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The recent surge in populist politics in Europe and North America has challenged many of the policies aimed at advancing sustainable shifts. In this article we argue that this surge necessitates a rethinking of transition and transformation. The mainstream perspective on transitions understands it largely as the proliferation and upscaling of innovative technologies and policy frameworks. We recast sustainability transitions and transformations as continuous processes of assembly and disassembly, driven by rupture and instability. Rather than seeing populist resurgence as a "barrier" to change toward sustainability, we argue that these ruptures and instabilities should be considered inherent to the transformation process itself. The recent local election in Bergen, Norway, witnessed the surge of a new "anti-elite" political party dedicated to protesting road tolls that finance public transport. We hold that although such movements certainly pose challenges to sustainable transitions, they also provide opportunities for revitalizing democratic politics—moving beyond postpolitical managerial governance and inviting new concerns into local and urban transformation processes. Key Words: politicization; populism; postpolitics; sustainability, transformation.

The climate change discourse has become mainstream and is reshaping political debates at the local, national, and international levels. This discourse, however, is now being countered by a surge of populist politics in Europe, North America, and other regions that could undermine or reverse much of the progress that has been achieved (Fraune and Knodt 2018; Lockwood 2018). These movements have typically articulated green policies through the prism of a conflict between "the people" and "the elite" (Müller 2016) and have questioned the legitimacy of mainstream climate and sustainability policies. In local and urban politics, many populist movements have manifested as opposition to road tolls and congestion charging, car-free zones, fuel subsidy removal, and so on. For example, the Yellow Vest movement in France was sparked by a fuel tax hike, after which it developed into a broad-based challenge to the regressive character of Emmanuel Macron's climate agenda (Kinniburgh 2019). There are, of course, wide contextual differences between these populist movements, within which climate change and sustainability policies are not necessarily their primary concern. Nevertheless, these movements have fundamentally challenged the policies and discourses of sustainable transformation, in terms of both the content of politics and its form (Canovan 1999).

Our concern in this article is that predominant ways of thinking and theorizing are at odds with the populist surge and its challenge to sustainable transitions and transformations. Human geographers have routinely asserted that climate and sustainability are a postpolitical domain in which political claims are effectively depoliticized by a managerial regime upholding the current sociopolitical order (Swyngedouw 2010). Now, however, climate change has been politicized from several divergent positions—both youth movements and right-wing populist movements—and the postpolitical diagnosis appears less accurate. This leads to questioning the legitimacy of both the process and substance of mainstream policymaking.

In this article we ask the question: How do we understand the political character of sustainability transformations in light of the populist surge? Considering the populist challenge, we argue that there is a need to examine the deep-seated social and political reconfigurations involved in transition and transformation and to a greater extent make

room for disruption and instability in our theorizing and empirical analyses.

Much of the scholarship on sustainability transitions emphasizes the emergence and diffusion of new sociotechnical innovations. This is what we might call the *emergence narrative* of sustainable transition and transformation. Ongoing transition to a more sustainable world is evidenced by the arrival and growth of solar panels, electric vehicles, smart meters, wind turbines, and so on. These niche innovations gradually drive sociotechnical regimes toward transition, whereas factors like public opposition have typically been seen as *barriers* (Steinhilber, Wells, and Thankappan 2013). Sustainability transitions research is increasingly taking politics and power into account (Geels 2014; Hess 2014; Affolderbach and Schulz 2016; Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Ahlborg 2017; Avelino 2017; Köhler et al. 2019), and other, related debates have shed light on the politics and inequalities of transition and transformation (O'Brien 2012; Feola 2015; Scoones, Leach, and Newell 2015; Gillard et al. 2016). Yet, as Bridge (2018) expressed in his review of energy research in the social sciences, "The transition is largely understood as the assembly, proliferation and normalisation of new technologies and or policy frameworks" (17).

In this article we recast transformations as deeply conflictual processes involving both assembly and disassembly. Rather than seeing populist resurgence as a barrier to transition or as external to transitions, such instabilities and ruptures should be considered fundamental elements of these processes. Transitions and transformations are necessarily conflictual and deeply political, given the fundamental nature of the social, cultural, and political changes they demand. They involve experiences of loss, deprivation, and marginalization, which populist movements attempt to articulate (Fraune and Knodt 2018; Lockwood 2018). Our theoretical frameworks need to move beyond the managerial approach to governance that mainstream approaches afford (Gillard et al. 2016) and account for the unstable and conflictual nature of transformation. Here we look to the thinking about assemblage and antagonism to provide such a conceptual space.

The empirical focus of this article is the surge of the populist Enough Is Enough movement leading up to the 2019 municipal elections in Bergen, Norway. Although the movement's immediate cause was removing toll road stations, this also politicized the wider governance of green policies and city planning through the lens of "elite" politicians who were out of touch with "the people." One coauthor of this article experienced the conflict and governance response firsthand while serving as political advisor to the city commissioner for urban development. This empirical study is the basis for our reflection on the deep-seated sociopolitical changes within which the resistance is situated.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we contextualize our perspective on transformation as disruption in philosophical and social science scholarship. Then, we discuss the current literature on sociotechnical transition and transformation, with a particular focus on their treatments of politics. Building on this, we outline our perspective on how to integrate instability and rupture theoretically, drawing on assemblage and antagonistic thinking. Subsequently, we outline our methods and the case study examining the populist surge in Bergen, analyzing the political ruptures it generated. In concluding, we reflect on whether and how these ruptures could be constructive to the politics of sustainability transformation.

Repoliticizing Transition and Transformation

The Roots of Transformational Thinking

The view of transformation as a dual process, in which creation and destruction go hand in hand, is certainly not new. It dates far back in human philosophy, mythology, and religion. Through the myth of Phoenix, the resurrection of the Christ, and the Hindu gods of creation and destruction, the duality of transformation is deeply embedded in how we have made sense of the universe. We also find this theme in classical social science accounts of transformation. The Marxist ontology of society's evolution through contradictions, crises, and revolution has underpinned many of the now orthodox analyses of the transformation toward modern society. A cornerstone of this line of thought is that the creation of new social orders necessitates a reconfiguring and annihilation of the old through wide-ranging and painful processes that also affect cultural institutions.

Key social science accounts have generally been based within this ontology. For instance, Polanyi

([1944] 2001), writing about "The Great Transformation" toward a competitive capitalist economy, described it as a deep-seated process crossing social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. The capitalist transformation of society must therefore be understood in the context of the wide-ranging transformation of the social order, not just as the emergence of a singular system ("the market"). Hence his well-known concept of the *double movement*: The advance of self-regulating markets was countered by the concomitant advance of institutions to protect society from self-regulating markets (Polanyi [1944] 2001). In turn, the capitalist transformation was a product of both these movements—as an "uneasy and fluid hybrid that reflects the shifting balance of power between these contending forces" (Block 2008, 1).

Schumpeter's notion of *creative destruction* is another example of how societal transformation is seen to hold both creation and destruction. It has been argued that Nietzsche introduced the idea of creative destruction to the social sciences and that he drew influence for this from a range of ancient mythological and philosophical sources (Reinert and Reinert 2006). As a classical economics concept, Schumpeterian creative destruction highlights how destruction is an inherent and necessary element of economic innovation and progress. It can be understood as the "process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one" (Schumpeter [1950] 2008, 82–83). In turn, both Marx and Schumpeter held that transformation to capitalism and beyond relies on destructive properties (Elliot 1980). We also find this in Deleuze's thinking. "Destroy in order to create" he insisted (Deleuze 2004, 130). Thus, there is arguably strong recognition of the destructive implications of transformations to be found among seminal contributions to geography and other social sciences.

More contemporary, Harvey's work has brought this dual perspective on transformation into geographical scholarship. Central to his perspective is that societal transformations have their roots in the creation and destruction of value. For example, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey (1989) traced the emergence of the postmodern experience to fundamental contradictions of modernism. Postmodernity, he asserted, is a form of creative destruction, founded on a postindustrialization that undermines the institutions of the modern welfare state and exacerbates instability and insecurity. His more recent analysis of the emergence of neoliberalism as "accumulation by dispossession" invokes this outlook (Harvey 2005).

In other words, there is a strong foundation in our academic tradition for considering transformations as deep-seated and fundamental processes that necessarily involve conflict and destruction. Yet, insights from these classical perspectives have been insufficiently mobilized in our current understanding of ongoing systemic changes. Instead, more recent debates have been underpinned by an *emergence narrative*, in which sustainability arises by shedding unsustainable technologies and practices. After discussing what we mean by narrative of emergence in the following section, we elaborate on how this dual perspective on transformation—also involving contestation and rupture—can be developed in analysis.

Beyond the Emergence Narrative

What we here term the emergence narrative is the tendency, within much of the mainstream transitions literature, to depict change as progress toward sustainability through innovations and drivers that advance sustainable technologies and practices (Affolderbach and Schulz 2016; Bridge 2018). The paradigmatic schematic is that offered by sociotechnical transitions theory, which portrays transitions as resulting from interactions between niche innovations and sociotechnical regimes (Rip and Kemp 1998). Figurative illustrations of the processes of transition typically allude to emergence—with take-off, acceleration, and stabilization phases, drawn from left to right, respectively—metaphorically pointing to progress (see, e.g., illustrations in Geels 2002). A range of studies have examined episodes or cases of transitions, explaining why and how transition occurred. A recent comprehensive review found that the field is rapidly growing, with more than 500 new publications in 2018 alone (Köhler et al. 2019). This literature presents ample evidence of the ongoing transition to a more sustainable world. From this literature, one gets the impression that we are witnessing the emergence of sustainable transitions; that despite barriers, setbacks, and existing regimes, there is proliferation and upscaling of innovative

technologies and policy frameworks for a better future.

This is not to suggest that transitions toward sustainability are considered unproblematic or programmatic in this work. Indeed, multiple "barriers" to sustainable transition have been identified. Although the field has previously been critiqued for overlooking politics (Shove and Walker 2007), power and politics are now increasingly recognized factors in sociotechnical systems (Köhler et al. 2019). In particular, there is a focus on regime actors and how they form coalitions and influence decision makers to uphold inertia (Meadowcroft 2009, 2011; Geels 2014; Hess 2014). Avelino (2017) and Ahlborg (2017) refined the theoretical categories to understand how power and politics play into transitions. It has also been recognized that sociotechnical transitions can be long, messy, and painful processes (Meadowcroft 2011). In addition, there has been fruitful work suggesting that there are productive synergies between transition studies and policy mobility, including the view of cities as assemblages through which transitions are mobilized (Affolderbach and Schulz 2016).

Nevertheless, there are limits to how far this framework, with its managerial approach to governance, can take us. For the most part, even political conflicts are seen as barriers to be overcome and technical problems to be solved. As expressed by Gillard et al. (2016), the transitions framework "favors a process of innovation based on hard to reach consensus over more contentious politics and pluralistic pathways" (254).

Authors writing in the *transformations* vein (as opposed to the *transitions* vein) typically center power and politics more forcefully in their analyses. We do not dwell on the debate between the concepts of transition and transformation here, but we do note that a key reference point is Pelling's (2011) distinction between transitions as incremental change and transformation as radical change. A bibliometric analysis of the two approaches found that the transformations literature has a less coherent cluster of authors than the transitions literature (Chappin and Ligtvoet 2014). Yet, according to Feola (2015), "all concepts of transformation recognize that transformative processes are characterized by discontinuities, ruptures, or thresholds, and do not generally proceed smoothly" (381). For example, Scoones, Leach, and Newell (2015) took as their point of departure that green transformations are "deeply political."

Transformational change is understood as fundamental and disruptive shifts in political power, culture, and sociocultural practices (O'Brien 2012). Rather than seeing progress as a movement between predefined stable states, transformations are understood as restructuring fundamental relationships of power (Barca 2011). This involves recognizing that sustainable, green interventions are in themselves acts of power (Davidson 2020). So when researchers differentiate between degrees of change, from incremental changes to those that are more radical, transformation is often considered the most deep-reaching form (see, e.g., Heikkinen, Ylä-Anttila, and Juhola 2019). These writers also typically emphasize the deliberate aspect of change, holding that the types of changes needed will not have the speed or direction required without normative leadership, collective action, and changes in consciousness (see O'Brien 2012).

The transformations literature tends to be less empirical compared with the transitions field. Yet, a wide range of social science empirical studies confirm the deeply conflictual nature of socioecological change. The field of political ecology, for example, focuses on struggles around environmental politics, highlighting the power differentials and inequalities in dominant environmental governance regimes, as well as the strategies of those who resist them (Peet, Robbins, and Watts 2010; Perreault, Bridge, and McCarthy 2015). There are ample case studies that analyze how citizen groups contest purportedly sustainable projects, such as wind energy (Pasqualetti 2011; Reusswig et al. 2016), as well as literature contributions that warn against seeing this opposition to renewable energy developments as illegitimate barriers to be overcome (Aitken 2010). Insightful contributions have already argued for considering the role of grassroots innovation and participation in transition processes (Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Smith and Stirling 2017). Existing literatures, such as that on transport and planning, also recognize that sustainable transitions are unlikely without contestation against the ideologies and structures of carbon society (Huber 2013; Nikolaeva et al. 2019; Davidson 2020).

In other words, it is unsurprising to human geographers, and to social scientists more broadly, that transitions and transformations to meet the climate

challenge are necessarily conflictual and disruptive. Our argument attempts to take this a step further, though. We would argue that academics in this field do not fully appreciate the deeper political implications of change toward sustainability. The field has yet to come to proper terms with how transformations are politicized and what the political disruptions of populism mean for the transformation process. This includes the need for a deeper appreciation for the potentially constructive and vitalizing role that rupture and populist conflicts can play in transformation processes. We argue that instability and rupture should figure more centrally in our frameworks and analyses, and theoretical concepts that help us accomplish this goal are needed. Following that, more open-ended and pluralistic visions of where transformation processes are taking us will be required, which means that we should reconsider our assumptions about which actors and what types of agency will play a role in this process.

Centering Instability and Conflict within Theory

As opposed to the narrative of emergence, we can see transformation as a process of continuous assembly and disassembly, driven by conflict, rupture, contradictions, and agency (Castán Broto 2015; Haarstad and Wanvik 2017). To Bridge (2018), a perspective on destabilization and disassembly opens thinking about a world in motion that "does not rely on tropes of emergence and innovation" but rather focuses on "the conditions of possibility that sustain durable structures over time and space" (18). In other words, rather than being barriers to transition, ruptures and conflicts are integral elements of the transformation process itself. Instability and rupture should be central to our theoretical perspectives, rather than add-ons or plug-ins to frameworks built on the assumption of stability and gradualism. This builds on the historical accounts of transformation in philosophy and social science discussed earlier and the scholarly literature on sustainable transformation. Building on these ideas, we look to Deleuze's thinking on assemblage and Mouffe's work on antagonistic politics to provide a conceptual space for recasting transition and transformation in this direction. Both of these approaches are open to considering transformation as contentious, unstable,

and contradictory processes that are always confronted by a *constitutive outside*.

What we find relevant in assemblage thinking is that it offers an ontology that does not see social entities—such as the state, the economy, or the energy sector—as natural and organic wholes with an essence, bound together by internal relations. Instead, entities (or "assemblages") are temporary or longer lasting relationships between various component parts (DeLanda 2006, 2016). Rather than thinking of society as a definable system, the assemblage framework emphasizes the unstable and creative potential of ever-changing and conflictual relations between actors (Gillard et al. 2016; Wanvik 2018).

Geographers and other social scientists have used the assemblage perspective to conceptualize the relational character of politics and policymaking, often highlighting the diverse ways in which hegemonic policy regimes are created and maintained (Prince 2010; McCann and Ward 2012). This way of looking at the world generally, and climate and energy transformations specifically, however, provides an ontology that is more open to change, instability, and conflict than mainstream transition ontologies, such as sociotechnical regimes or individualized notions of sustainability (Davidson 2020). For example, it denaturalizes the social entities about which we are accustomed to thinking, such as the energy sector, and draws our attention to how the energy sector is in fact assembled through its relationships with other elements and their contingent capacities. Thus, instead of analyzing the energy sector as an "incumbent regime" embedded in "elite coalitions" as in Geels (2014), we can instead analyze it as powerful only through the continued relational, cultural, and political work that maintains it as such. The "incumbency" of fossil fuel companies is dependent on a range of contingencies that can, and frequently do, rupture (Haarstad and Wanvik 2017).

In turn, social entities are constituted not only by their own essences but also by relationships to what is outside themselves. This creates instability as well as opportunities for dynamic change. Deleuze encourages us to look for "lines to the outside" (Deleuze and Parnet 2007; Culp 2016)—cracks in the wall, new constellations, and nomadic practices that might help unravel the way the hegemonic assemblages stabilize the world. We need to understand the process of not only becoming (or what we

want to sustain) but also unbecoming (or what we want to dismantle).

The stress on difference here means that there is always something partly outside of the system, as the system is conceptualized, practiced, and territorialized by the hegemonic powers. There is always space for "properly political" acts of resistance even within a hegemonic postpolitics consensus (Temenos 2017). In other words, any postpolitical consensus is always unstable and vulnerable to contestation, for instance, from populist antagonism.

Mouffe developed this ontology in her writings on antagonism and hegemony (Mouffe 1993, 2005; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). It is this antagonistic outside that tends to be forgotten in mainstream research on transitions, studying how niche innovations and regime barriers interact within the system. A sustainable transition will never be complete without difference, without an outside that challenges and antagonizes it (Castán Broto 2015; Gillard et al. 2016). Mouffe underscores the need to acknowledge the dimensions of undecidability that pervade every order, or system, and to create more pluralistic systems where outsides are given legitimate forms of expression. She argued that populism emerges as a reaction when the claims and grievances of parts of the population are rendered illegitimate and treated as a residual category (Mouffe 2005). These claims then find expression by other sometimes violent means that destabilize the system as a whole.

The current populist challenge to sustainability policies in Europe and beyond highlights the relevance of this way of thinking. Climate and sustainability have become part of the hegemonic discourse, and populism arguably presents an antagonism from the "outside" of sustainability transitions. Populist attacks on sustainability politics seem to come from the right (Lockwood 2018), but they are hard to pin down as such. Populism in modern democratic societies is a thin-centered ideology, typically combined with other political preferences that can be both leftist and rightist (Mudde 2004). Populism is typically understood as an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of society (Canovan 1999). Hence, populism is more than a barrier to sustainable transition or transformation—it challenges it on a far deeper level. It questions both the content of policies and the form of politics that

underpin it—potentially undermining its legitimacy and showing it to be more unstable and contingent than previously assumed.

The populist reaction to the mainstream sustainability discourse has been manifested in several different policy areas, where a variety of movements have made powerful claims about the inequality, illegitimacy, and maldistribution of green measures. Many of the local conflicts against the sustainability agenda have been within renewable energy, such as the siting of wind power plants, as ample research attests (see, e.g., Pasqualetti 2011; Reusswig et al. 2016). Although much of this opposition has been framed as NIMBYism, the links to populism have also been explored (Devine-Wright 2013; Batel and Devine-Wright 2018). The populist reaction to the sustainability agenda escapes simple categorizations and identifications—it is ill-fitted in categories such as right-wing, conservative, pro-fossil, and other such labels that are often applied. It draws support from across the traditional left–right spectrum and typically refuses to be identified with any particular political bloc.

Populist Resurgence and Resistance to the "Green Shift" in Bergen

To help us understand the political character of sustainability transformations in light of the populist surge, we have conducted an empirical study of a recent (2018–2019) populist surge in Bergen, Norway. Norway's experience with populism has primarily been related to the Progress Party, which has combined populism with a right-wing ideology of neoliberalism and anti-immigration rhetorics (Jupskås et al. 2016). The Progress Party formed part of a right-wing–center coalition government between 2013 and 2020.

At the center of the populist surge in Bergen were protests against a road toll scheme that was expanded to limit private car use and finance public transportation. Our purpose for this case study is to examine the sociopolitical dynamics of the resistance to road tolls and how this disrupted established political processes. The empirical material is drawn from our long-term engagement with urban sustainability politics and city planning in the city. One of the authors served as political advisor to the city commissioner for urban development during the period in question, experiencing the events

firsthand. Over a fourteen-month period, from August 2018 to October 2019, he took part in the urban commissioner's daily events. These events included all city commission conferences (internal debates and political negotiations among the incumbency), city council meetings, and meetings between the urban commissioner and a broad range of stakeholders. The position as political advisor also involved daily monitoring of conventional media and social media activities regarding urban development in Bergen and Norway. We have also participated in debates with the road toll opposition leader, surveyed the Facebook pages of the anti–road toll movement, and followed local newspaper coverage closely.

This deep participant observation follows in the tradition of Flyvbjerg (1998), who entered "behind the closed doors of government and interest-group decision-making" (7), as well as ideas of coproduction of knowledge drawn from postnormal science (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). This does not mean that the dual role as researcher and planner is unproblematic, but there are established traditions that help maneuver the complexities of this role (Haarstad et al. 2018). These traditions recognize that knowledge about complex, dynamic, and uncertain social interactions and processes has to be generated through interactions and dialogue between diverse experiences, values, and worldviews (Lang, Wiek, and von Wehrden 2017) "in the course of acting" (Steyaert and Jiggins 2007, 727).

The empirical analysis is organized in the following way. First, we introduce the case context and explain how this sustainable transition came to be increasingly opposed by parts of the public. In the following section, we examine the dynamics of the increasingly populist opposition, showing how the resistance is embedded in deeper social and political reconfigurations of the transformation process. Next, we discuss how the populist surge created instabilities and ruptures in the city's governance process. Finally, we discuss how the ruptures might be a constructive transformative force by facilitating revitalizing urban politics and moving us beyond postpolitical managerial governance.

Bergen from International Front-Runner to "Enough Is Enough!"

In many ways, Bergen, Norway, has been an international front-runner in the transition toward sustainable mobility. Globally, Bergen is home to one of the highest proportions of electric vehicles (EVs), thanks both to a national economic incentive scheme, which makes EVs comparably cheaper to purchase and operate, and to local infrastructure investments in charging points and free parking. This Norwegian "EV revolution" (Hannisdal, Malvi, and Wensaas 2013) has lent itself well to studies using the sociotechnical transitions framework (Figenbaum 2017). It takes advantage of niche innovations in electromobility—the vastly expanding range of EV models available—and a favorable regime of policy, regulations, and norms. The share of EVs has grown steadily, and in some months in recent years EVs have made up more than half of new car sales.

Another key element of the local transition to sustainable mobility has been a ring of toll roads around the city center, with the double intention of discouraging private car use and financing new roads and public transport infrastructure investments. In recent years, the road tolls have been spent increasingly on public transport infrastructure, particularly a new light rail system and bicycle lanes, rather than roads for cars (Government for Norway 2017). This shift in spending is part of an agreement with national and regional authorities and has triggered significant federal funding. One light rail line has been built, another is under construction, and a third is being planned. Local politicians regularly described the light rail as the backbone of Bergen's shift toward sustainable mobility. The overarching goal is a 20 percent drop in private car use by 2030 (Bergen Municipality 2016).

Before the 2019 local elections, however, a populist reaction to this sustainable mobility transition emerged and grew in strength. The political discourse running up to the elections was dominated by the issues surrounding road tolls, the financing of public transport, and debate about where the urban light rail would run through the city center (field notes early fall 2019). The debate was highly polarized between liberal, left-leaning urbanites and more conservative, right-wing suburban dwellers, with harsh accusations from both sides. This debate had been ongoing for years, but its intensity was higher than usual, and then new voices emerged. Opposition to road tolls, which had increased immediately before the election, was mobilized under the slogan "Enough Is Enough" (Nok er nok). The

movement's leaders managed to garner the support of a significant portion of the suburban population. They established a new political party, People's Action—No to More Road Tolls! (Folkeaksjonen Nei til mer bompenger! [FNB]), that quickly rose in the polls.

The final election shook the municipality and, to some extent, the entire national political establishment. The new protest party became the third largest party in the council, with 16.7 percent of the total vote. In the stable political systems of Bergen and Norway, this was historically unprecedented. FNB won or came in second in all suburban districts. FNB drew voters from all parties; although most voters were conservatives, even the left-leaning Labour Party lost more than 10 percent of its voters to this new populist protest party. Because the Green Party managed to secure the most votes in the city center, however, the parties on the left and center could still create a governing coalition.

The surprise vote made it clear that people resented the increasing road tolls and that large portions of the population failed to see the benefits of what they were paying for—the light rail, in particular. Arguably, it sparked a shift in the debate toward a recognition of the skewed costs of the transition— costs that could be levied on people who feel they have no alternatives to private car use and who might not see the benefits of either the light rail or the bike lanes. It also illustrated the political and democratic constraints on a sustainable transition that could arise if people do not consider the costs and benefits to be fairly distributed.

The Foundations of the Populist Resistance

Although this public opposition to road tolls and the light rail could be viewed as a barrier to sustainable mobility transition, we argue that an alternative perspective considers this resistance to be an integral part of the transformation process itself. As we have already discussed, transformation should be seen as a deep-seated process that reconfigures technological, social, and political practices, in which disassembly, instability, and conflict are key components. Seen from this perspective, the public opposition to road tolls in Bergen is merely a symptom of deeper sociocultural changes involved in the ongoing transformation process. It is embedded in sociocultural and political polarization, which is broadly evident;

research has pointed to growing urban–rural polarization and the resulting differentiation in incomes, sociocultural identity, and political preferences (Glaeser 2011; Rodríguez-Pose 2018; Jennings and Stoker 2019). The local elections in Bergen are evidence of this trend; the Green Party became the largest party in the city center, whereas suburban voters strongly supported the anti–toll road (pro-car) populist (see Figure 1).

The anti–toll road movement reflects the anti-elite political rhetoric that has gripped much of Europe—most famously represented by the Yellow Vests and Brexit. The key figure in Bergen, Trym Åfløy, repeatedly stated that if he were elected to the city council he would not call himself a "politician" but instead the "people's representative" (field notes fall 2019). The title of FNB's 2019 political platform was "Because you should not be punished for driving a car in Bergen!" Yet, the movement's rhetoric is deeper than toll roads, echoing the divisions between the people as left behind and ignored by the politicians familiar from other populist movements (Lockwood 2018; Kinniburgh 2019). FNB's Facebook threads are ripe with indignation over high public sector salaries, "elite" politicians who do not care about "ordinary people" (vanlige folk), and "symbolic" climate policies for which ordinary people bear the costs (see Table 1).

What we see in these protests is not only resistance to higher road tolls but also the wider discourse on sustainable transformation, which seems to valorize urban lifestyles at the expense of suburban, car-dependent lifestyles. The conflict involves action provoked by shifting identity structures and cultural practices that need to be accounted for in any understanding of what is going on. Arguably, there is a sense that the cultural hegemony of suburban "petroculture," about which Huber (2013) has convincingly written, has been replaced by the cultural and normative hegemony of the educated and green urbanite class. This suggests a more fundamental disconnect between institutions, political leaders, and people, which defies simple explanation.

One element of this discourse has been that the interventions occurring during the transition to sustainable mobility in Bergen appear to have been unequally distributed. The national and local subsidy regime for EVs added to the impression of geographically and socially based distribution injustices by favoring families with greater resources, such as
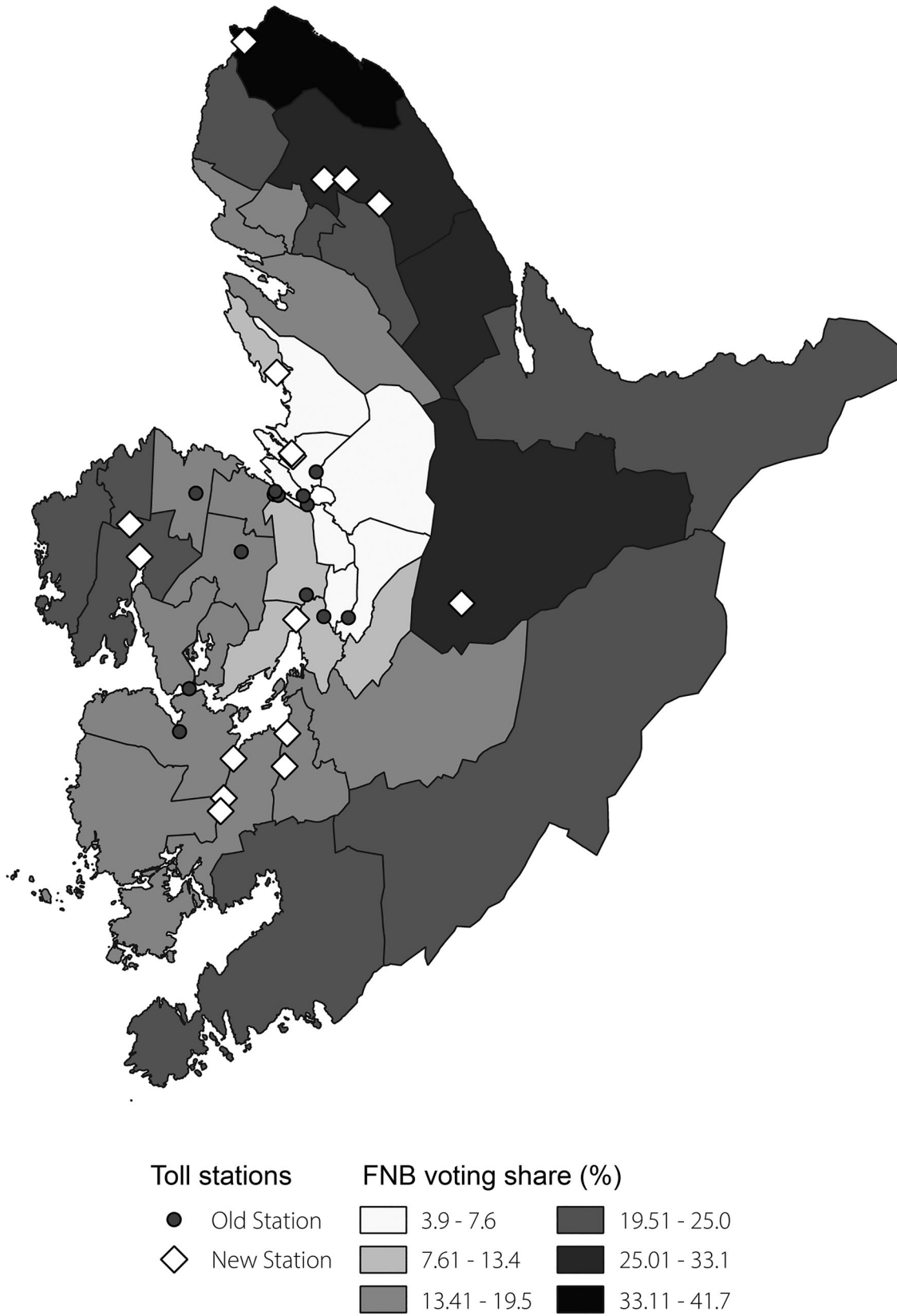
Figure 1. Map of electoral support for the populist party, with the inner and outer toll rings. City center is in the middle (lowest Folkeaksjonen Nei til mer bompenger! support). FNB = Folkeaksjonen Nei til mer bompenger!

Table 1. Example of posts on the Enough Is Enough Bergen Facebook page between August and September 2019

In Norwegian	Translated
Det renner inn med hysteriske klimatiltak, kostnader spiller ingen rolle virker det som. … Enda en søt liten episode i «Norge redder hele verden»!	There are pouring in hysterical climate measures, and costs don't matter it seems like. … Another cute little episode of "Norway saves the whole world!"
Nei vi må nok gjøre som franskmennene stoppe opp heile Norge til vi fekk gjennom det vi stemmer for.	No, we should do as the French and bring Norway to a halt until get what we are voting for.
På med gul vester og protest. Det eneste som hjelper	Put on yellow vests and protest. The only thing that works.
På tide å få inn «vanlige» folk fra FNB framfor «Elite» politikkere fra Høyre! Godt VALG	Time to elect "ordinary" people from FNB instead of "elite" politicians from the Conservatives! Happy ELECTION
Politikerne tjener 1.6 millioner kroner i året og betaler ikke en eneste av regningene sine selv engang. Det er motbydelig hvordan vi tillater de å holde på på denne måten	The politicians are making 1.6 million NOK per year and are not even paying a single one of their own bills. It is disgusting how we allow them to continue like this.

Note: FNB = Folkeaksjonen Nei til mer bompenger!

second cars and second homes, with both tax exemptions and zero road tolls. In practice, the scheme is subsidizing the purchase of Tesla sports cars (Holtsmark and Skonhoft 2014). Other sustainable mobility initiatives also illustrate ways in which the "green shift" is sociopolitically slanted. For example, a survey of the membership of Bergen's car sharing ring in 2015 (1,450 members, 38 percent response rate) revealed that the membership is significantly more highly educated than the general population—93 percent of members had completed higher education and 63 percent had a master's degree or higher (Larsen 2016). The car sharing ring is a distinct phenomenon within the city center, where most of the shared cars are located. In a different study that surveyed suburban communities about their mobility practices, we found that the residents either disliked the idea of car sharing or did not know what it was (Wathne, Haarstad, and Kopperud 2017). In other words, the residents who are targeted by and interested in green interventions and actions in Bergen have a distinct profile: They are highly educated and live in central urban areas.

We argue that this shows that the populist characterization of green policies as "elitist" cannot be dismissed simply as rhetoric. The rhetoric of green elitism is also rooted in the actual realization of the sustainability transformation and in the politics of how it is realized. Any substantive change toward sustainability plays into a preexisting landscape of difference, inequality, and polarization in Bergen, which it might actually increase as a result of the policies. Aside from whether road tolls or car sharing are good for the climate, they reinforce the sociocultural status and norms of some groups and undermine those of others. Thus, the uproar against road tolls cannot be explained simply by an increase in economic costs. There is also the perception that this has been perpetrated by a particular social group, the politicians, the elite, who ignore, or perhaps even actively work against, suburban populations.

Instability and Disruption in the Governance Process

Conflict and resistance can be seen to hinder or slow transformation processes, but they can also create disruption in the formal governance process itself. In Bergen, the populist movement "outside" of the formal governance process had distinct effects on the "inside," where it created disruption, contradiction, and a strong sense of urgency (field notes early fall 2019). The growing popular resistance created a political logic by which urgent measures had to be reached, both to turn the tide of public opinion and to complete policy measures ahead of an uncertain election outcome. The Greta Thunberg–inspired Fridays for Future demonstrations were another key context behind increasing urgency and impatience, which, combined with poor planning, came to shape outcomes fundamentally.

This sense of urgency was sparked by the launch of a toll on an outer ring around the city just months before the election (the old and new toll stations are illustrated in Figure 1). Funds from the road toll had been decreasing for some time because of increasing EV use and a general decrease in the number of cars on the inner ring. Simultaneously, the municipality witnessed a substantial increase in

private car use in suburban areas. To deal with these challenges, the outer toll ring was originally planned for implementation in early 2019 but was postponed until April and the beginning of the election campaign. The introduction of an outer ring on 6 April 2019 led to a significant "overnight" increase in private car users who now had to pay to attend many of their daily activities. This sparked a rapid increase in support for the FNB and altered the local political context.

This, in turn, threatened to destabilize negotiations over regional urban growth agreements between Bergen, the adjacent municipalities comprising the Bergen urban region, and the National Road Authority (field notes spring 2019). These negotiations were aimed at reducing overall private car mobility in the urban region to meet local, regional, and national ambitions for climate mitigation and the infamous national goal toward zero growth in private automobility (Norwegian Ministry of Transport 2016). This agreement would ensure a 50 percent national government investment share in the region's public transport infrastructure (worth approximately NOK 4 billion), primarily to be used for the urban light rail and low carbon mobility infrastructure. Some parties, particularly the delegation from Bergen, were impatient to finalize the deal to respond to negative preelection polls for the incumbency and reduce pressure from political opponents in both the national government and adjacent municipalities (field notes early fall 2019). One of the negotiating parties, the mayor of an adjacent municipality from the populist Progress Party, refused to sign the agreement until after the elections, implying that a new political majority opposing toll roads would scrap the agreement completely (field notes May 2019). The negotiations eventually broke down and were left incomplete, with the effect that large-scale infrastructure investment planning was put on hold. In other words, the disruptions brought about by the populist surge had wide-ranging effects on local and urban governance—even before the election—by politicizing and destabilizing the negotiations over large-scale infrastructure investments.

Rupture as a Potentially Constructive Force

From a normative standpoint, considering the need for rapid implementation of sustainable mobility measures, the resistances and instabilities in the Bergen case can certainly be seen as negative. When recognizing the deep-seated structures at play in a transformation process, however, we find that these resistances and instabilities might play a different, more constructive role. The assembly of something new necessarily involves the disassembly of something else, as appreciated within the historical accounts of transformation processes. Thus, we hold that the critical question about promoting sustainability is not how to overcome these barriers but rather how to make use of these ruptures and resistances as catalysts for change.

From that point of view, the conflicts in Bergen might, in the longer term, stimulate a political revitalization that allows for deeper social and political transformation than political leaders had anticipated. The conflict politicized sustainable mobility to an extent that shook the political establishment. It recast mobility and transportation policy from a technical–bureaucratic issue to a deeply social and political cause—both locally and nationally. In the spring and early fall of 2019, urban growth agreements and the zero growth objective, of which only experts had generally been aware, became staples of the political debate (field notes 2019). Road tolls were the most debated issue in Norwegian newspapers in 2019 (Henriksen 2019). The issues of where toll road payment points should be located, what the rates should be, and how they affected traffic patterns broke out of the protected realm of expert opinion and became widely debated in newspapers and on social media. Resistance turned the sustainable mobility transformation into a social and political issue.

A result of this politicization of the issue was to bring a wider range of voices and identities into the debate. The key figure in the opposition in Bergen, Trym Ăfløy, broke with every stereotype of how a politician should speak and look. He had no previous political experience, a background in various seemingly failed business ventures, and a general appearance that played well into the "ordinary person" image. Others who joined the newly formed party were similar, or were at least portrayed as such by the media; they had no previous political experience, little claim to expert knowledge, and no connection to political elites. This is in line with earlier findings, and Canovan (1999) pointed out that populist politics "is powered by the enthusiasm that draws normally unpolitical people into the political arena" (6). Of the eleven new city

council members elected from FNB, only one is reported to have had any formal political experience. These identities are familiar characters in the populist playbook, but there is more to it than that. Of course, by channeling their resistance into electoral politics, the FNB are partly playing by the rules, but they also break the mold of who does and does not participate in politics and disrupt the professionalization of politics that pervades the postpolitical era (Canovan 1999; Swyngedouw 2010).

This, in turn, disturbed the established relationships and dividing lines of political establishments. Incumbents were forced to relate to new narratives, logics, and actors. Established political actors, on both the left and the right, scrambled to align their discourses with this new populist sentiment and to create varieties of leftist or green populism (without necessarily constructing it as such). The Green Party in Bergen, for example, attracted significant social media attention with their "hug a road toll station" stunt, the leader of which stated that the purpose was to replicate the populist logic of FNB.

One might lament this simplification of political narratives and the appeal to parochial sentiment, which populism tends to involve. It can also be understood as a deepening of political discourse, however, in the sense that the political establishment is forced to try harder to connect with typically neglected social groups. This makes dividing lines in society more visible and politicized, challenging the political establishment.

Thus, in thinking about deep transformation, it is not the immediate electoral setbacks on specific political issues that are critical; rather, the critical issue is how ruptures and new antagonisms might revitalize and catalyze more fundamental forms of social change—and thereby work constructively for sustainable transformation. The Bergen experience illustrates that several of these potentially revitalizing effects of transformation occurred, including the politicization of green policies, the mobilization of neglected social groups, and new voices in the public arena.

Conclusions

Our point of departure was that the surge of populist politics in Europe and North America necessitates a rethinking of transition and transformation. The article asks how we should understand the political character of sustainability transformations in light of the populist surge. Herein, we have argued for the need to look beyond what we have called the emergence narrative of transition, which highlights proliferation and upscaling of innovative technologies, and to instead recast transitions and transformations as driven by conflict and instability. This is consistent with classical social science accounts of transformation, as well with the ideas of Deleuze and Mouffe. Recasting the "green shift" might also open conceptual space for revitalizing democratic politics, pointing to more open-ended and pluralistic transformation processes.

We examined the specific case of Bergen, Norway, where the recent local election witnessed the emergence of a new anti-elite political party dedicated to protesting road tolls to finance public transport. There was a real and perceived sense that policies aimed at advancing the "green shift" favor higher income groups and residents in the city center. As reflected by one of the movement's slogans, "You shouldn't be punished for driving a car," it resists the wider political and cultural shift in which car driving is portrayed as undesirable. The disruptions brought by this surge contributed to delays in a major infrastructure planning process—the urban growth agreement—between the city and the state. At the same time, though, these ruptures are potentially constructive forces in local politics in Bergen, because they are challenging the professionalization of politics and drawing new voices into the debates. New political actors are mobilized, new alliances are forged, and mobility and transport policy are recast from a technical–bureaucratic issue into a deeply social and political debate, both locally and nationally.

Our purpose with this case study is to illustrate how the populist surge should push us to reconsider the politics of transition and transformation. The populist challenge to the sustainability agenda is more than simply a barrier to policy implementation: It highlights the political and cultural disruptions that these sorts of social changes involve. This suggests that instability and rupture should be considered integral parts of the transformation process. As the case of Bergen shows, sustainability transformations are contingent, conflictual, and open-ended, with a diverse landscape of actors. The diversity of claims can certainly be a barrier to the sustainability agenda in the short term, but the longer term

perspective should recognize this diversity of actors, identities, and opinions and find ways to assemble them into new alliances and affiliations that can drive sustainable transformation. Transformation has to thrive on these differences; otherwise it is doomed to fail.

This challenges us to rethink assumptions about the public benefits of sustainability. It also appears to make the transformation to climate, energy, and environmental sustainability much more difficult; for example, how can we ever achieve drastic CO_2 cuts if people protest even the slightest increase in road tolls so vigorously?

There are no simple solutions to these challenges. Yet, the preceding reflections suggest that there is a need to broaden the language of transformation—not only the academic concepts but also the ways in which sustainability transformation is presented to and discussed with and among "the people." If scholarly input to society's debate on change toward sustainability is reduced to advancing and discussing innovations, then we are not contributing to bridging the gap between the elite and the people (however these difficult categories are defined). We are neglecting a critical task, which is to advance an understanding of transformation that subsumes more open and pluralistic change processes. We must also reexamine our assumptions about who is to play a role in this process. If the populist surge tells us anything, it is that sustainable transformation must be more than technical or economic innovation and that it must be for more than just the urban middle class.

Ultimately, our invitation to think about destabilization, rupture, and disassembly is a move toward a more open understanding of transformation. It underscores the social, political, and economic elements of sustainability as much as the ecological aspects. Transformation is the process of not only *becoming* (what we want to sustain) but also *unbecoming* (what we want to dismantle). It is not a skeptical or pessimistic view; rather, it brings into view the conditions of possibility for overcoming fossil fuel–based society.

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