also able to access the date of creation for chapters' Facebook groups. Using computational techniques, data on each chapter was scraped from Extinction Rebellion's website. Publicly available creation dates for Facebook pages were subsequently collected. The variables included in this dataset include: the title of the chapter, location (country and continent), geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude), social media and website links, and Facebook page creation date. A total of 1265 groups

were recorded, with an approximate date of creation provided for 86.2% of cases. Analysis of these data allowed us to observe key geographical and temporal patterns of transnational diffusion of Extinction Rebellion chapters between 2018 and 2021.

Second, the Protest Events Dataset is an inventory of all major protest events around the world associated with Extinction Rebellion. Digital ethnographic methods were employed to qualitatively analyse and map all such protests (Caliandro 2018). Rather than recording every protest act undertaken, only those events that were commented on by national chapters as being noteworthy were included. Collecting these data initially involved an online search for all protest events associated with Extinction Rebellion, seeking information relating to each of the 79 countries where chapters have been created. Extinction Rebellion's official website was then utilized to track the web presence of each country's national chapter, and these websites and social media pages were investigated for comments on important protest events. This allowed us to qualitatively observe the sense of importance given to different protest events – locally, nationally, regionally, and globally – by each national chapter. A date, location, and brief description of each event were then recorded in the dataset. Finally, the timings of major protest events were analysed in conjunction with the geographical and temporal dynamics of the Chapters Dataset. These data allowed us to investigate the links between eventful protest and chapter creation.

Four limitations were identified in the Chapters Dataset. First, taking the date that each chapter created a Facebook page to approximate the month in which the group itself was created is an imperfect measure. Nevertheless, we contend that the former can be considered as offering at least a reasonable proxy for the latter. Social media is increasingly recognised as an important, if not necessary, tool for social movements in the twenty-first century (Mundt, Ross, and Burnett 2018). One of the first tasks for any such group is usually to create a presence on social media. The accuracy of this proxy is weakened by factors such as the possibility of a delay between a chapter's establishment and the creation of a Facebook page. However, alternative measures, such as activists' memories or the date of registration with Extinction Rebellion itself, are also subject to error. All such measures are at best a representation, likely preceded by planning and discussion among activists interested in establishing such a group. Hence, while imperfect, we consider the Facebook page creation date to offer a defensible proxy for each chapter's beginning.

Second, as 13.8% (174 of 1265) of chapters did not have a Facebook page, these could not be included in the temporal analysis. Although these cases were found across all continents, it is important to note that these were not evenly distributed. While data for date of creation was lacking in 10.5% of Europe's 888 chapters, this figure was 12.0% (19/158) for North America, 19.0% (8/42) for Asia, 19.6% (21/107) for Oceania, 38.5% (15/39) for Africa, and 58.1% (18/31) for South America.

Third, 16 of the 1265 chapters included in the Chapters Dataset were originally created under a name unrelated to Extinction Rebellion. Of these 16 chapters, 10 were later renamed to demonstrate affiliation with the movement.[2] In these cases, we decided to record the start-date as the date at which the name was changed to an Extinction Rebellion-related name. A further four pages were also created under names unrelated to Extinction Rebellion, but have not been subsequently changed. As we are unable to ascertain an estimated date at which these four became associated with the movement, their temporal data was removed from the dataset. Finally, two of the 16 Facebook pages were created under a different name but were deleted prior to data collection. Given the lack of information on the timing or nature of the name change, their start-dates were removed from the dataset.

Fourth, the Chapters Dataset contains thin descriptive data only. As such, more granular details about the chapters under analysis – such as the number of activists per chapter, each group's level of activist engagement, the regularity of meetings, similarities and divergencies in goals, perspectives and strategies between groups, and changes to each chapter over time – are absent from the dataset. On the latter point, an important piece of information the dataset lacks is whether each chapter expanded, contracted, became dormant, or even disbanded altogether in the period after it was registered with Extinction Rebellion. In this way, our dataset is limited in scope to simply where and when chapters emerged around the world, irrespective of what occurred to each individual group subsequently. While the Chapters Dataset nonetheless provides important insights into the dynamics of internationalisation, we hope this paper will also help to inform and inspire thicker descriptive descriptions.

Despite their limitations, these datasets shed light on dynamics that would otherwise be hard to perceive. Although the study of transnational diffusion has to date been a rich and important subfield of social movement studies, the field has to date mainly studied using qualitative methods. Hence, this research offers important new insights into the spread and transnationalisation of a social movement's ideas, tactics, and organisational strategies.

Results

In what follows, we outline the findings from our analysis of the Chapters and Protest Events datasets. This section is divided into three sections: geographical

dynamics (where, across the world, Extinction Rebellion chapters have been formed), temporal dynamics (when these chapters emerged), and eventful protest-related dynamics (the timing of chapter formation in relation to major Extinction Rebellion-related protest events).

Geographical dynamics

Since its formation in May 2018, Extinction Rebellion chapters spread throughout most of Great Britain and across considerable swathes of the globe. At the time of data collection (June 2021), 1165 chapters had been created in 79 countries across 6 continents. Although clearly global in nature, our analysis indicates that the largest numbers of chapters are found in the UK, Europe, and the Anglosphere. Of the 1165 chapters in the Chapters Dataset, 70.2% are located in Europe, 12.5% in North America, 8.5% in Oceania, 3.3% in Asia, 3.1% in Africa, and 2.5% in South America (see Figure 1).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the UK has the highest concentration of chapters and the largest number in any single country. Roughly one in three of all Extinction Rebellion chapters are found in the UK (420 out of 1265 chapters worldwide). Within England, Scotland and Wales,[3] a high density of chapters is found, roughly in line with the density of the population across the landmass. Chapters appear highly localised; on average, Great Britain has just over 9 chapters per county. These span the full length and breadth of the country from Shetland to Penzance. They are located in urban centres (such as Leeds, Glasgow, and Wandsworth), towns (such as Conwy, Hartlepool, and Dover), and rural areas (such as Heart of Wales, Waveney Valley, and Skye). Whereas evidence from prior studies has suggested that the attendees at both of Extinction Rebellion's major London-based protests in 2019 were largely drawn from the south of England (Saunders, Doherty, and Hayes 2020, 10), our analysis points to a more even distribution of activist association throughout the UK when it comes to on-the-ground organisation.

Outside of the UK, a further 37.1% of all chapters are located in the rest of Europe. While the number of chapters per head of population across these countries is lower than the UK, a similarly high density is found across France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Czech Republic. As Figure 2 indicates, the highest density of Extinction Rebellion chapters globally is found in the UK and adjacent Western European states. Indeed, 57.6% of all chapters (n = 729) are located within 1000 kilometres of London, accounting for 82.1% of Europe's chapters. Moving into eastern and southeastern regions of Europe, chapters become sparser, with a range of countries containing only one (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Moldova) or two (Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine) chapters in total.

Outside of Europe, a significant proportion of chapters are found across the Anglo-sphere. Together, the US (N = 91), Australia (N = 78), Canada (N = 49), and Aotearoa New Zealand (N = 27) contain around one in five of all Extinction Rebellion chapters worldwide. In fact, taking the Anglosphere as a whole, including the UK and Ireland, this figure rises to 54.0%. This reality is pictorially illustrated by the high density of chapters within these societies shown in Figure 2. Across the US, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, we see an intensity of concentration of chapters comparable to that found in the UK and western Europe. To exemplify the point, akin to the more than 40 chapters found in London, 14 chapters are found to have been created within the Greater Melbourne area alone.

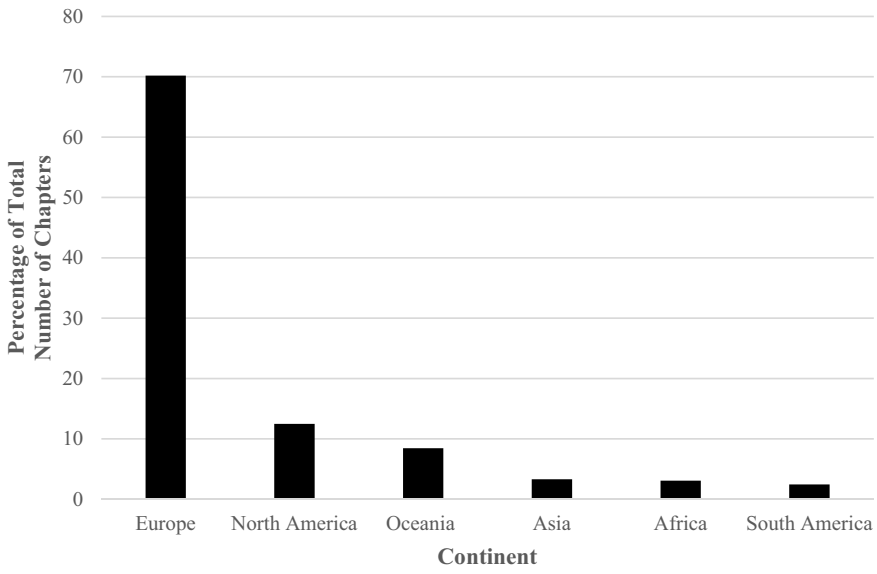

Figure 1. Percentage of total chapters worldwide by continent.

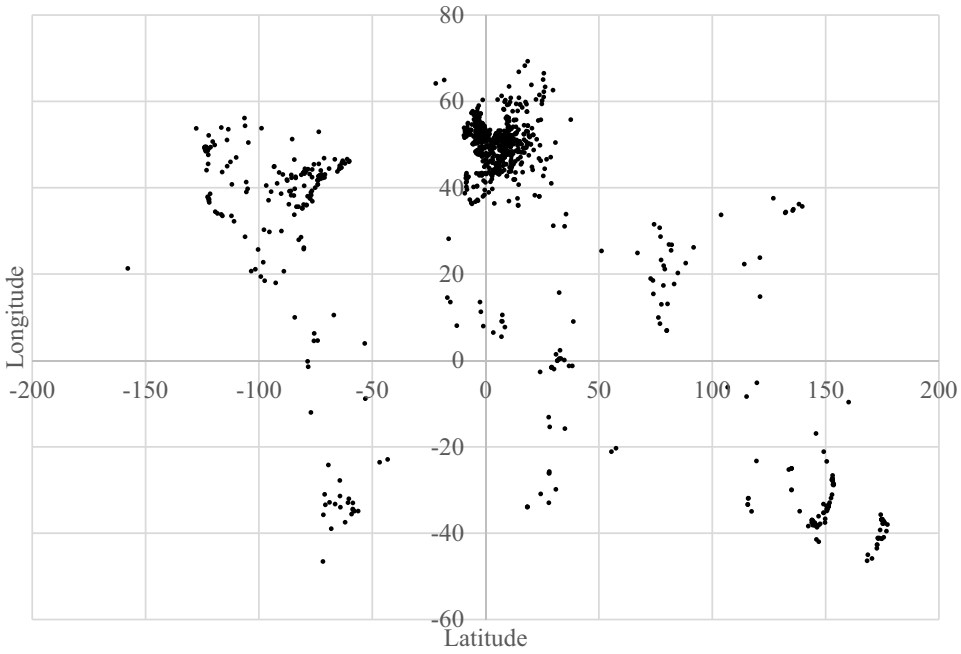

Figure 2. The world of extinction rebellion chapters.

While we can conclude from this analysis that Extinction Rebellion chapters are most densely concentrated in the UK, Western Europe, and the Anglosphere, there are nevertheless other important pockets of density. A belt of chapters is found in the area between Montevideo, Uruguay through central Argentina to Santiago, Chile. There is a cluster of chapters around Lake Victoria, from Kenya through Uganda and Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of Congo's North Kivu province. West Africa contains another series running from Senegal to Nigeria. A handful of local chapters have also been created in India (20), South Africa (9), Mexico (9), and Japan (6). However, these areas have not seen the same density of chapters found in the UK, Western Europe and the Anglosphere.

Crucially, all this is not to say that Extinction Rebellion is simply a movement in the Global North. Indeed, 41 of the 79 countries with at least one Extinction Rebellion chapter were located *outside* of Europe and the Anglosphere. Rather, the data suggest that it is in the latter that the specific strategy of highly localised and densely distributed chapters was undertaken, at least initially.

Temporal dynamics

As outlined above, chapters constitute the backbone of Extinction Rebellion's organisational structure and strategy. Hence, from its formation, the movement's 'leaders' encouraged their creation as a way to disseminate radical environmental activism not only in the UK but also across borders. Indeed, as early as December 2018, chapters had formed in 26 countries across all continents bar Antarctica. In this section, we describe the timing of the spread of Extinction Rebellion chapters across the world, from the creation of the movement's parent organisation RisingUp! in 2017 to those of May 2021 (the most recently created chapters at the time of data collection). We perceive five key waves in the expansion of Extinction Rebellion, located around five points that witnessed sudden increases in the rate of chapter creation: (1) origins to January 2019, (2) Spring 2019, (3) Summer 2019, (4) declining expansion, and (5) the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first wave of chapter creation runs February 2017 to January 2019. Almost a year and a half after RisingUp!'s founding, the first Extinction Rebellion chapters begin to pop up in small numbers through Summer and Autumn 2018. However, November 2018 saw a sudden and dramatic peak: whereas only 10 new chapters were added the previous month, November witnessed the creation of 131. After this apogee, a decreasing rise in the number of chapters occurred until the end of January 2019. Over this first wave, 277 chapters were registered. Although the UK features prominently among these (42.6%, n = 118), this initial wave was in fact distinctly international, with 27 other countries represented. 26.4% of new chapters were created in the rest of Europe (n = 73), with the largest numbers found in France (31) and Germany (10), while significant inroads were made into Canada (12.3%, n = 34), the US (9.8%, n = 27), and Aotearoa New Zealand (5.4%, n = 15). Outside of Europe, North America, and Oceania, small numbers of chapters were also formed in Brazil, Colombia, Israel, India, Solomon Islands and South Africa.

A second wave of chapter creation occurred between February and June 2019, rising to a peak in May 2019. This was the most prodigious wave, with 369 chapters appearing in the course of 5 months (29.1% of all chapters in the period analysed). Chapters emerged in 44 countries, 19 of which were new to the movement's ranks. Through this phase, however, Europe predominated, constituting fully 80.2% of all new chapters in this wave. More than half of European chapters were within the UK (42.8%, n = 158), with a further 37.4% located in the rest of Europe (n = 138). North America and Oceania displayed similar values, constituting around 7–8% of all new chapters in this wave (29 and 28 respectively). At the individual country level, notable increases in the density of chapters occurred across Germany (n = 43), the US (n = 21), Australia (n = 20), France (n = 18), Ireland (n = 12), and the Netherlands (n = 9). Meanwhile, relatively few new chapters were added across the Global South, with only 16 across all of Asia, Africa, and South America combined (less than 4% of the total for this wave).

A third wave identified in the data ran from July to September 2019, with its associated peak in August of this year. At 203 in total, this summer wave witnessed lower – but nonetheless considerable – numbers of chapters being added than the spring. Of these, 64.5% were in Europe (n = 131), 13.8% in Oceania (n = 28), 11.3% in North America (n = 23), 7.4% in Asia (n = 15), and 1.5% in Africa and South America (n = 3 each). While still relatively small in number, this third wave represented an apex for Extinction Rebellion in Asia, with India prominently represented in this regard (n = 13). The summer of 2019 also saw a switch within Europe, where for the first time the proportion of new chapters in the UK (29.6%, n = 60) was below that of the rest of Europe (35.0%, n = 71), though this dynamic likely represents the density of chapters within the UK reaching a saturation point.

The fourth wave occurred between October 2019 and April 2020 in a period of declining expansion. A small spike in new chapters occurred in November, after which the number added per month was clearly in decline, even as chapters continued to be created each month. Nevertheless, during this wave, 180 chapters were created over a period of 7 months, growing in 39 countries. Twelve of these represented new countries being added to Extinction Rebellion's ranks. At 75.6%, the bulk of new chapters were still found in Europe, with continued growth in particular within the UK (28.9%, n = 52), France (11.1%, n = 20), Germany (6.7%, n = 12), Italy (4.4%, n = 8), and Eastern Europe (including Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, and Lithuania). Chapters continued to be added across North America (8.9%, n = 16), mostly within the US (n = 13). In a similar vein to Asia during the third wave, this fourth wave represented a high-water mark for Africa (7.2%, n = 13), with new chapters being created in the Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia. However, it is during this period that COVID-19 emerged and began to be transmitted across the world.

The fifth wave of Extinction Rebellion expansion occurred amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic (May 2020 to June 2021). Social distancing and avoidance of gatherings became commonplace, while governments around the world enacted periodic lockdowns, curfews, and restrictions on in-person assembly, with social movements worldwide having to resort to alternative strategies to ensure visibility for their claims (Gerbaudo 2020). Comparatively, few chapters were created during this phase, with only 46 added in this 15-month period. After a small peak in June 2020, the creation of new chapters fell to fewer than 10 per month. Although this phase involved a total of 23 countries, only five of these saw more than one chapter created: France (12), UK (9), the Netherlands (3), Portugal (2), and Norway (2). Importantly, this is not to say that Extinction Rebellion itself necessarily stagnated over this period; only that we no longer see the rapid rise in chapters across the world like that seen in earlier waves.

Protest events and the spread of Extinction Rebellion

Since its creation, Extinction Rebellion has been very active in mobilising not only at the local level, but also through large-scale protests and campaigns that have achieved considerable media visibility. These campaigns were designed to garner media attention and disseminate their narrative of climate emergency, utilising civil disobedience and to spectacular repertoires to do so. The Protest Events Dataset reported eight major protest events associated with Extinction Rebellion: (1) the Declaration of Rebellion, October 2018; (2) the first International Rebellion, April 2019; (3) the Global Day of Action for the Amazon (in collaboration with Amazon Watch), August–September 2019; (4) the Global Climate Strike (with Fridays For Future), September 2019; (5) the second International Rebellion, October 2019; (6) the Bushfire Rebellion, January 2020; (7) the Autumn 2020 Rebellion, September 2020; and (8) G7 protests, June 2021 (see Table 1). Of these, our analysis points to the first two of these as constituting eventful protests. The other six, while important in their own right, did not impact the dynamics of chapter creation to the same extent.

The 'Declaration of Rebellion' took place at the end of October 2018, with more than 1000 activists demonstrating in London's Parliament Square (Taylor 2018). Fifteen were arrested at this initial protest, while

Table 1. Waves of extinction rebellion chapter creation and major protest events.

Wave	Dates	Peak	Protest events
1	Start to Jan 2019	November 2018	October-November 2018: Declaration of Rebellion
2	Feb 2019 – June 2019	May 2019	April 2019 International Rebellion
3	July 2019 – Sept 2019	August 2019With substantial increases May–August 2019	September 5th – Global Day of Action for the Amazon (with Amazon Watch)
4	October 2019 – April 2020	Small peak November 2019	October 2019 International RebellionNovember 2019 Global Climate Strike (with Fridays For Future)January 2020 Bushfire Rebellion
5	May 2020 – end	Small peak June 2020	September 2020 Autumn RebellionJune 2021 G7 Protest

a further 85 of the thousands who poured into London in the weeks of civil disobedience that followed were also detained. This moment of large-scale protest contained many of the visual and performative characteristics that have since come to be associated with Extinction Rebellion, including the occupation of bridges in order to block city traffic, the movement's distinctive symbols and flags, and the strategy of mass arrest. At the time, Extinction Rebellion received widespread press coverage both inside and outside the UK (Townsend 2019).

It was in the immediate aftermath of this protest (November 2018) that the growth in Extinction Rebellion chapters saw its first and most dramatic growth (see Figure 3). Hence, we contend that this first campaign of the movement represented an eventful protest, having a demonstrative impact on the spread of chapters both within the UK and internationally.

Whereas the Declaration of Rebellion demonstrations were located within the UK only, the next major protest event – the first International Rebellion of April 2019 – occurred in at least 34 countries across the world. Nevertheless, the majority of these were located within Europe. As with the first eventful protest event, the International Rebellion was dramatic, vibrant and emphatic, garnering widespread media coverage. In London, 11 days of protest were organised with thousands of actors occupying five prominent sites in central London, more than 1,100 of whom were arrested (Stuart 2020). Similar scenes played out in cities across the world, from New York to Melbourne. Again, it is in the month directly following the first International Rebellion that we observe a second dramatic spike in new chapters (May 2019; see Figure 3). This is again suggestive of eventful protest, with the first International Rebellion giving rise to a sudden spread in chapters.

From the third wave of chapter creation on, the impactfulness of protest actions becomes less clear. To be sure, the period that saw the most intense, continuous, and globally oriented protests was characterised by a substantial and fairly stable increase in the number of chapters worldwide (see Table 1, waves 3–5). However, through this period, major protest events and the contours of chapter creation do not appear to be closely related. The Bushfire Rebellion of January 2020, for example, while being widely reported and highly international (taking place in at least 27 countries across the world, including 6 African states, 4 in Asia, and 3 in South America), failed to produce the kinds of increases in the rate of chapter creation that followed previous protest events.

Overall, we conclude that, despite the volatility in the creation of new chapters, the increase in the number of these local groups does appear to overlap with

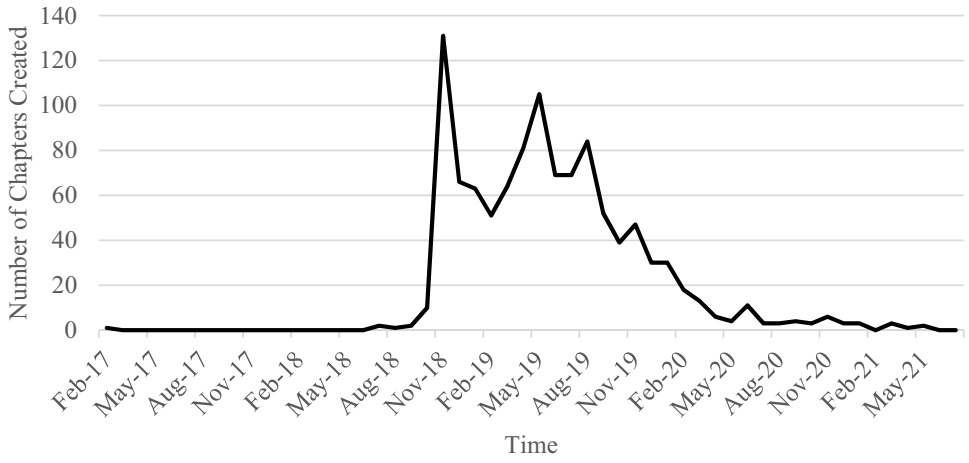

Figure 3. The creation of extinction rebellion chapters over time.

Extinction Rebellion's eventful campaigns in Autumn 2018 and April 2019. In this way, these events appear to have been crucial in the expansion of Extinction Rebellion across the world, affording the visibility to the movement's claims and discourse. As eventful protests, they reshaped the environmental movement arena across the world, introducing new organisational practices, repertoires, and networks.

Conclusion

Since 2018, Extinction Rebellion has been at the forefront of spreading climate rebellion around the world. The research presented in this paper indicates that, despite the movement's own recognition of the importance of global action for mitigating the worst excesses of ecological breakdown (Gardner and Carvalho forthcoming), and while certainly transnational in its dissemination, the local chapter remains a predominantly Western European and Anglosphere phenomenon in terms of sheer numbers. Numerous important clusters of chapters are found across the Global South, but few have attained the same density and localisation found in the Global North. The data also indicate that the spread of chapters across the world was nonlinear, with several waves and peaks. We have argued that the Declaration of Rebellion (October–November 2018) and the first International Rebellion (April 2019) represent eventful protests (Della Porta 2008, 2014), giving rise to massive expansions in the number of Extinction Rebellion chapters globally. While the relationship between protest actions and chapter creation through the rest of 2019 appears mutually reinforcing, both largely ground to a halt through the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of the extent to which climate mobilisation since 2018 has moved beyond the 'limited transnationalisation' of prior phases (Rootes 2005), our data reveal a mixed picture. At least for Extinction Rebellion, there appears to have been a genuinely transnational dimension from the start, with chapters being formed across the world throughout the period analysed. Nevertheless, we also see a differentiation in chapter formation globally, with the greatest density of chapters found in the UK, the Anglosphere (the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and Western Europe. Perhaps, then, we may conclude that we have entered a period of dissymmetric transnationalisation in the global climate movement. Importantly, due to the focus of – and methodology employed in – this paper, our findings are necessarily broad-brush strokes. Further research is needed to understand the micro-dynamics of diffusion, North-South relations in the building of transnational social movements, and the variations on the modes of reception, adaptation and cultural translation of the movement.

Notes

1. Extinction Rebellion is commonly abbreviated to 'XR' (hence, Extinction Rebellion Nottingham is usually referred to as 'XR Nottingham'). As Extinction Rebellion chapters typically use this abbreviation in their title, we also adopt this shorthand version when referencing specific chapters.
2. Of these, 9 were originally affiliated in name with alternative environmental movements.
3. Northern Ireland appears to be something of an anomaly, with only one chapter serving the entire region.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to offer their sincere thanks to João Santos for his help in data collection for the Extinction Rebellion Chapters Dataset. They would also like to thank the organisers and attendees at the Social Movements and Political Action seminar series at ISCTE-IUL and the Sociology Seminar Series at the University of York, where this paper has been presented. Thanks also to the University of York's internship programme which facilitated Maria Valenstain to join the research team.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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