WTFutures

Youth on Climate Futures

KEY LEARNINGS

Plurality University Network u+ Réseau Université de la Pluralité

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS WTFUTURES?

While the evidence of climate change is overwhelming, climate action is facing a backlash. This could, in part, be attributed to its failure to connect with the aspirations, but also the difficulties, of people all over the world.

Young people are not exempt, in spite of surveys telling us that their choices and actions are already largely influenced by climate issues.

This project – led by the Plurality University Network and supported by the European Climate Foundation – is about listening to them:

- To better understand how young people in the world see the future in the context of climate change, and of the different (political, economic, cultural, social…) ways of responding to it.
- To evaluate how importantly climate change influences their thoughts about the future – be it their own future, or that of larger communities.
- And to understand whether and how they imagined what a sustainable world might look like.

In order to answer these questions, we sought out past and ongoing initiatives in which youths take time to articulate their knowledge, experience and interrogations regarding climate change, the responses to it, and the futures that result from them.

We wished to elevate the visibility of these initiatives and their outcomes; to create interactions among them; and to gain insights based on their combined findings.

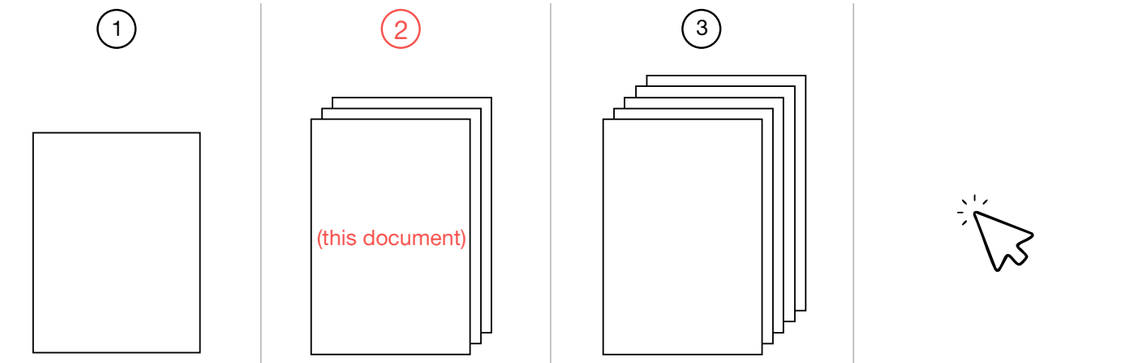
We selected 54 projects from 29 countries. We spoke with their initiators. We read their material as well as research papers, surveys, and other reports. We organized online discussions on various cross-cutting issues.

As we progressed, our questions started evolving. What young people had to tell us was both different, and deeper, than what we expected. This project changed us. Maybe it will change you.

So read on.

The WTFutures Universe

This "Key Learnings" document introduces the 54 projects we surveyed and briefly describes how we worked with them, before focusing on the key and, we believe, sometimes novel insights that emerge from this long, global conversation.



1 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
7 pages

2 — KEY LEARNINGS
32 pages

- How we worked
- What we learned: 7 Key Learnings
- What's next: fictional projections and further developments of WTFutures

3 — DETAILED DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECTS

- How we worked
- Description of the 54 projects
- WHAT the young participants had to say: Thematic analysis of the 54 projects
- HOW the projects worked with youngsters: analysis of the methods and the experience

WEBSITE
WWW.WTFUTURES.XYZ

- How we worked
- What we learned: 7 Key Learnings
- Description of the 54 projects
- WHAT the young participants had to say: Thematic analysis of the 54 projects
- HOW the projects worked with youngsters: analysis of the methods and the experience
- What's next: fictional projections and further developments of WTFutures
- Additional content

A LOOK INSIDE THE ENGINE ROOM

The initial intention of WTFutures was *"to better understand how young people in the world see the future in the context of climate change, and of the different (political, economic, cultural, social…) ways of responding to it."*

HOW WE WORKED

IDENTIFYING AND DOCUMENTING PROJECTS

We believe that every inquiry must be built from the ground up. From the start of this project in November 2024 until its end one year later, this meant staying open to surprises and even challenges to what we initially thought we would learn.

We sought past, ongoing, and upcoming projects where young people:
- Collectively explore perspectives on the future and climate change.
- Using some form of collaborative process, regardless of its nature – foresight tools and methods, artistic and fictional approaches, action-learning, etc.

We were also particularly focused on plurality, be it in terms of geography, age groups, initiators, objectives, as well as visions of tomorrow – utopian, dystopian, critical, alternative, interrogative, unconventional, etc.

Since our scope was international, we started broad. We published a call in three languages (English, French and Spanish). We reached out to networks in different countries – working either on climate or on futures-related topics – who could guide us towards projects they identified as relevant to our research. We opened a **dedicated website** where we documented the projects we encountered, and on which projects we had not heard of could document themselves. Our goal was to ensure that we reached people, projects, and communities beyond established pathways.

SELECTING THE PROJECTS

We contacted more than 80 projects, conducted structured interviews with over 45, and ultimately selected 54 projects that were closely aligned with our focus on youth, climate, and futures.

Projects by Geographical Origin

Africa, Middle East	North America	Latin America	Asia	Europe	Oceania
7	7	3	6	29	2

Projects by Age Groups

Children (under 10)	Teens (10-17)	Young adults (18-35)
13 (24%)	31 (57%)	41 (76%)

(the sum total is higher than 100%, since projects could address several age groups)

Obviously, future developments of WTFutures should focus on diversifying the geographical distribution of its projects, as well as increasing the representation of children in the project participants.

STARTING A CONVERSATION

Throughout the project, we endeavoured to establish a dialogue with those who were leading projects across the world.
- On the website as well as social media, we highlighted “featured projects” and described a wide range of initiatives so that people who identified with these examples – rather than with our formal definition – would also be encouraged to reach out.
- We brought together a few crossborder networks as well as experienced practitioners in an informal committee, which helped us make sense of the insights that we had not anticipated: for example, the question of eco-emotions, the ethical considerations that arise when working with youths, etc.
- We organized three open, online “Agoras”, drawing close to 120 participants to discuss some of the themes that strongly emerged from the projects: Education (with Alena Tomanová, Hanna Røkenes, Alfredo Jornet, and Umar Sheraz), Emotions (with Svetlana Chigozie Onye, Aniela Fidler-Wieruszewska, and Arnaud Sapin), and Action (with Maria de Mater O’Neil, Erika de Torres, and Prarthana Gupta).

ANALYSIS AND OUTCOME

The analysis was the most time-intensive phase of the project. After reviewing all the projects and interviews, we met for a week-long residency in Paris to begin structuring our findings, kickstarting a series of editorial meetings which lasted throughout the summer of 2025.

During this time, we also reflected on the best ways to make this analysis available and usable to a diverse audience. In addition to a classic report, we collaborated with the web designers Juliette Lépineau and Elias Rhouzlane to create a web platform that would present the diversity and richness of the content we had gathered. With Juliette Lépineau and Natali Mällo, we created short-form communication content that could be easily accessed and shared.

Below, you will find the list of the 54 projects, as well as a description of how we analyzed each of them.

THE 54 PROJECTS

NAME OF THE PROJECT	MAIN INITIATORS	COUNTRY
A Fearless Mural for the COP27	Fearless Foundation	Egypt
Aubervilliers 2124	Point de Rassemblement	France
Bagmati River Youth Project	ADB, Youth for Asia	Nepal
Banking on Youth	ADB, Youth for Asia	Philippines
Butterfly 2050	République Française	France
Campus de l'Engagement	ENvironnement JEUnesse	Canada
Centre for Reworlding	Centre for Reworlding	Australia
Citadins, Citadines 2050	LABEC and U+	France
Climate Action Photovoice	CREDA	Italy
Climate Future in Brussels 2030	BrusselAVenir	Belgium
Climate Futures in Mali	Mamadou Doucouré, UNICEF	Mali
ClimateWorks Lab	City Hive	Canada
Crafting Change through Natural Dye-making	UCL, Lakeshore Arts	United Kingdom
Défis Résilience	CAUE Paris, Manon Besançon	France
Destination Beauvais 2040	City of Beauvais, inSiglo	France
Éco-Motion	Éco-Motion	Canada
El Futuro es Clima	Demos Lab	Spain
Emerging Breakthroughs on Climate Change	UNICEF Innocenti	International
Emerging Horizons	UNICEF Innocenti	International
Enter Nusantara	Enter Nusantara	Indonesia
Exploring School Scenarios in Melbourne	Neil Selwyn and al.	Australia

THE 54 PROJECTS

NAME OF THE PROJECT	MAIN INITIATORS	COUNTRY
Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear	Aniela Fidler-Wieruszewska	United Kingdom
Future Images of Youth on Food systems	Minna Kaljonen et al.	Finland
Future Is Now	Youthwatch, BrusselAVenir, U+	Slovakia
The Future of the Togolese Coastline	Akouété Serge Yemey	Togo
Générations F	LUIT, Zelda Soussan	France
Going Green, by Eduponics	Eduponics	South Africa
Imagining 2060	Tamkang University	Taïwan
Imagining Climate-Just Futures	Oxfam Intermón	Spain
Imagining Futures / Future Imaginings	Kate Moles *et al.*	Uganda
Imagining the Future for Transformation	University of Utrecht's Urban Studio	Netherlands
JustFutures	Anabela Carvalho *et al.*	Portugal
Kidding the Futures	Umar Sheraz	Pakistan
Kijiji Cha Amani	James Kataliko	Democratic Rep. of Congo
La Crise dont vous êtes le héros	Nantes Métropole	France
Local Conferences of Youth	YOUNGO	France
Message Towards the Region	Youthwatch	Slovakia
Museo Del Futuro	Mexico City Initiative (MCI)	Mexico
Museum of the Not-Yet-Possible	Nur Anisah Abdullah	Taïwan
Narrative of change in Science Education	Hanna Rokenes and al.	Norway
Net Zero & You(th)	Apathy is boring	Canada
Not About Us Without Us	Jennifer Olachi Uchendu et al.	International

THE 54 PROJECTS

NAME OF THE PROJECT	MAIN INITIATORS	COUNTRY
Our Future Pledge	UNICEF Innocenti	International
Parque Explora: Laboratorios Creativos	Parque Explora	Colombia
Pedagogías del Mañana	Cooperativa Garua	Spain
Puerto Rico 2054	Maria Mater O'Neil	Puerto Rico
The Eco-anxiety Africa Project	Sustyvibes	Nigeria
Théâtre des Négociations	Frédérique Aït-Touati, Bruno Latour	France
Urbanités Numériques en jeu	Institute for Research and Innovation (IRI)	France
Voices of Tomorrow	Curriculum For Life	United Kingdom
Young Voices for Fairer Futures	Reasons to be Hopeful	USA
Youth Climate Lab	Youth Climate Lab (YCL)	Canada
Youth Future Under Construction	The British Academy	United Kingdom
Youth Talks	Higher Education for Good Foundation	Switzerland

HOW WE ANALYZED THE PROJECTS

The 54 projects that WTFutures analyzed, based on their published material as well as on interviews with the teams in charge, were analyzed along three axes.

AXES #1 AND #2: WHAT THE YOUNG PARTICIPANTS SAID

We analyzed this material in two ways:

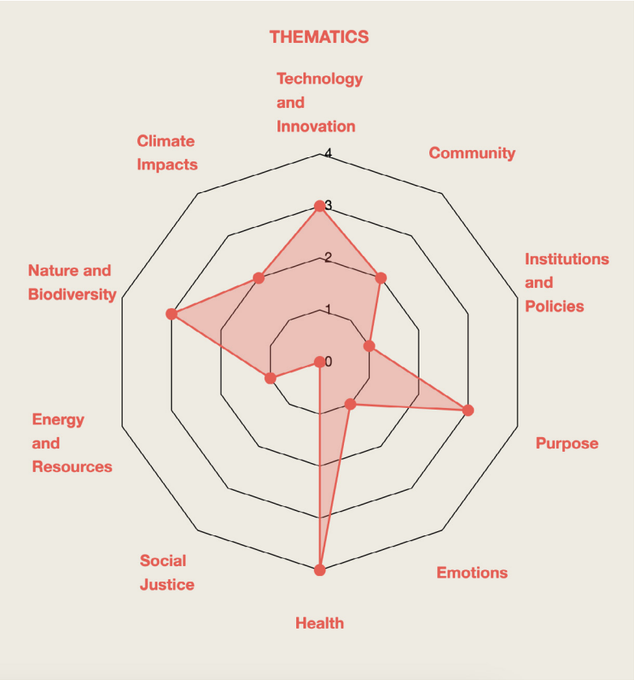
"Thematics" categorize the content, the topics that matter to youngsters.

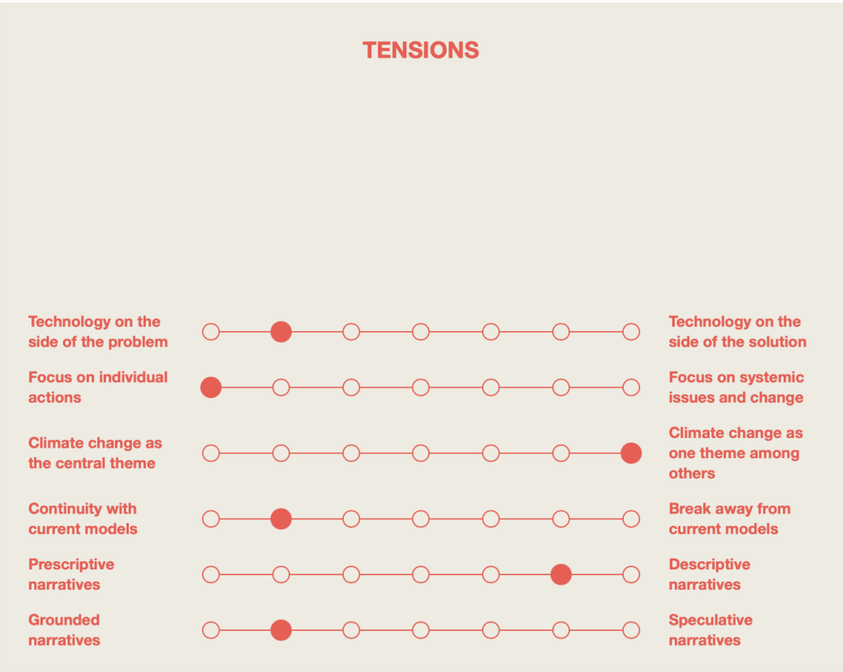
Climate Impacts	How young people imagine what a future marked by climate change might look like.
Community	The role that human relations and community plays in how young people imagine the future and, in particular, the consequences of and responses to climate change.
Emotions	What young people express about the range of emotions that climate futures elicit in them, how to deal with them, and how they connect to action.
Energy and Resources	Visions and challenges regarding the production, distribution and use of resources. Two main categories emerged: energy, and food.
Health	How health, and in particular mental health, features in the images of the future that young people form.
Institutions and Policies	What young people said, both in terms of policy recommendations, but also on how they perceive their political institutions.
Nature and Biodiversity	How the idea of "nature" is represented and thought of in young people's vision of the future.
Purpose	How young people imagine their purpose in today's and tomorrow's world.
Social Justice	How young people connect their visions for the future to struggles for dignity, inclusion, and fairness, and to what extent these concerns are connected to climate futures.
Technology and Innovation	The role that technology plays in how young people experience life, and their expectations towards tech and innovation in responding to climate change.

"Tensions" identify polar differences in vision and outlook, and locate the projects somewhere between the poles.

Climate change as the central theme / As one theme among others	What influence climate change exerts on how youngsters imagine their future ; how climate change is, or isn't, connected to other concerns.
Continuity / Break away from current models	Futures based on today's economic, social and political arrangements vs. futures imagining wholly alternative mechanisms.
Grounded / Speculative narratives	Images of the futures explicitly based on participant's lived reality and environment, vs. purely imaginative futures, untethered from young people's actual experience.
Focus on individual actions / Focus on systemic issues and change	Individual and technical responses to climate change, vs. a focus on the interconnectedness of issues and the need to act at a systemic level.
Prescriptive / Descriptive narratives	Images of the future laden with values (desirable futures, or negative futures imagined as warnings) vs. neutral description of plausible or likely futures.
Technology on the side of the problem / Technology on the side the solution	How young people value the role that technology plays in shaping their futures and that of the Planet.

This thematic analysis also helped create graphic representations of what each project focused on:





AXIS #3: HOW THE PROJECTS HAPPENED

Here, the analysis focused on the process, the methodologies, and the experience lived by young participants.

Climate Change Literacy	What, if anything, the projects did to develop their participant's awareness and knowledge of the existence, the causes and/or the effects of climate change.
Embodying the Narratives	What importance the project gave to connecting the participants to the futures they were imagining, through their bodies, senses and emotions.
Futures Literacy	What, if anything, the projects did to develop the participants' ability to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do, and/or equip them with foresight tools and skills.
Learning New Skills	What importance the projects gave to the learning of other skills, be they creative, technical, organizational, entrepreneurial, reflexive, social, etc.
Links with Political Initiatives	Whether and how the projects emanated from, or interacted with, formal policy-making projects on a local, national and/or international scale.
Meaningful Experience	How much attention the projects put in making the young participants' experience engaging, in producing a lasting effect, as well as in taking into account what the participants produced.
Youth Agency	Whether and how the projects contributed to their young participants' ability to act in ways that shape their life trajectories, and/or to engage in collective action.
Youth-Led Projects	What role youngsters took in the design, governance and running of the project.

KEY LEARNINGS OF THE PROJECT

Taken together and analyzed in the way we just described, what can the 54 projects in 29 countries that constitute the corpus of WTFutures teach us?

The answer is: a lot. Speaking as the small WTFutures team, this project has changed us. We entered the project looking for visions and messages: substantive assertions about what young people see, want, fear, from the future.

We got some of that, but not that much.

We soon realized that we were looking at the projects the wrong way. In most of them, the experience of working together on futures, the capabilities developed during the project, and its effects on young participants after it concluded, were far more important than the formal outcome. In fact, this outcome was often left unpublished, either due to a lack of resources, or for privacy reasons, or because it did not feel right to share it out of context.

While we remained interested in the images of the future they came up with, we became more interested in the projects as practices and experiences, and in studying the effects they had on their participants. Young people are all on a (sometimes messy) journey through which they build their identity, they define what matters to them, and they imagine their place in the world that will be. The projects resonated with these processes. In most cases, they gave participants tools to reflect on them. Through collective work, they created bridges between individual and collective futures, as well as between different visions of the future.

From this change in how we looked at the projects, a whole set of questions emerged, that became central to WTFutures:

- What is it like to grow up one's whole life in a world marked by climate change?
- How does it influence the way in which young people think about their future?
- And what effect does that have on what young people expect and need in order to find their place in the world?

In this report, we propose the term **Climate Natives** to describe this common experience of growing up with climate change. We try to define what that means and does not mean. By doing this, we immediately run into **eco-emotions**, because they are both so central in many young people's lives, and so poorly taken into account. We naturally move on to **arts**, which in many projects worked as a connector between people, issues, chronologies, etc. Art takes us to skills, including but not limited to "**futures literacy**", and to the question of what young people would expect from **education**.

Finally we look at young people as change-makers. Reflecting on **activism**, we suggest reframing it into a normal form of activity that should be valued and socially recognized. Which would go a long way towards including young people at all levels of **decision making**, beyond the good-intentioned but disappointing efforts to include them into today's institutional processes.

This, in a nutshell, is what you will find in the following pages.
If this feels like a mouthful, just take one initial step by turning this page. Get to know the Climate Natives. Then let them take you on their journey.

1. CLIMATE NATIVES

> *"Riders on the storm*
> *Into this house, we're born*
> *Into this world, we're thrown*
> *Like a dog without a bone*
> *An actor out on loan*
> *Riders on the storm"*
> The Doors

The thousands of children, teenagers and young adults who participated in the 54 projects we surveyed in WTFutures are all different. They do not live, think, know, fear or want the same things. However, they have one thing in common: they are **Climate Natives.**

LCOY 2025: Gabonese youth assert their climate leadership

WHAT DO (AND DON'T) WE MEAN BY "CLIMATE NATIVES"?

Taking the clue from Marc Prensky's 2001 definition of "Digital Natives" (see box), we will define a Climate Native as **a person who has grown up in a world marked by the prospect, and increasingly the reality, of anthropogenic[1] climate change and its consequences.**

This does *not* mean that climate change is the only issue that matters to Climate Natives. As all young people, they are in a process of building their own identity and finding their place in the world as it is and as it might become. They are also concerned by other large issues such as social inequalities and, according to *Youth Talks,* the resurgence of war.

1. Caused by humans.

"Digital Natives" – and their critics

In 2001, the American writer and researcher Marc Prensky coined the expression "Digital Natives" to describe *"a person who has grown up in the information age"* and never known a world where digital technologies and services were not part of everyday life. He went on to conclude that Digital Natives had developed a completely different way of thinking than their "Digital Immigrant" elders.

The concept has been criticized for being too homogenizing – Digital Natives may have this one experience in common while remaining different from one another on everything else –, ignoring inequalities, overstating both the Digital Natives' skills (using digital technologies is not the same as understanding or creating them), and speculating without proof about the effects on young people's way of thinking.

In taking Prensky's cue, we will try to avoid the same kind of over-generalization and essentialization. We trust the reader to let us know if we succeeded.

Being Climate Native also does *not* turn every living youth into a committed climate activist: indeed, some projects noticed that, having lived with climate change all their lives, some young people may have "naturalized" it, seeing it as an inevitable phenomenon and sometimes losing track of its connection to human action – therefore, possibly losing the ability to imagine any course of action apart from dealing with the consequences. Others may simply find the issue overwhelming and/or refuse to shoulder the responsibility for fighting climate change just because older generations have decided to pass it on to them. When asked by *Youth Talks* what they would or would not be ready to sacrifice to "build their desired futures", they appeared *"torn between the needs of the present and their desires for sustainable futures."* Sure, many elements of their everyday lives, (social media, fast fashion, travel, etc.) are criticized for their contributions to climate change, but what would sacrificing them really achieve? And why didn't their predecessors do the same?

> *"While family relationships, wellbeing, and physical health are the main areas in which young people are not willing to make sacrifices, material consumption (food, cars, technology, etc.), certain activities (travel, hobbies, and passions), and personal ambitions are variously cited both as aspects to sacrifice and aspects to maintain. This dichotomy highlights the difficult dilemma in which these young people find themselves."*
> Youth Talks

Faced with these contradictions, some young people can become part of the current "climate backlash" – not because they are unaware of the situation, nor because they do not care, but because they also have a life to live. Understanding the complexity of climate change can also feel overwhelming, even debilitating. In some cases, it may feel easier to turn towards simpler ways to explain life and to project oneself in the future.

Finding their own place in the world, and saving the world – or at least, making sure it remains inhabitable: the challenge of reconciling these two imperatives may be key to understanding Climate Natives.

WHEN WOULD WE DATE THE ADVENT OF CLIMATE NATIVES?

Climate Natives are not just one "climate generation."

We propose 1997, the year the Kyoto Protocol was signed by all countries but three (and ratified by all but four, the U.S. having signed but not ratified). This year symbolically marks the moment from which the reality of anthropogenic climate change was acknowledged globally, at the highest level – and also, from which the gap between acknowledging its existence and acting on this knowledge became more and more visible. Of course, many voices across the globe had warned of climate change before that date; but Kyoto made it both a reality and a global priority, relayed by media, activists as well a growing number of institutions and companies – hence a constant presence in the minds of young people born after that.

There is no end date. Climate Natives are not one "climate generation": they are all the generations born after this initial date.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT CLIMATE NATIVES?

What the projects surveyed by WTFutures almost unanimously tell us is that three perspectives inform the Climate Natives's worldviews and images of the future:

1. **The gradual degradation of living conditions and opportunities** due to climate change: climate change is already affecting them (although not equally, depending on where they live and their social position), and it will get worse.
2. **What specialists call the "polycrisis"**, the perspective of a world where man-made and "natural" catastrophes, often occurring simultaneously, are a normal part of life rather than exceptions.
3. **The understanding that the people in charge,** whom (in many cultures) young people are encouraged to think of as role models, cannot be trusted to act on their knowledge of climate change and in fact, often lie about it.

Again, beyond that, Climate Natives are as different from one another as people of all generations. Their concrete experiences of climate change are different. Also, they are sometimes more aware of climate change and its effects than *knowledgeable* about it: many projects reflect or express a need for more "climate literacy"[2], which due to its systemic dimension can probably not be taught as just another subject matter (see below, *Rethinking learning*). They can also be concerned with other issues besides climate change: the international *Youth Talks* survey puts climate change on par with war and conflicts; inequalities and discriminations; and, at least in the West, with the effects of digital technology on youth's wellbeing.

Climate change adds a new overarching issue without making the other ones fade away, rather compounding them. However, this has a number of consequences on Climate Native's state of mind, vision of the future, agency, and imagination.

2. "Climate Change Literacy" can cover a wide range of subjects and forms. At its most basic, it is about awareness and understanding of the existence, the causes, and the consequences of climate change. However, depending on context and public, it can also be about deeper topics such as being prepared for extreme weather events; how climate policy is produced; how to deal with our and others' climate-related emotions…

STATE OF MIND (AND MENTAL HEALTH)

> *We've grown up in the climate crisis. It shapes our education, our jobs, our futures. We can't afford to be passive—we have to make space to act, even if it's messy.*
> Net Zero and You(th)

Several surveys[3], as well as many of the projects reviewed in WTFutures, point toward an extremely widespread and often crippling "eco-anxiety" – in fact a range of emotions such as anger, grief, guilt, sadness, powerlessness. Alongside other factors such as digital technology (particularly social media), eco-anxiety contributes to an also well-documented Mental Health crisis[4] in our youth today. *The Eco-anxiety Africa Project* (TEAP), a youth-led initiative initiated in Nigeria, sees eco-anxiety sometimes leading to depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts or deeds. On a less pathological, but still significant level, the 23 young activists behind a paper titled *Not About Us Without Us* write: *"Knowing how much unnecessary harm is being caused, we can find it difficult to engage with basic tasks such as relaxing, sleeping, studying or working. Some of us also struggle with exorbitant feelings of guilt about our carbon footprints [...], despite our understanding that the structures and systems we live in make ethical choices extremely difficult."*

Those advocating for more climate action, can no longer overlook the importance of dealing with the Climate Natives' complex eco-emotions.

SENSE OF FUTURITY

By "sense of futurity", we mean the ability to imagine one or several future(s), to project oneself into the future, and to take the future into consideration when making decisions and acting. The awareness of climate change severely impacts this sense of futurity. This is not an abstract concern: it has consequences on how young people think of having children or of owning things, it makes them doubt the usefulness of many of the study paths offered to them, and even brings some of them to give up promising mainstream careers.

One of the classic tools of future studies, the Futures Triangle[5], assigns different "physical" values to the present *(push)*, the past *(weight)* and the future *(pull)*. Setting aside considerations on the decidedly Western worldview that these values express, the fact that, for a lot of Climate Natives, the future is also associated with weight, is certainly of no small consequence.

The awareness of climate change has consequences on how young people think of having children or of owning things, it makes them doubt the usefulness of many of the study paths offered to them.

3. Hickman, Caroline et al. (2021), **"Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey"**, The Lancet Planetary Health, 5(12).
4. World Health Organization, **"Children and young people's mental health: the case for action"**, 2025.
5. The Futures Triangle is a method to map forces of change and their interaction, categorizing them by their timeframe: the "push of the present", the "pull of the future", and the "weight of the past". **Learn more in this article.**

AGENCY

Using Nicki Lisa Cole's[6] definition of agency – *"the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories",* the projects surveyed by WTFutures also give us indications on how climate change adds to the difficulty that young people face in finding their place in the world. They reflect a fundamental uncertainty on what can be done both in the face of climate change, and about it:

- **What can be done *in the face of* climate change:** how to both shape one's identity, pursue one's aspirations, and prepare for what are likely to be more challenging environmental circumstances? One of the consequences can be seen in many projects where young people challenge current study curricula and their failure to acknowledge climate change.

- **What can be done *about* climate change:** one of the striking lessons from the projects is that those who chose to act in that area have mostly done away with the classic distinction between adaptation (to the consequences of climate change) and mitigation (slowing down or reversing climate change). One reason is that climate change is already a reality, and that any course of action needs to acknowledge this fact. Another is that the focus on policy-making has yielded disappointing results, whereas local, concrete action feels more satisfying and perhaps (not certainly) more impactful in the eyes of many (not all). Several projects also point to the intrinsic value of activism, almost regardless of its outcome, in bringing people together, creating solidarity, generating knowledge that can be used elsewhere, processing emotions, providing meaning, finding answers, and finally developing the sense of agency which, when dealing with issues on their own, many young people find themselves lacking.

IMAGINATION

After Amitav Ghosh[7], several authors have described climate change and the failure to address it as a "crisis of the imagination". Looking at the projects identified during WTFutures, young people do not lack imagination. In fact, calling upon their imagination was one of the ways of overcoming the difficulty of getting some of them to talk about their eco-emotions, and/or to project themselves into a future that most of them find menacing.

This does not (yet?) mean that young people have a clearer vision than anyone else on what post-climate change or truly sustainable worlds might look like, and how we could get there. It means, however, that aside from the (however necessary) dry, technical discussions on climate policy, innovation, or investment, there is a huge untapped resource in imagination. Recognizing its importance and valuing it, particularly with young people, may be a powerful way of helping both substantive alternatives, and a stronger sense of agency, to emerge.

6. Cole, Nicki Lisa. «How Sociologists Define Human Agency.» ThoughtCo. **https://www.thoughtco.com/agency-definition-3026036 (accessed August 15, 2025).**
7. Amitav Ghosh (2016), *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, The University of Chicago Press.

EARNED MISTRUST

It is of course normal for young people to challenge legacy culture and institutions. However, the overwhelming feeling we get from most young people, that they have been let down by their elders in spite of all that was known about climate change, may signal a more serious rift.

All Climate Natives do not react in the same way, of course: some express anger, which remains a way of acknowledging who they are addressing their anger to (institutions, corporations, etc.); some feel discouraged, sad or helpless, sometimes resulting in "activist burnout"; others become dismissive of existing institutions, preferring local, community, peer-to-peer action; others still are questioning the very value of (particularly democratic and/or transnational) institutions, contributing to the current, global democratic crisis.[8]

THE LIVING FUTURE GENERATIONS

Let us try to summarize the above in a simple way: Climate Natives are the living "future generations". Those who defined sustainable development *("meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs")* or the precautionary principle *("taking into account the needs of future generations")* probably had them in mind. But the generations whose whole life is impacted by past decisions on climate are no longer an abstraction. When they were still in the future, adults could speak in their name, then overlook them. Now, they are here. In many countries, they make up more than half of the population. Just as we cannot continue to see climate change as a challenge for the future, we cannot continue to act (or fail to) on behalf of the future generations as if the Climate Natives were not already present!

Overwhelmingly, the projects surveyed in WTFutures tell us that young people may be sad, angry or anxious about climate change and other issues, yet they are also full of energy, desire, intelligence and imagination and ready to act in ways that make sense to them. From the local to the transnational, from public institutions to corporations and NGOs, it is time to give them not one, but several seats at the tables where decisions are made, where funds are allocated, where research questions are asked. It is time to let Climate Natives begin to take care of themselves, since they will be the ones to inherit a damaged planet.

Just as we cannot continue to see climate change as a challenge for the future, we cannot continue to act (or fail to) on behalf of the future generations as if the Climate Natives were not already present!

8. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2024*: **https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2024/**

2. EMOTIONS RECLAIMED

Citadins Citadines 2050 - Reading workshop Labec

We hadn't seen the topic of emotions coming at the beginning of the project. However, eco-anxiety and, more broadly, the range of emotions experienced by youth in the face of climate futures, came out so strongly through many projects and interviews that it became one of the central topics of our analysis. Aside from direct conversations with projects, WTFutures also organized an "Agora" dedicated to the topic, with Svetlana Chigozie Onye *(The Eco-anxiety Africa Project,* or TEAP), Aniela Fidler Wieruszewska *(Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear)* and Arnaud Sapin, a student in social and environmental psychology whose PhD studies eco-emotions in a population of young adults.

WHAT ARE ECO-EMOTIONS?

Although eco-anxiety is the expression most commonly heard, research and experience have identified a whole range of eco-emotions: typically, anger, grief, fear, guilt, sadness, powerlessness, and on the other side, hope.

The Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht defines eco-anxiety as *"the sense that the ecological foundations of existence are in a process of collapse".*[9] Although eco-anxiety is the expression most commonly heard, research and experience have identified a whole range of eco-emotions: typically, anger, grief, fear, guilt, sadness, powerlessness, and on the other side, hope.

9. Glenn Albrecht, Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World, Cornell University Press, 2019.

Eco-emotions are, according to Arnaud Sapin, both existential and political emotions.

- On a personal level, they are an expression of how we perceive our possibility to exist in the world as it is becoming. These emotions used to be mostly future-oriented (in the words of Aniela Fidler Wieruszewska, *"eco-anxiety is essentially a concern for the future")*, but they are also more and more connected to present experience: *"Eco-anxiety manifests itself differently across Africa because climate events are happening quickly, and young people are also facing different issues like political instability and poverty, and they have neither the social capital nor the support they would need",* says Svetlana Chigozie Onye *(TEAP)*.

- These emotions are also political, because they relate to the overwhelming feeling, on the part of young people, that the generations with the power to act on climate change are forsaking their responsibilities and letting the next generations deal with the effects. Thus, anxiety can be compounded by frustration and anger.

> *"Young people are [...] recognising that they are being deprived of a liveable future and excluded from critical climate policy decision-making processes. Their claims emphasise their disproportionate suffering from the consequences of climate change and their inability to imagine better futures in the face of such a bleak present."*
> JustFutures (research article)[10]

HOW PREVALENT IS ECO-ANXIETY, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Whatever its precise form, eco-anxiety in youth is a massive phenomenon. In 2021, a survey of 10,000 children and young people (aged 16–25 years) in ten countries reported that 84% of respondents were "worried", and 59% very or extremely worried about climate change[11]. More than 45% said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning. *TEAP*'s survey in Nigeria found that 66% of young people were experiencing eco-anxiety, and over 40 % thought they didn't have the resources or support to overcome it.

The consequences are wide-ranging. Eco-emotions have a strong impact on how young people see their place in the future. Many of them – in several countries, a majority *(Youth Talks)* – feel that they will not have access to the same opportunities as their parents.

Their vision of climate change impacts their professional choices, their choices in studies, and even their vision of possible parenthood. They can have impacts on young people's mental health, sometimes reaching pathological levels: depression, PTSD… Although they are not the only factor, eco-emotions therefore contribute to the well-documented mental health crisis in current young generations.[12]

10. Santos, T.R., Rebelo, D., Garcia, A., Fernandes-Jesus, M., Malafaia, C. and Carvalho, A. (2025), Imagined Climate Futures and Collective Action: An Analysis of Affect in Dystopias and Utopias by Young Climate Activists. J Community Appl Soc Psychol, 35: e70072. **https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.70072**
11. Caroline Hickman et al, **"Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey"**, The Lancet Planetary Health 5-11, 2021
12. UNICEF, **"Perception of Youth Mental Health Report 2025".**

LEGITIMIZING ECO-EMOTIONS

> In the eyes of parents, peers, teachers, health professionals or employers, eco-emotions should be considered legitimate emotions.

This, however, also requires an acceptance on the part of others. *"We have to consider the stigma that exists on mental health in many African communities, where you're expected to just survive and go through life"*, says Svetlana Chigozie Onye. The authors of *Not About Us Without Us* add: *"Mental health professionals must actively challenge the notion that the absence of uncomfortable feelings about the current state of the world (such as worry, sadness and frustration) is necessarily a sign of 'good mental health' and that the presence of these feelings suggests the presence of a 'disorder'. Indeed, the absence of strong feelings in response to upsetting global issues is more often a cause for psychotherapeutic concern than their presence."*

In the eyes of parents, peers, teachers, health professionals or employers, eco-emotions should be considered legitimate emotions, and needing help to process them should be OK.

→ *In the WHAT section of the website on "Emotions", we describe how several projects were designed to help young people name their emotions, share them, accept them, and begin to cope with them.*

Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear

EMOTIONS AND ACTION

Acknowledging the prevalence and the importance of eco-emotions also matter to those advocating for climate action. Emotions and action are deeply linked.

> *Rather than being signs of dysfunction, uncomfortable climate-related feelings often have enormous value; for instance, worry as a warning of potential threats, anger as a rejection of injustice, and grief as a healthy recognition of loss. Together, our climate-related feelings connect us to like-minded people around the world, they motivate our action, they remind us of our care for both other people and the natural world, and they guide us as we think about the better future we would like to create.*
>
> Not About Us Without Us

On the one hand, a feeling of powerlessness can breed apathy. According to Arnaud Sapin, *"If we look at the studies, most of the eco-emotions are rather drivers than barriers to action. Highly anxious people and angry people are the ones that are doing the most. Taking action consumes a lot of energy. All emotions, whether negative or positive, provide energy that we can use to think, to reflect, to question ourselves and in the end to go, to act and make good futures. The worst is to not feel anything!"*

The "action" we are talking about here may not be labeled climate action. The first order of action is often to go about one's life, to live according to one's values and to be able to project oneself into some future. More can accrue from there, whereas the opposite may not be true.

> It is time to recognize the existence, and indeed the value, of emotions in climate action.

Along with a growing number of researchers, *JustFutures* also challenges the idea that activists should focus on "positive" emotions such as hope, and that negative feelings only breed despair and apathy. *"Contradicting the traditionally hedonistic view that hope is inherently positive or beneficial, hope for a better future may, in some cases, obscure the need for disruptive action, encouraging conformist approaches to change instead."* In the projects, hope *emerges* from action, it is not a precondition, and it does not predetermine which futures can be imagined: *"Positive imaginations of the future, then, require a certain emotional depth, incorporating the despair and helplessness of present-day predicaments. [...] Leaving open possibilities for future-making is an important strategy that can better equip activists to deal with plurality, conflict, and loss. [...] If despair is acknowledged, then the 'real' utopia becomes open and subject to negotiation."*

It is time to recognize the existence, and indeed the value, of emotions in climate action. And for professionals working across the fields of futures, climate, and education, it is also high time to better integrate emotions in their practice, discourse, and reflection.

> *Climate conversations tend to focus on facts and behaviors and solutions, concluding with 'this is what we need to do'. [...] We skip over how people feel about this, even about the very solutions. Emotions are integral to the possibility of behavioral or other change.*
>
> Aniela Fidler Wieruszewska, Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear

LETTING EMOTIONS SPEAK

> *One could argue that a lot of the turmoil we experience today is because of emotional suppression. [...] We're basically told in a way that you have to suppress your emotion to be able to survive life. And youths do have this boiling pot of emotions. But I also think it's because they have the innocence to dream of a better future and believe in it. Maybe as you get older, when you experience life, that hope to dream is lost. So I think we need emotions to be able to feel anger, to feel frustration, to want to take action.*
>
> Svetlana Chigozie Onye, The Eco-anxiety Africa Project

Pushing this reflection further, some youngsters also reclaim the place of emotions in their personal and professional lives. According to them, emotions shouldn't be something we hide, a proof of weakness but a demonstration of *emotional intelligence.* For a long time, being an adult was in many ways connected with being reasonable and rational, implying, among other things, that emotions had no place in corporate, scientific and political spheres.

A transformation may be underway with youth. Many of those who participated in the projects we surveyed seem willing to acknowledge the importance of emotions and encourage others to share their feelings. Emotions are becoming a very serious matter.

3. ART AS A CONNECTOR

A Fearless Mural for the COP27 - Photo credit Fearless Foundation

33 out of the 54 projects surveyed by WTFutures engaged their young participants in some form of artistic practice, whether it resulted in theater plays *(Générations F, Théâtre des Négociations),* murals of frescoes *(A Fearless Mural for the COP27, Kijiji Cha Amani)*, displays from a "Museum of the Future" (or its Mexican version *Museo del Futuro*), crafted artefacts *(Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear, Puerto Rico 2054*), or fictional stories told in writing and drawing *(Butterfly 2050)*, as radio shows *(Future Is Now, Climate Future in Brussels 2030)* or on video *(Pedagogías del Mañana)*...

Creative Media used in WTFutures' projects		
Text narratives	Video	Dye
Poetry	Photography	Textile scraps
Oral storytelling, proverbs	Drawing, painting	Game, videogame
Podcast/radio	Signage, banners	Social media content
Theater	Sculpture	
Music, songs	Design	

WHY ARE ARTISTIC PRACTICES SO PRESENT?

We will refrain from overinterpreting the very significant presence of art in WTFutures' corpus, since it is in part a reflection of how we searched and selected the projects. However, a few common messages emerge from the projects.

> Artistic practices have proved to be particularly engaging for young participants.

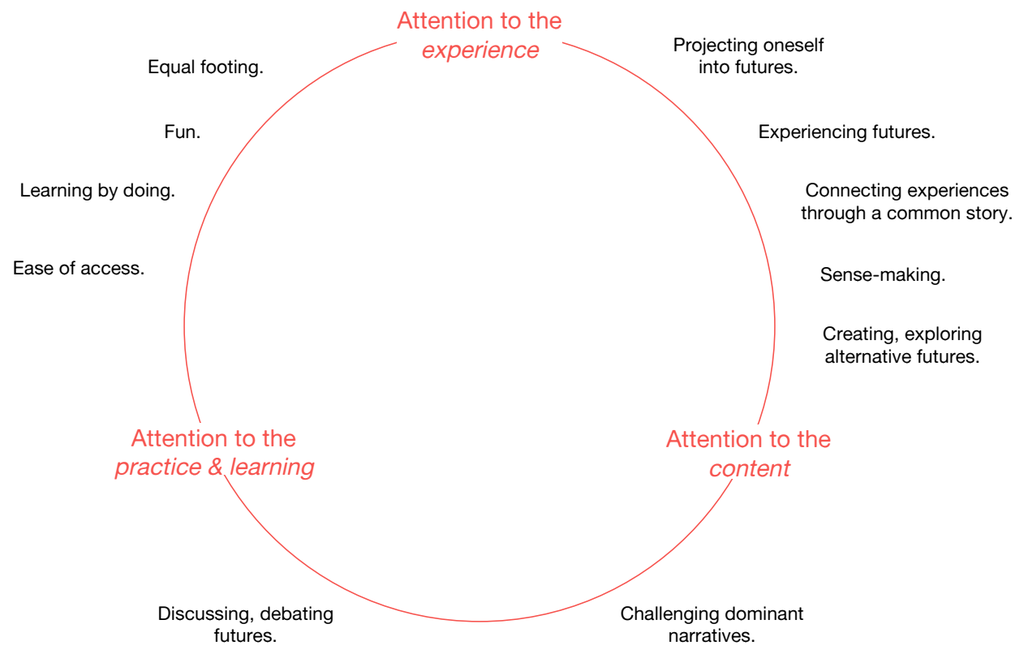
A first set of messages let us understand what art is *not* about in these projects:

- It is not about artists residencies or exposing young participants to the work of professional artists. Art features in the projects as a collective practice undertaken by the young participants, often (but not always) with the help of artists whose role is to help the participants push their imagination further.
- Rather than a way of illustrating predetermined visions of the future, art supports collective exploration and sense-making, helping images of the future emerge, but also challenging them.
- Rather than providing certainties and clear-cut messages, art provides openings, a diversity of possible directions, and food for further discussions.

Artistic practices have proved to be particularly engaging for young participants. They are fun. There is an inherent excitement in creating something, and pride in sharing it with others. They are a powerful way of learning, but they are also, to use a quote from Aniela Fidler Wieruszewska, *"not school"*. They provide a way of expressing one's emotions without needing to put words on them. They can put young participants on a more equal footing with adults…

THE ART-FUTURES LOOP

However, the fact that two fifths of WTFutures' projects do not use art also tells us that there are other ways to engage young participants. We therefore need to observe the projects in a closer and more nuanced way in order to better understand the role that artistic practices play in them.



Attention to the *content*: artistic explorations and renderings of alternative futures, their sharing with various publics, and their use in various forms of political deliberation.	Connecting issues beyond their traditional silos, by weaving them into common future "narratives". Exploring alternative futures: using the freedom afforded by art to dare imagine truly different, even weird, futures. *(Générations F, Climate Futures in Brussels)* Producing powerful representations of futures towards various publics, including (but not limited to) policymakers. *(Message Towards the Region, Our Future Pledge)* Catalyzing conversations *(Museum of the Not-Yet-Possible)* Self-reflecting (as individuals and groups) on artistic production, for example in order to discuss what is probable, desirable, etc. *(Future Is Now, Imagining the Future for Tranformations)* Questioning dominant narratives of the future, past, and present. *(Centre for Reworlding)* Becoming conscious of the diversity of visions of the future and accepting it…
Attention to the *experience*: first-person visions of the future, calling upon the senses, acknowledging emotions, and connecting to one's attachments, culture, history, etc.	Experiencing life in a world marked by climate change. *(Citadins, Citadines 2050, Climate Futures in Mali)* Making sense of one's experiences, connecting personal experience into common stories. *(A Fearless Mural for COP27)* Projecting oneself personally into alternative futures. *(La Crise dont Vous Êtes le Héros)* Fun, excitement, engagement, pride…
Attention to the *practice and learning:* art as a means of becoming capable and/or enhancing one's capability of imagining and discussing alternative futures.	Making futuring practices more welcoming and less daunting, learning them in action and in conjunction with creative practices. *(Future Is Now, Feeling Futures through the Stuff We Wear)* Putting young and old participants on an equal footing. *(Youth Climate Lab)* Exploring alternatives to traditional processes of deliberation, policymaking, international negotiations, etc. *(Théâtre des Négociations)*

In summary, art works as a connector: between people, between experience and knowledge, between issues (and, in education, disciplines), between past, present and future, and also between generations.

TAKING ART SERIOUSLY: A FEW CONDITIONS

Art can be demanding in its own way. Children, teenagers and young adults can produce amazing, challenging and fecund works of art if they are put in the right situation and helped. Listening to the projects, we identified a small number of conditions for artistic practices to express their full potential:

- **Give them time:** time is always a significant constraint when working with young people, both because of their attention span, and because so much of their time is determined by others. However, creation takes time. If you need to make choices, cut down on the time for "serious" work rather than that of creation. There are enough places where young people are asked to be serious.

- **Do not overload participants with content.** Again, creation offers an alternative way towards learning than what class usually provides. You want to maximize this difference. Also, and this is also true of adults, the more content you dump on participants, the less they will be able to imagine alternatives.

- **Be demanding on the form and open on the content.** If you are working with artists, ask them to help the youngsters produce great works of art. Great form will produce better and more original content, whereas the reverse is generally not true. The pride of having created something worth sharing with a public is a powerful motivator.

- **Avoid stifling creativity** by remarking on the feasibility or realism of the young participants' images of the future. Let the young participants reflect together on what they created in their own way.

- **Anticipate how the creation will be shared.** First, this is generally when the project really ends and the promise to participants is fulfilled. Second, this is when the images of the future produced by the young participants meet other audiences and can therefore begin to produce an impact at a different scale.

Children, teenagers and young adults can produce amazing, challenging and fecund works of art if they are put in the right situation and helped.

4. THE FUTURE AS CAPABILITY

All the projects surveyed in WTFutures invited their young participants to project themselves in the future, albeit in very different ways. Many, but not all of them, sought to provide the participants with some kind of futures literacy. Others used specific foresight techniques along with other tools. And some just asked their participants to reflect on the future in whatever way they saw fit.

Climate Action Photovoice

Defining Futures Literacy

Drawing on UNESCO's definition[13], the *Future Is Now* project defined Futures Literacy as a skill that allows persons and collectives to:

- *"better understand the role that, through anticipation, the future plays in what they see and do;*
- *"understand the real-world effects of imagining futures;*
- *"articulate the differences between various uses of the future, depending on context and purpose."*

We all anticipate, both in the short term (before crossing a street) and the long term (to make life choices), but we mostly do this unconsciously: we are generally unable to articulate the images of the future on which we base our decisions. And we are certainly not taught to do it, except in the rare Futures Studies departments of select universities.
Futures Literacy is, above all, about turning these unconscious behaviours into conscious individual and collective practices.

But why is this important, particularly for today's youths?

13. UNESCO, "About. Futures Literacy: An essential competency for the 21st century" https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-literacy/about

WHAT IS THE FUTURE, ANYWAY?

> Create, or recreate, democratic spaces where young participants become actors and agents of change.

We will prudently refrain from providing a generic answer to this question, and rather focus on what the future is (and is not) in the projects we have studied within WTFutures:

- **It is part of a temporal continuum** connecting past, present and future. The future is no *tabula rasa* where anything goes. It is connected to history, to current conditions, to people's experiences. In the words of Anna Barford, summarizing the British Academy's *Youth Futures Under Construction* program: "*Temporally speaking, there is a triple significance to understanding young people's challenges: they are shaped by the past, matter for today and impact tomorrow"*. In some projects, such as the *Centre for Reworlding*, revisiting the past is a precondition for becoming able to imagine different futures: *"Reworlding imagines a world that could have been [...] to decouple from maladaptive ways of engaging/disengaging with the climate emergency context."*

- **It is both a personal and a collective construction**, using a large variety of "scaffolding" methods to associate the group's (and its participants') bits of knowledge, experiences, projections, values, and acts of imagination.

- As a result of this, **it is multiple,** fundamentally diverse and uncertain, and also open to each participant's imagination and intervention. There can be no "true future", even in retrospect. At best, some futures may be more performative than others, because they are borne by more powerful players.

Therefore, the future is not a place where all of our problems are either solved, or drive us to catastrophe. Rather, it is both:

- **A space, continuously shaped and discussed by its participants,** where various configurations of actions, intentions, and experiences can be tested; and where knowledge interacts with values in assessing what is possible, plausible, and preferable.

- **An individual and collective capability** to reflect on our assumptions about what will and should be, to accept the diversity of perspectives about what is possible and desirable, to collectively deal with change as well as shape it.

By this description, the characteristics of the future are also those that, by essence, shape (or should shape) spaces for democratic deliberation: grounded, collective, open, diverse, inclusive, co-produced…

This, to us, is the core lesson of how the projects featuring in WTFutures use the future: as a way to create, or recreate, democratic spaces where young participants become actors and agents of change, always in a reflexive way that allows them to pay attention to their environment as well as to the needs and desires of others.

The tired “utopia vs. dystopia” debate

Working with, or on, the future, generally produces narratives: descriptions of the future, scenarios, timelines, etc. A body of literature and practice tends to warn against dire descriptions of the future, *aka* dystopias, as they would generate despair and apathy, and therefore prove counter-productive in terms of climate action. Based on the mostly dystopic tone of mainstream science fiction production, there is also the belief that people, if left to imagine on their own, will spontaneously produce dystopias.

In our experience, as, it seems, in that of many projects identified in WTFutures, none of this is true.

- Dystopias do not deter action. As the researchers behind *JustFutures* point out, *“emotionally elaborated dystopias [can be] central in framing the present crisis and motivating engagement. From there, utopian impulses and hope emerged through solidarity and collective work, giving rise to ‘real’ utopias—practical visions of inclusive and negotiated future societies that embraced contingency and possibility.”*
- Real groups rarely produce dystopias. *“Neither catastrophist nor irenic, they tell the story of a future in which everyday life is difficult, but (generally) made livable by a combination of ingenuity, solidarity and fighting spirit, supported by infrastructure and public action”,* says the report of the *Citadins, Citadines 2050* project.

WHY IS FUTURES LITERACY SO USEFUL?

It is certainly not indispensable to be “futures literate” in order to reflect or act on climate issues. Saying that, without climate action, “there is no future” is technically untrue (except, perhaps, in the very long term: barring extinction, there is always a future, however bleak), but it can work to stoke a person’s or a group’s moral fire. Working on concrete, local projects without needing to project oneself beyond solving present problems is also perfectly reasonable.

However, the projects identified by WTFutures highlight many reasons why “using the future” in some form or another can be hugely beneficial:

- **Complexity:** understanding that problems have multiple causes, that actions have multiple-order consequences, and that issues are interconnected. According to Mamadou Doucouré, one of UNICEF’s “Youth Foresight Fellows”, capacity building on foresight *“allowed participants [in his workshops in climate futures in Mali] to connect systemic factors and global futures to their personal futures.”*

- **Path-dependency:** understanding that past, present and future are connected; that actions in the present may not determine the future (because of complexity), but that they do open or close certain futures (e.g., the “+1.5°C” future is now closed forever).
  Note that complexity and path-dependency are also key concepts in climate science, therefore reinforcing the usefulness of using futures in connection with climate change.

- **Plurality:** there is not one future. *How* you think about the future creates different futures. In Pakistan, *Kidding the Future* used various modes of thinking to help school children and teenagers create “expected futures” (cause & effect thinking), “alternative futures” (contingent thinking), and "preferred futures” (value-based thinking). And of course, each participant’s own way of thinking, value system, etc., will also result in very personal images of the future. The side-effect of plurality is **openness to dialog.** According to Doucouré, futures-related capacity building also *“made those holding strong opinions more open”* to other possibilities.

- **Critical thinking:** becoming conscious of the constructed, “narrative” quality of the future, can help realize that these characteristics also apply to the present and the past. This helps participants question dominant narratives, revisit suppressed memories (e.g., of colonized and/or marginalized groups), take science fiction tropes with a grain of salt – and also, reframe their own memories in more empowering ways, such as those of the Covid pandemic in *Destination Beauvais 2040.*

- **Hope:** not by passively believing in some magic (tech or otherwise) solution to the world’s trouble, but by being able to *“develop images of the future economy and/or society that are more sustainable, equitable, fair & just, and simply liveable than the present or the past”*, in the words of Nur Anisah Abdullah *(Museum of the Not-Yet-Possible).*

- **Self-confidence and agency:** the consequence of all of the above, is that participants in the projects become capable to shape, articulate, advocate and discuss alternative images of the future. They learn to connect these images with their personal experience, and picture their own role in shaping the future – their personal future, as well as that of broader communities.

FUTURES LITERACY IS NOT RESERVED TO YOUNGSTERS!

The researchers involved in the *Narratives of Change in Science Education* project speak of *“future-scaffolding skills, skills that enable people to construct visions of the future that support possible ways of acting in the present with one’s eye on the horizon.”* These skills are definitely useful to youngsters. However if one goal is also for young people to play a larger role in the world, they should spread to their interlocutors too:

- **Climate scientists**, whatever their disciplines, could use it to open up to other disciplines and ways of thinking: as we can see in WTFutures, the simple invitation to “Listen to the science” has proven ineffective, and sometimes counter-productive, in generating climate action.

- **Climate activists** could often benefit from the creative part of Futures Literacy to complement denunciation with projection, becoming more capable to articulate what they fight for, not just against.

- **Decision-makers**, private or public, would benefit from thinking more long-term, and moving away from the linear simplicity of “problem-solution” thinking, towards a better grasp of complex interactions.

- **Innovators** could use it to become more capable of thinking about the second- and third-order impacts of their inventions, along with those that might be impacted…

5. RETHINKING LEARNING TODAY FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD

Pedagogías del Mañana - Caldearenas

Although many of the projects surveyed by WTFutures touch on the subject of education, they do it in very different ways. Some projects happen in an educational context (*Pedagogías del Mañana, Kidding the Future, Imagining the Future for Transformation, Exploring future schools scenarios in Melbourne, Eduponics…),* others do not. Some make education their main topic *(Narratives of Change in Science Education, Climate Futures in Mali…)*, while for others, education was just one topic among others raised by the young participants.

Despite this diversity, we found a remarkable consistency around four powerful messages:
1. Climate change calls for a major change in education.
2. The relative separation between education and other dimensions of life, however precious it has been, is becoming fragile.
3. Literacy in a world marked by climate change includes many forms of knowledge and skills generally not taught in schools nor, in fact, anywhere else.
4. "School", today, is generally not up to the task, and needs to change.

CLIMATE CHANGE CALLS FOR A MAJOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION

There are two reasons for this. One is that climate change itself is a systemic transformation, with systemic causes, that calls for an understanding of complexity. The second reason is that young people are already seeing the effects of climate change on the world, as well as on their own lives and perspectives, and this redirects their thoughts towards what they need to be equipped with in order to grow up in this world.
This, according to nearly all the projects that have discussed education, has consequences both on *what* should be taught, and on *how* it should be taught:
- The most obvious change that almost all projects call for, is **to connect academic disciplines,** both with one another (in the name of system thinking), and with the overarching issue of climate change. Some imagine an additional "Climate Change" subject matter working as a bridge between traditional disciplines. Others imagine integrating climate change within existing disciplines, be they hard science, social science, artistic, or technical and vocational.
- **But it cannot stop there.** Several projects have formally or informally drafted lists of necessary skills that should be taught somewhere, but generally are not. We will develop this further below.
- Many of these necessary skills, such as collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution, **cannot just be taught in a classroom.** Education for the coming world should rely more on peer-to-peer learning and collective work, and connect more with real-world experience and action – although always adding a critical and reflexive dimension to them. This is, of course, a change in favor of which many education reformers have advocated for decades. However, we cannot help being struck by how loudly it emerges from the voice of youths involved in the projects that we surveyed.

> Young people are already seeing the effects of climate change on the world, and this redirects their thoughts towards what they need to be equipped with in order to grow up in this world.

"Learning up" from traumatic experience

Several projects describe situations where students build up on their personal or collective experience to develop knowledge and skills, including when these experiences are traumatic (*Puerto Rico 2054* after hurricane Maria, *Destination Beauvais 2040* and others after Covid). Others try to help young people cope with the strong emotions elicited by climate change by giving them a common goal: become part of a fictional social movement called "Creative Collectives for Utopia" *(Imagining the Future for Transformation)*, fight against a new tourist infrastructure in a preserved valley *(Pedagogías del Mañana),* etc.

While they are often designed in reaction to a given situation, these projects open a space where participants can simultaneously cope with the situation, act, and learn skills that will serve them both in reactive and in anticipatory contexts.

THE SEPARATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND OTHER DIMENSIONS OF LIFE, HOWEVER PRECIOUS IT HAS BEEN, IS BECOMING FRAGILE

There are many good reasons to make the time and space allocated to children's education into a kind of safe haven, where security is (generally) assured; where social inequalities are (somewhat) compensated; where societal conflicts are (somewhat) muted; where children can (somewhat) detach themselves from the influence of family and community to become their own selves; and where many kids are given opportunities their parents did not have and could not pay for otherwise. However, this separation is becoming more difficult to uphold.

> How can education prepare them for tomorrow's world, especially since so much about it remains unknown?

Climate change already has concrete consequences on schools themselves. In several countries, the heat is such that schools close early several months each year, reducing the time kids spend learning. *Climate Futures in Mali* even imagined school education happening at night. The situation for children forced to migrate because of climate change, or its political consequences, is of course worse and will likely concern tens of millions of young people in the next decades. How can learning still happen, and open up future opportunities for these children?

In the eyes of many students, parents and teachers, education is supposed to prepare for jobs, on top of providing students with tools for thinking on their own. However, in a world transformed by climate change (as well as by other disruptions such as AI, digital platforms, etc.), the nature of jobs, or even their very existence, is in question. Although in some projects, young participants do talk about preparing for future "green jobs", most of them seem to think that the transformations of work go well beyond the nature of a few specific jobs.

Mass education systems were (quite reasonably) built to prepare young people for a relatively stable world, which is likely not going to exist when today's children become adults. How can education prepare them for tomorrow's world, especially since so much about it remains unknown? How much do the requirements for such an education differ from what educational systems offer today?

Lastly, several projects, particularly in higher education, report that students arrive with personal experiences of the disruptive effects of climate change on their lives and their prospects, as well as strong feelings and/or opinions about it. How to process the profound emotions connected to climate change? How to deal with, or avoid further polarization among students (and teachers) harboring different views? How to acknowledge the value of students' challenges to existing curricula while retaining their most valuable aspects? It is not enough (and often not possible) to brush these feelings aside in the name of academic neutrality.

> *"I don't think we are fully aware of the stakes of ignoring emotions and creativity in the classroom. More and more students are entering the classroom with a sense of hopelessness about the future. The classroom—a place oriented towards learning about society for its benefit—should especially enable diverse people to come together and grow collective agency and hope for the future."*
> Josephine Chambers, Imagining the Future for Transformation

Campus de l'Engagement

"LITERACY" IN A WORLD MARKED BY CLIMATE CHANGE INCLUDES MANY FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS GENERALLY NOT TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS NOR, IN FACT, ANYWHERE ELSE

UNESCO defines literacy[14] as *"the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute information",* and to apply this knowledge in daily life. *It "involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society."*

Although this definition applies initially to reading, writing, and numeracy, it can be extended to other fundamental sets of skills and knowledge. Several projects point towards

- **"Climate Change Literacy"** (understanding its causes and effects, preparing for it, mitigating it, and imagining transformation possibilities in this new context – freely adapted from *Campus de l'Engagement)*;

- **"Futures Literacy"** *("a capability that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do"* – UNESCO) ;

- **"Emotional Literacy"** (naming, accepting and processing one's emotions – freely adapted from *Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear).*

Beyond that, many projects also point towards the need for new sets of skills applicable to an unstable, and generally more difficult world:

- Dealing with complexity and uncertainty, (see *"The Future as capability").*

- Several projects mention the importance and value of Indigenous knowledge and skills, particularly as ways to live in tune with one's human and natural environment and to reconnect to one's history and spirituality.

- Other projects, particularly *Youth Talks* and *Voices of Tomorrow*, insist on personal values, virtues and "life skills":

> *"The top answer [on education] given by young people is to learn or relearn personal values and virtues that allow people to 'live together' in harmony. They mention areas such as respect, kindness, solidarity, moral values in general, tolerance, openmindedness, empathy, acceptance, responsibility, friendship, love, and more. This result, coupled with the near-total absence of traditional skills and aptitudes such as science, technology, engineering, math, social sciences, and the humanities, all of which are traditionally taught at school, is staggering."*
> Youth Talks

- The projects working with young activists describe activism, among other things, as a very powerful form of learning that should be recognized, valued and developed as such. (*We expand on this idea in the next section, "Lifelong Activism").*

- Some projects highlighted that identifying a local problem within a youth community and developing a project to address it can mobilize and teach a wide range of skills, while also empowering young people through the visible results of their actions.

14. UNESCO (2025), "What you need to know about literacy": https://uis.unesco.org/node/3079547

"SCHOOL", TODAY, IS GENERALLY NOT UP TO THE TASK, AND NEEDS TO CHANGE

> Young people are calling for a major overhaul of education systems, but they are doing so because they believe in their importance.

What transpires from most projects is that young participants reflect critically on their school experience and find it is failing to teach them what they think they need for a future marked by Climate Change. In two cases *(Feeling Futures Through the Stuff We Wear, Exploring future schools scenarios in Melbourne)*, the project organizers found that in order to maximize their young participants' engagement and creativity, they had to explicitly be "unlike school".

> *"School is one of the most obdurate 'legacy infrastructures' in young people' lives that impact any decisions that one might make about future possibilities. [...] These legacy infrastructures are never 'neutral': they afford and disafford certain ways of designing for [...] futures."*
> Exploring future schools scenarios in Melbourne

This does not mean that, in the eyes of young people, there is no reforming "School" (in its already wide diversity), nor that education should from now on take place somewhere else. In all the projects we reviewed, education is seen as more important than ever for young people to find their place in the world. And it is widely felt that some kind of public school system is the way to bring this benefit to most children.

Listening to what comes out of the projects that we reviewed, young people are calling for a major overhaul of education systems, but they are doing so because they believe in their importance.

Bagmati River Youth Project

6. LIFELONG ACTIVISM

In the 1990s, the expression "lifelong learning" emerged to describe a perspective on personal and professional development that no longer strictly differentiates a moment in life dedicated to learning, and another to working. Ideally, lifelong learning would not just consist in training periods after initial education, but would weave learning and doing in a constant, reflexive loop.

Looking at the projects surveyed within WTFutures, we get a sense of something similar regarding activism: that for Climate Natives, some (broadly defined) form of activism is often indistinguishable from life.

ACTIVISM INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM LIFE

What do we mean by that?

- Firstly, the world in which Climate Natives are growing up has so many unknowns, that one cannot just learn how to fit some predefined space in society: there is no alternative to taking part in shaping this world. Activism is a way of finding meaning out of apparent chaos, of opening up possibilities: it is a *sense-making activity* for a world that may not make sense to many young people.
- Secondly, one of the most overwhelming feelings regarding climate futures expressed by young people across many projects, is that of powerlessness (see "Emotions reclaimed"). Overcoming this feeling is obviously a condition for young people to just "live on". By providing youngsters with both a community and a role, by building up self-confidence and resilience in the face of radical uncertainty, activism is a deeply *empowering* experience in a world where these are hard to come by.

By activism, we refer to a very broad range of actions whose intent is to contribute to a political, social, environmental goal on a scale beyond that of each participating individual. They range from everyday gestures to local community initiatives; from injecting meaning in how one does their job, to social entrepreneurship; from birdwatching to taking stewardship of a particular ecosystem; from protesting to creating alternatives, or drafting alternative policies, or taking part in formal institutions… This is indeed a broad definition, but one that, in our opinion, acknowledges the diversity of forms of engagement, as well as the fluidity between them. The young participants in the projects we surveyed are generally aware of the importance of scale. They recognize the limitations of personal action, but they also see a continuity between personal experience and broader change. Most of them would not define themselves as activists, although they go back and forth between high and low-intensity forms of engagement. If activism is part of (post-)normal life, it does not need to be how a person defines themselves.

INTRICATION BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

As a consequence, the vast majority of the projects surveyed by WTFutures create a connection between learning, imagining, speculating, and organizing on the one hand, and on the other hand, advocating, protesting, or concretely producing some kind of change on the ground. These links work both ways: from knowledge-focused activities to action, and from action to knowledge and support.

Intricate links between climate 'knowledge' and 'action'

From knowledge to action	From action to knowledge
Obtaining feedback on creative/futures work from experts and/or institutions *(El Futuro es Clima, Destination Beauvais 2040, Message Towards the Region…).*	Action-learning of professional skills *(Eduponics),* creative skills *(Climate Futures in Brussels 2030)* as well as skills connected to activism but usable elsewhere (see below).
Having a recognized voice in a formal policy-making or decision-making process *(LCOY, Banking on Youth…).*	Organizing a "critically appreciative" cooperation between students and a real-world climate initiative *(Imagining the Future for Transformation).*
Co-producing research and/or projects along with professionals, as part of a learning journey *(Urbanités Numériques en jeu).*	Studying activism to *"understand the different ways young people envision and think about their place in the transformations of society" (JustFutures).*
Shaping protest and/or advocacy campaigns *(Pedagogías del Mañana, Kijiji Cha Amani, A Fearless Mural, Emerging Breakthroughs on Climate Change…).*	Providing emotional and other support to activists *(Net Zero and You(th), Éco-Motion, Centre for Reworlding…).*
Concretely experimenting with the ideas generated by the group *(Puerto Rico 2054).*	Training activists *(Net Zero and You(th), Campus de l'Engagement…).*
Taking charge of some of the needs and/or processes identified during the knowledge and ideation phase *(Bagmati River Youth Project)...*	

"Science" helps understand what is happening and why, but because we are dealing with complex socio-ecosystems, it does not really tell us what to do.

Although research has questioned it for some time now[15], there is an implicit model of how individuals are driven to some kind of climate action: first comes awareness of climate change; then knowledge of its causes and effects; then work on motivation, both by helping overcome the feeling of powerlessness and by working on, or with, the cognitive biases that hinder or facilitate the will to act; and finally action, whose direction is indicated by science.

This (admittedly oversimplified) model does not fit well with what the projects tell us. Awareness is pretty much there already. "Science" helps understand what is happening and why, but because we are dealing with complex socio-ecosystems, it does not really tell us what to do – and it definitely does not help people deal with the inconsistency between their personal desire to act (or change) and the way the world currently works. Also, as we saw above, the link between knowledge and action goes back and forth.

Construing activism as a normal part of life is a way to recognize that young people today are all dealing with a mostly unknown future, *simultaneously* trying to find their own (however-unstable) place in it, understand it, imagine it, and experiment at various scales with ways to make it better.

15. Mark A. Ferguson & Michael T. Schmitt (editors), **"Psychology of Climate Change"**, Special Issue, Current Opinion in Psychology, December 2021.

REFLECTING ON, AND SUPPORTING, ACTIVISM

Several projects are specifically targeted towards activists.

Some focus on providing support to activists, in order to help them preserve their energy and impact on the long term: dealing with the difficulty of achieving tangible results, sharing their emotions with a supporting group of peers, adjusting one's goals to both a clearer vision of their desirable future and a realistic assessment of their possibilities *(Éco-Motion).* Again, the existence of such projects inscribes activism in the participants' long-term perspective on their personal life, and not just as something one does when they are young and foolish.

Other projects focus on training activists on a wide range of skills and field of knowledge:

- Personal skills and attitudes, building up the ability for critical thinking, problem solving, as well as the ability to process one's emotions;
- Relational skills such as deep listening, nonviolent communication, conflict resolution, role playing;
- Collective leadership, organizing skills (from protests to events to local initiatives), crisis management;
- Communication, both face to face and online;
- Fact-checking;
- Futures literacy (see above "The Future as Capacity"), Climate literacy;
- Social entrepreneurship;
- Understanding policymaking and institutional processes, etc.

Activism can therefore become a powerfully efficient and engaging source of "action learning" whose benefits extend well beyond particular forms of engagement.

This is a long and diverse list. Few people will be able or willing to master all these skills. As in any other collective endeavor, it will call for specialization. Also, most of these skills are clearly applicable to many other circumstances and needs. Activism can therefore become a powerfully efficient and engaging source of "action learning" whose benefits extend well beyond particular forms of engagement.

In providing support, training, and reflexivity to activists, several projects also come to challenge traditional forms of activism, particularly climate activism. How inclusive is it to persons with different backgrounds and needs? How to move away from a moralizing and/or top-down, "listen to the science" approach, and meet other people where they are? How to connect climate issues with others that matter to people, whether social, feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, etc.? What new forms of action could be more efficient and engaging, perhaps also shifting "from blame to co-responsibility" *(Climate Futures in Brussels 2030)*? Etc.

> *"I stopped trying to 'convince' people. I started telling my own story, and that invited them into the conversation."*
> Net Zero and You(th)

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF ACTIVISM

Activism, especially towards climate change, is embedded in many types of activities. It is a knowledge-producing, sense-making activity. It helps individuals feel anchored and build up their self-confidence. Yet, while, for example, entrepreneurship is highly valued as a form of learning as well as of personal and professional development, activism is not (sometimes it is even explicitly discouraged).[16]

What WTFuture's projects tell us is that this should change. How could learning institutions recognize reflexive activism as a legitimate source of learning, providing credits for it, inviting internships in activist organizations and projects? How could work organizations value their personnel's engagement in citizen and community projects as much as they do their entrepreneurial spirit? How could social security and lifelong learning institutions acknowledge the value of the time spent on activism as much as the time spent in formal, paid work?

Answering these questions would go a long way towards offering Climate Natives a more meaningful path forward for growing up in today's and tomorrow's world.

16. Chip Cutter and Lindsay Ellis, **"The Boss Has Had It With All the Office Activists"**, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 28, 2025.

7. INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING

Défis Résilience - Climathon - Photo credit CAUE de Paris - Jean-Baptiste Vicquelin

Many projects advocate in favor of a greater and more meaningful involvement of young people in the decisions that will have a major impact on their futures: policymaking, international agreements, the governance of major public and private organizations, etc. But how to achieve this in a way that truly makes a difference?

INSTITUTIONALIZED YOUTH PARTICIPATION

> It is difficult to shake the impression that this participation has not made much difference in the decisions themselves.

A growing number of public institutions have created youth councils and other formal channels for the participation of youths in their decision processes. Among the projects surveyed by WTFutures, *Local Conferences of Youth* (LCOY) in various regions officially contribute to the climate COP processes. Since 2013, the Asian Development Bank has had a permanent "Youth for Asia" program expected to contribute to its strategic plans. Most United Nations organizations have put in place mechanisms to include youths in their governance.

It is difficult to shake the impression that this participation has not made much difference in the decisions themselves. In the preparation for the 2024 Summit for the Future, a UN "Policy Brief"[17] lists a long list of shortcomings: limited scope (often restricted to *"issues deemed of specific relevance to young people");* lack of standing and funding; insufficient support leading to a lackof inclusivity and high turnover; the difficulty to deal with the technicality of issues and to navigate institutional complexity, etc. Surveyed by UNICEF Innocenti in 2024[18], the vast majority of

17. United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3: Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-Making Processes" (2024): **https://our-future-agenda.shorthandstories.com/oca-decoded/youth-engagement/index.html**
18. UNICEF Innocenti (2024) : "Meaningful Youth Engagement in the Multilateral System" **https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/meaningful-youth-engagement-multilateral-system**

young participants in international events estimated that their participation was “tokenistic”, more symbolic than effective, and even felt “exploited”.

MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In response to these limitations, UN organizations, and particularly UNICEF, have studied the conditions for a “meaningful youth engagement”, defined as follows:

> *“Meaningful youth engagement is where children and youth are involved as equal partners; where their views and circumstances are respected; where marginalized youth also get the opportunity to participate; and where youth from all backgrounds are welcome and engaged as agents of change rather than just beneficiaries.”*
> UNICEF

This work has also resulted in an evolving set of principles for meaningful youth engagement, among which: safety; institutional mandate and designated seats for young participation in formal processes; diversity, inclusion, and accessibility; support in terms of funding, information, etc.; transparency and accountability; and *“youths as equal partners in decision-making”.*

Formalizing the conditions for effective participation can go a long way towards enhancing the role of young people in institutional processes. However, the limitations expressed by young people are also experienced by other stakeholders trying to find their place in political processes, as well as by participants in many “participatory democracy” initiatives in various parts of the world. Improving these processes remains essential, but there should also be other forms and spaces to allow young people to drive change.

WHAT IF WE WERE ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION?

The initiatives we just described focus on bringing young people into existing institutional frameworks. This is of course positive, but is it really the priority?

Focusing on climate, which is the topic of WTFutures, the failure to act on a sufficient scale by national and international institutions would not have been solved just by higher youth involvement. Institutions, as well as global negotiation processes, have a way of “digesting” fresh blood while remaining the same. Also, because climate change is now a daily reality in a growing number of places, adaptation has become as high a priority as mitigation. While for mitigation, local action only really makes sense if supplemented by global transformations, the local scale appears more meaningful for adaptation. The prospects for young people to take on leadership roles at this scale feels much more realistic.

We are not saying that the efforts to promote meaningful youth engagement in institutions (and corporations) should be abandoned. They are needed. But they are not the whole story nor, perhaps, the main story.

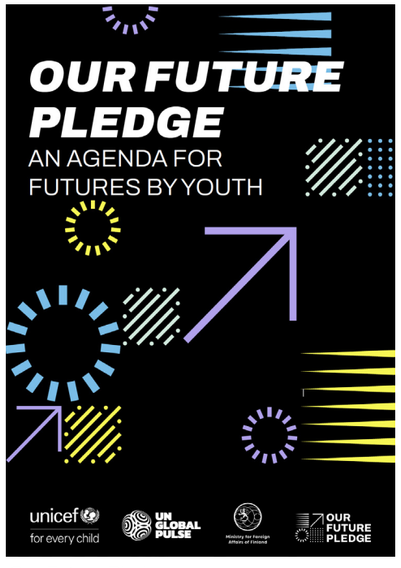
ALLIANCES RATHER THAN MERGERS

In Spain, *El Futuro Es Clima* led a very stimulating experiment. Two separate bodies – a “Meta-forum” made up of 40 randomly selected young participants, and an “Advisory Council” made up of 20 climate experts, separately rated their priorities according to three criteria: Urgency, Importance and Context (i.e., the readiness of actors to act on proposed actions). Both groups came up with a significantly divergent list of priorities. The young participants placed emphasis on communication; degrowth rather than technological fixes; and basic material necessities such as work, education, and health. Whereas the experts expressed their frustration at short-termism; their hope on younger generations; knowledge, narratives, and engagement; and some specific policies such as taxes and financial incentives.

> Rather than merging everything under a big tent with planetary climate policies at the top, we could think in terms of alliances and collaborations.

These differences, once acknowledged, may not be a problem, but rather a way to “triangulate” action on climate change. Different groups could work on activities that reflect their respective worldviews, attachments and capacities, while having fora where they can coordinate what requires coordination, discuss where their views diverge, and learn from one another. Rather than merging everything under a big tent with planetary climate policies at the top, we could think in terms of alliances and collaborations.

> *“Current institutional frameworks expect youth to adapt to existing systems. This project shows the value of meeting youth where they are, through creative, artistic, and participatory means.”*
> Climate Futures in Brussels 2030



Our Future Pledge

From discussions with several projects, we can identify a few possible directions for such collaborations:

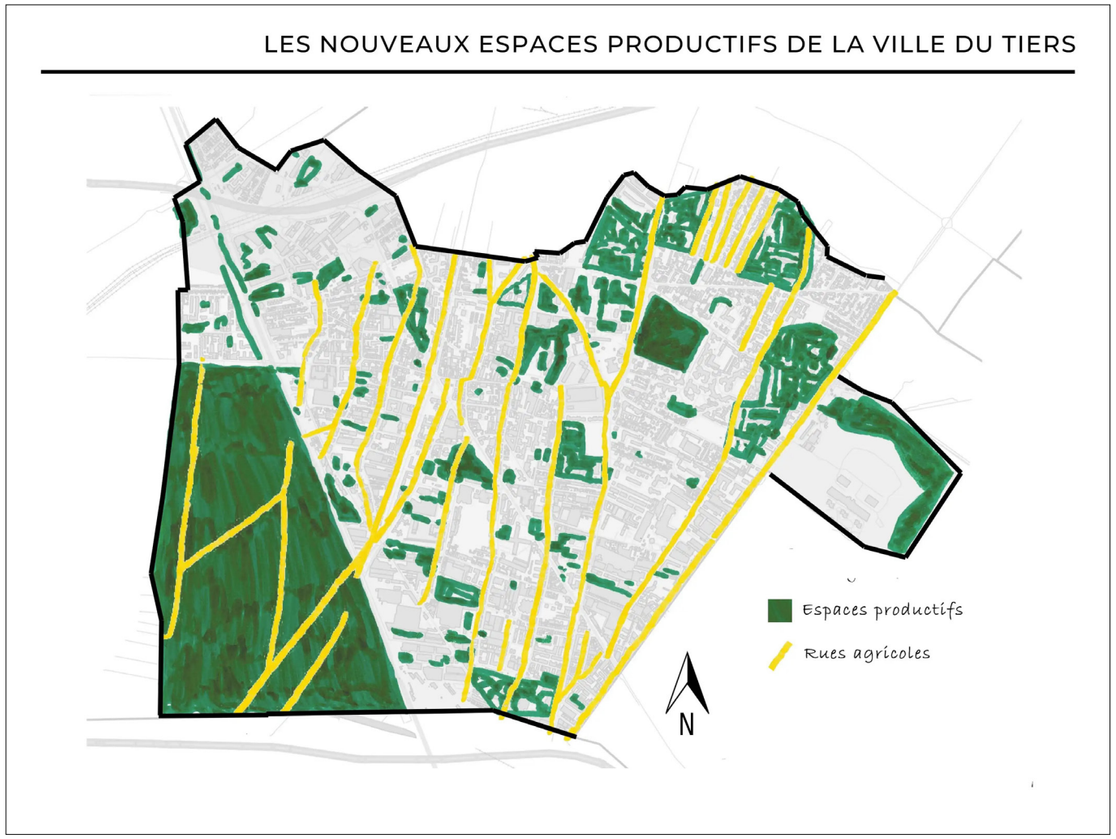
- **Co-creation:** *Urbanités Numériques en jeu* uses game and simulation software to let young people take a leading part in urban planning projects, along with experts and technicians. By being present at the initial stages of a project, young people's engagement becomes much more powerful. In other projects, we encounter co-education, co-research, etc.: children, teachers and professionals building knowledge and projects together, and learning different things from one another.

- **Reinvention:** In *Le Théâtre des Négociations*, the young students simulated COP21's negotiations, although with different roles and mechanisms. What they came up with were not better policies, but the beginnings of what could be a different way of framing such negotiations: *"We realized we were arguing on the wrong matters. We were negotiating about amounts of greenhouse gases emissions instead of our vision of the world and what we want for the future. [...] It is not about having a global VISION, it is about experiencing and having a global will to move forward, change, reflect upon ourselves. [...] The diversity of our perceptions and our concerns prevent us from agreeing on a common vision but constitutes our common richness."*
  What can be done with such an insight? We are honestly not sure, but having seen what has become of COPs after the Paris agreements, why not give alternatives a try?

- **Multilevel action:** In *Bagmati River Youth Project,* a government-initiated program to anticipate the effects of climate change on a crucial ecosystem resulted in a massive youth capacity-building program, itself largely run by young facilitators. During this program, young participants went from defining the issues to dreaming futures, to translating these dreams into designs – and towards actually taking charge of many of the actions.

- **Spaces:** many projects, such as *The Eco-anxiety Africa Project*, point to the need for (non-commercial) spaces where young people can express themselves, share their emotions and worries, be free of adult supervision and – implicitly – interact with one another without the intermission of screens.

These are just weak signals collected from the ground. Much more work would be needed for them to begin composing a coherent framework. We hope to be able to pursue that goal in the following months.



Aubervilliers 2124

WHAT'S NEXT? THE FUTURES OF WTFUTURES

A BIT OF SPECULATIVE FICTION

Before we describe some serious ways in which WTFutures's work could be pursued, we decided to use our own medicine. Each member of the team wrote a personal, speculative story of a future somehow changed by the aftermath of WTFutures.

ROSE RONDELEZ: TEENAGE CRISIS

Sunday, October 8, 2045, 11 a.m.

We can hear a show from the living room.

"The passing of this law makes me terribly sad. I feel that the Assembly only listened to the technical arguments but ignored the feelings of doubt expressed by the scientists. Are we back in the 20's?
- That's exactly what I was thinking. We've learned to trust our instincts! But some Members of Parliament seem to be nostalgic for an era of pretense and empty rhetoric..
- Haha you are indeed getting very angry at them.
- And I should! I mean, have you seen the part on facilitating regulatory access to clinical trials and market authorization?? It's nonsense to see it passing like that!
- It is true that in our latest survey, 68% of the citizens expressed fear and/or anxiety when thinking about the clinical trials of advanced neurotechnologies for cognitive enhancement. But 52% were also feeling hopeful about what the technological developments could do to address mental health issues.
- I feel like human relationships and seeing a real therapist are much more…"

- Mooooom, can you turn off the live stream?

- What's going on Jim?

- I can't stand these streamers who are always talking about hope, love, sadness, blah blah blah. WE DON'T CARE!

Jim is thirteen. I try to be patient. I remember when I was their age.
I had a pretty terrible teenage crisis myself.

- What would you want them to talk about instead?

- I don't know… maybe the technical details! It's much more interesting than knowing that Noah, Kéo or Mia are hopeful for the mental health problems of a loved one I don't even know!

- Okay... I see. You know it hasn't always been like this. When I was your age, journalists and politics only cared about economic or technical arguments. And when emotions were brought into the discourse, it was only to spread hatred and mistrust towards others.

- Yeah, yeah. You already told me this. But right now I'm just angry, I don't need discussion. It's getting on my nerves. I need a timeout. I'm going outside.

I could add that when I was their age, emotions were so rarely discussed that I didn't even know how to put words to those teenage feelings. That I would never have known how to ask for or take a timeout. My parents imposed it on me as a punishment.
I am so proud of my kid, who already knows so much about how to take care of themself.
I would love to tell them all these things, but the wisest thing to do for now is to let them handle it on their own. They're old enough.

- Okay sweetie! I love you!

CHLOÉ LUCHS: FROM REVOLT TO REVOLUTION

Since countries voted, in 2030, to establish official youth delegations within parliaments around the world, today in 2035, statistics began to show a remarkable shift: young people found it easier to imagine themselves in the future. What they learned in school, still at times, disconnected from the actual challenges of tomorrow, no longer felt like their only roadmap. The fact that they were recognized and listened to suddenly expanded their sense of "futurity" and possibility in the world of tomorrow. Of course, there was still a lot to do and the planet was not really doing any better than in the 2020's (multiple climate crises of all shapes and formats). But, new jobs and new possibilities for involvement were shifting their sense of feeling valued and feeling like they had a role to play. In other words, new examples of alternative pathways to adulthood made it clear that there were many ways to "make it" in life. So many things were to be invented and the barriers to "do things" or "express one's needs" felt less inflexible. Of course, this decision had come after the Gen Z protest of 2025, where revolts from different parts of the world (Morocco, Nepal, Georgia, Italie, Madagascar, Indonesia, Kenya...) became a revolution.

Students realized that following traditional courses such as marketing or translation, professions that had, in many places, already been automated, or courses such as "designing mufflers" or "coding python", were not the only route towards relevance, meaning or work. Instead, public life and civic engagement began to stand out as valid, powerful options for building their individual and collective future – since, on the side of the people in power, the listening was real and their opinions honestly valued. Youth were being asked for help in designing new curriculums, in reflecting on how they saw the future of their city and in imagining what type of climate orientated jobs could be needed and useful – among many other things. Not only were they being asked these things, but the ideas that emerged from these discussions were passed on to the youth delegations in different parts of the world and budgeted to be put in place within the coming year.

For Pina, this transformation felt perfectly natural. Getting involved in climate youth movements 5 years ago when she was 20 had become a defining part of her identity, especially when the subjects of her engineering class (planes, motors, speed, fuel) didn't feel like they made any sense any more for the world she wished to see.

Through her engagement in different climate not-for-profits, she met countless inspiring peers from across the globe, all united by the desire to fight for the kind of world they wanted to live

in. Advocating alongside them gave her an immense sense of power and belonging. Today, at 25 years old and as the right hand of Supina Fox, 26 years old, the Canadian youth representative, Pina had the chance to travel across the country, sit in on conversations with adult delegations from around the world, and play a leading role in shaping the social media campaigns that kept young people informed, mobilized, and passionately engaged in political debates. Her generation was growing in strength, numbers, and confidence. For the first time, Pina felt they were not just being heard but were actually shaping the rules of the game. With persistence and unity, youth delegates succeeded in pushing forward ambitious climate legislation. For example, where she lived in Canada, strict and enforceable bills to halt deforestation and put a stop to cross-border pipelines to the United States. These victories gave Pina and her peers proof that youth influence was no longer symbolic: it was becoming structurally embedded in governance.

Furthermore, daily life itself became a more fertile ground for expression. Young people felt freer to articulate their visions of justice, solidarity, and ecological responsibility, whether in parliament, in schools, or in their communities. The future, once abstract and distant, now seemed like a shared project in which they had a tangible, legitimate stake.

DANIEL KAPLAN: SHOWDOWN AT THE UNITED NATIONS!

JOHANNESBURG, 9.29.2050 - The Precautionary Council (PC), the United Nations body representing “Present Future Generations”, is set for a showdown with the Security Council after having vetoed the latter’s Moon and Interplanetary Nature-preserving Exploitation (MINE) resolution. The resolution would have allowed economic exploitation of all Solar System asteroids and moons, which has raised alarm from environmentalists as well as from the majority of countries without access to space.

The PC’s swift decision came as a surprise. It was not expected until November, since one half of the schools that make it up during this 5-year mandate (Johannesburg, Alep, Bangkok, Karashi, Munich, Recife, Vancouver, Wellington) only reopened a few weeks ago. “The Teens and Young Adults constituencies have been active all summer, and that is the result”, rejoiced the Tent Home of Youth Networks for Earth (THYNE) after the veto.

The PC’s resolution was also unusually short and blunt, at least under UN standards:

> *“Having failed to take into account the interests of the generations, including ours, that would live with the consequences of their resolution on Earth’s climate;*
> *Having failed to even consider the needs of other countries;*
> *Having failed to consult with other UN bodies, including this one;*
> *The MINE resolution brought by the UN Security Council is deemed contrary to the UN’s 2043 Revised Charter, and therefore vetoed.”*

As usual, speaking with a representative of the PC’s various age constituencies has been a challenge. The Pre-Teens were eager to communicate, but mostly in damage-control mode, since, apparently due to a miscommunication on their Twitch forum, they were the only constituency to have voted against the veto. The Children could not immediately be reached for comments, finding themselves, according to one of the Parents-in-Residence, “out playing and they cannot be interrupted”. The Teenagers are in the middle of a four-week self-educational trek in the Bush, with intermittent network access. The Young Adults are in an intense process of mutual retraining with the Teenager’s teachers, who have little else to do during these four weeks. We did, however, manage to get ahold of Amogelang Mkhize, who was authorized by her fellow Young Adults to act as spokesperson on this occasion.

“As long as the Security Council or other UN bodies keep coming up with this kind of sh.. and not even trying to talk to us, we won’t waste arguing why it’s a no”, said Mkhize in typical Young Adult parlance. *“As most everybody except, perhaps, UN diplomats, we can not dedicate all our time to the PC or any other organization. We have subjects to study and teach, local projects to organize, commons to manage, we’re on Basic Needs Duty one day a week. And we want time to make our own proposals, not just veto the ones put in front of us.”*

The Security Council has yet to issue an official reply. Off-the-record, an anonymous diplomat complained of *“being prevented from ensuring the future of the Economy by a bunch of amateur, woke kids” (“What’s ‘woke’?”*, asked a puzzled Amogelang Mkhize) The Chinese representative more diplomatically extended an olive branch by opening two million admissions in the country’s best universities to students from the PC’s current host countries. So did SpaceX Nation, the Security Council's eighth and newest member, by offering free trips to Mars. But it may take more than overt bribery to sway the Precautionary Council.

NEXT STEPS FOR WTFUTURES

Here we describe four projects which, we believe, would take WTFutures to the next level. None of them can be done by us alone. Also, there may be better sequels than the ones we have come up with. If you’d like to discuss what happens after this initial work, do reach out!

1. IN THE HEADS OF CLIMATE NATIVES

Ambition: To let young people themselves define what being a Climate Native means, and draw the consequences in terms of what matters to them when looking at the future.

A sub-objective would be to help overcome the gap that seems to be forming between current strategies for climate action, and the expectations of many young people – from those leading the “Gen Z” revolts in several countries at the end of 2025, to those who are aware of climate issues but do not adhere to current forms of activism.

How this could be done: By co-creating a common, yet adaptable protocol that could be used by groups working with young people interested in testing what ideas, aspirations and concerns the expression “Climate Natives” generates, everywhere on the Planet.
We imagine:

- Partnering with 5-7 ‘pioneer’ groups, funded through the project in order to (i) co-create and test the protocol, and (ii) participate in the project’s governance.
- Then, launching public calls to invite other groups to run the protocol with their respective communities, share the results, and discuss the resulting insights.
- Looking for commonalities and differences among local experimentations in order to produce a nuanced, plural, yet compelling description of what being “Climate Natives” might mean, and what consequences this may have.

For/With whom: This project is first and foremost for the young people themselves. In order to do this, we want to work with: youth movements and youth-led organizations; local institutions; corporations, NGOs and community organizers who truly believe in youth engagement; innovative schools, universities, teachers and informal education organizations…

Working with a research organization to validate the protocol and process the results would also be valuable to the project.

2. GIVING REAL POWER TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Ambition: To scan and test various ways to give young people real power in public and private organizations, and understand the benefits and challenges of doing so.

What would it mean to give young people a genuine share in decision-making within public organizations and/or corporations? How could it concretely happen? What are the benefits and risks associated with various options? Under what conditions could young people of different ages effectively and sustainably dedicate time to decision-making?

How this could be done: We would like to make this project both a real pilot, and a rigorous exploration of existing and speculative directions for real youth participation in decision making.

- At this stage, we imagine that the project should be co-piloted with youth organizations and researchers who have already worked on this issue, and begin with a review of existing experiments, surveys and research.
- It would continue within two local communities, possibly in Canada and France. After collaborative design-fiction workshops to invent various mechanisms connected to various local issues, at least two directions would be effectively prototyped, tested, and evaluated in each community.
- At the same time, we would run a series of online conversations designed to share concrete experiences of youth involvement in decision-making.
- The project could result in a "toolbox" and a set of guidelines, as well as mechanisms to monitor progress.

For/With whom: This project should be carried out with: International youth movements and organizations; Local institutions and municipalities willing to share real decision-making power; Researchers already working on similar topics; Speculative designers with strong local connections; Foundations interested in how to extend youth participation in their communities…

3. VALUING AND SUPPORTING ACTIVISM

Ambition: To recognize and value the skills, knowledge and intelligence developed through activism, making activism a legitimate way to spend one's professional or learning time.

If, as we intuit, *"for most Climate Natives, some (broadly defined) form of activism will be indistinguishable from life",* then activism needs to be socially recognized as a socially valuable activity, relevant in terms of learning as well as work. This project intends to imagine concrete ways to achieve this.

How this could be done:

- By learning from activists and from the few instances where activism is studied and/or recognized as valuable,
- Then working with organizations (schools and universities, corporations, local communities…) to design, prototype and test various ways to value and support activism: Activist CV, Engagement Credits, or Activist Internship ?...
- Creating and discussing a "Guidebook" for the professional, academic and social valuation of activism.

For/With whom:
This project is primarily for young people engaged in climate and social justice movements, who often struggle with the lack of recognition of the value of their engagement. However, it could eventually benefit virtually all Climate Natives.

It would be carried out with: Youth organizations; Universities, employers, and institutions open to experimenting with alternative forms of accreditation; and a group of speculative designers.

4. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CLIMATE NATIVES AND CORPORATE SOCIAL IMPACT

Ambition: WTFutures has identified a significant misalignment between Climate Natives and both public institutions and (at least) large corporations. Many corporations, in particular, have a hard time attracting and retaining young people, both as customers and employees.

This project intends to partner with a few large corporations with a sincere commitment to sustainability. Its goal is to involve young people, including those most critical of corporations, in imagining how a true focus on social and ecological sustainability could transform corporations in general, and the participating organizations in particular.

How this could be done: This project builds upon another Plurality University Network's flagship program, The Emerging Enterprise (2024). Mixed groups of Climate Natives and representatives of 5-8 corporations, with the help of science-fiction writers, would:

- Imagine fictional corporations that make sense in the future;
- Test them against the ten "Archetypes" of corporations of the future created by The Emerging Enterprise;
- Apply their common insights to imagine several ways in which some of the participating corporations could transform themselves between now and 2050;
- Identify common insights as well as differences, and future directions both collective, and within each participating organization.

For/With whom: This project should initially involve fairly large organizations with an already significant CSR (or equivalent) activity focusing on both social justice and environmental impact, as well as an equal group of young participants: students, activists, social entrepreneurs, etc. The project could unfold at different scales, from international (happening mostly or entirely online) to national or even local (for example, with the participants of one of WTFutures' local projects).

NON-CONCLUSION

Rather than a conclusion, we would like to offer a few ideas on what you can do with the content of WTFutures, either on your own, or in interaction with us.

Whether you're one of the projects featured in WTFutures, or a project that should have featured in it; a youth organization, or an organization working with and for youth; an educational or a research organization; an institution or a corporation truly interested in how to involve young people in how you work and decide…

- All the material in WTFutures is open source. Feel free to circulate, reuse, adapt, translate, or otherwise wrangle with it. Just remember to quote us and, if at all possible, to share what came out of it!
  → Where? **https://wtfutures.xyz/**

- Circulate the ideas that you consider the most powerful, relevant or perhaps intriguing. We have created a variety of formats to help you do this easily.
  → Where? **https://shorturl.at/rpBQG**

- There are certainly dozens, if not hundreds, of projects we have missed during this first year. If you are running one of them, or if you're inspired by someone else's project, feel free to reference them directly on our collaborative platform.
  → Where? **https://platform.plurality-university.org/wtfuture**

- Challenge and enrich these ideas: What did we miss? Where did we get things wrong? What existing knowledge or experience have been overlooked or mischaracterized? How could we elaborate on the most fecund ideas and directions for action?
  → Where? Just drop us an email at **wtf@wtfutures.xyz**

- We will create several occasions for interested people and organizations to discuss WTFutures, especially through online discussions continuing the "Agoras" program initiated in 2025. Use Linkedin or Instagram to remain informed. Also, if you're interested in having us join your discussions rather than the opposite, do reach out!
  → Where?
  Linkedin: **https://www.linkedin.com/company/plurality-university-network/**
  Instagram: **https://www.instagram.com/plurality_university/**

WHO IS BEHIND WTFUTURES?

THE PROJECT TEAM

Chloé Luchs-Tassé is a futurist with a multidisciplinary background in fine arts, digital culture, and international organizations. She designs strategies, develops new projects, and creates collective methods focused on ecologically engaged transitions and futures. In 2018, she co-founded the Plurality University Network (Paris, France). Now based in Montréal, she works as a foresight and strategy consultant.	
Daniel Kaplan is a futurist and social entrepreneur, with one leg in innovation, and another in imagination. In 2000, he created the Next-Generation Internet Foundation (Fing), a think-&-do-tank to “anticipate digital transformations”. In 2018, he co-founded the Plurality University Network (U+), of which he is the Director.	
Rose Rondelez is a designer committed to contemporary social and ecological issues. After forging an academic path at the intersection of social and political sciences and design, she develops her practice around topics such as imaginaries of the future, relationships with non-human living beings, and citizen participation. She is a project manager for U+.	
Juliette Lépineau is an illustrator and graphic designer working in the cultural and artistic fields. She is in charge of the visual communication of U+ and WTFutures.	

ABOUT THE PLURALITY UNIVERSITY NETWORK

The Plurality University Network (U+) is a nonprofit organization based in France, whose mission is to “connect those who mobilize the resources of the imagination to explore and enable empowering, just and sustainable futures”. With members all across the world, it is both a community of practice, and a platform for experimenting with innovative approaches whose common goal is to develop the capacities of individuals and organizations to imagine change and project themselves as agents of transformation.

https://www.plurality-university.org/

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE FOUNDATION

The European Climate Foundation (ECF) is a major philanthropic initiative working to foster the net-zero transition and ensure a healthy, thriving planet for current and future generations.

https://europeanclimate.org/

https://wtfutures.xyz/
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