YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Youth Knowledge #31

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Introduction

Jamie Gorman and Tomi Kiilakoski

On 28 November 2019, the European Parliament declared a climate emergency, one of many parliaments and local governments across Europe to do so in response to heightened public pressure to act on the climate crisis (Mazon et al. 2022). The loss of biodiversity and the "latest and most comprehensive scientific evidence on the damaging effects of climate change" (European Parliament 2019) were stated as reasons why immediate and ambitious action was needed. The European Parliament also noted that whatever measures are taken should not erode democratic institutions or undermine fundamental rights. This echoed the language of the Paris Agreement, which calls for climate justice and a just transition, as well as calls by the International Labour Organization (2015) to ensure decent work and poverty eradication alongside environmental sustainability. In 2024 the climate emergency is still with us, and Mazon et al. (2022: 2) cautions that until CO_2 emissions are actually reduced, "these declarations indicate mere intent but not any willingness to act". Indeed, the time to turn intention to action is now. The 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC 2022, vii) warns us that there is "a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all". Consequently, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change have emerged as priorities to ameliorate the harms caused primarily by industrialised societies to the earth's atmosphere and ecosystems. While the word "crisis" communicates something of the scale, risk and urgency of our present atmospheric predicament, Bruno Latour (2018: 15) reminds us that this is not simply a moment in time that will pass:

> If only it were just a crisis! If only it had been just a crisis! The experts tell us we should be talking instead about a "mutation": we were used to one world; we are now tipping, mutating, into another.

The task of responding and adapting to the "mutating" of our world falls most sharply on young people and future generations. This has obvious implications for research, policy and practice in the youth sector.

At the same time as these emergent institutional responses, recent years have seen a rapid rise in young people's political action calling for urgent transformation of ecologically harmful practices. These political processes share a lot. They state that change is needed and that it needs to be rapid, systematic and ambitious. They hold that the road to transformation cannot involve sacrificing basic rights. Yet there remain many tensions between young people and political institutions. Many youth climate activists are not content with the way political decisions are made and express concern at the speed of action. Furthermore, the nature of the proposed policy solutions are contested by some young people, who are proposing and enacting many different visions for alternative futures (such as degrowth and voluntary simplicity), which challenge the contemporary mainstream ecomodernist approach.

In considering how we respond to this issue, the youth sector can take a lead from young people themselves. Long before the new youth climate movement attracted public attention post-2018, young people had a long history of environmental activism globally (Hart 1994). In Europe, youth have been involved in nature protection since the 19th century (Mrkev 2019) and were central to many movements for environmental justice from anti-nuclear protests of the 1970s to anti-roads protests of the 1990s. Young people are active in ongoing place-based environmental justice struggles, such as resistance to mega-dams in the Balkans and others that are discussed in this book. They have been active within and alongside Indigenous peoples, trades unions and Global South movements in fighting for global climate justice since the 2000s.

But it was, as Sloam et al. (2022: 684) suggest, "the climate strikes that took place across the world in 2018 and 2019 [that] confirmed that young people are at the vanguard of action on climate change". To this we might also add – as Batsleer et al. (2022) argue persuasively – that young people are at the vanguard of democratic practice through their radical experiments in participation, prefiguration and collective action. This Youth Knowledge Book therefore explores these twin themes of democracy and the climate crisis in relation to young people in Europe today. We wish to make explicit the links between young people's responses to the climate crisis and their contributions to rethinking, revitalising and expanding democracy across Europe. In doing so, we also consider some key questions and implications for the European youth sector.

How are young people doing environmental politics across Europe?

As we face the unfolding atmospheric change with all its implications, young people in Europe are not calling for more or better environmental education, nor are they asking for specific youth policies in relation to the environment. Young people's democratic practices take a wide variety of shapes and forms. Some are engaged in official forms of participation, such as the Irish Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (2022). Others are undertaking activist litigation (Daly 2022), such as a group of young people from Portugal at the European Court of Human Rights. Still others are engaged in acts of counter-democracy (Rosanvallon 2007), such as the Ende Gelande coal infrastructure blockades in Germany (Temper 2019) – and of course the school strikes. These are examples of a wide variety of often radical democratic practices that broadly challenge status quo responses to the climate crisis that are rooted in growth-oriented or "extractivist" paradigms.

Young people's demands and justice claims

In their analysis of the 2017 European Values Survey, Henn et al. (2022) suggest that young people's participation in environmental activism is driven by post-materialist and left-wing cosmopolitan values. Young European climate activists tend to foreground strong critiques of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Furthermore, the perceived inaction of political decision makers also provokes their ire. As a result, young activists are articulating concerns that extend far beyond self-interest (or intergenerational justice) to critique the social and economic systems that have

brought about the climate and biodiversity crisis (Bowman and Pickard 2021). That these systems are the same ones that have placed young people in a particular state of economic precarity at this point in the early 21st century is also not lost on them. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, young Europeans had already faced multiple crises in areas such as unemployment, misinformation and discrimination (Williamson 2024: 56). The Covid-19 pandemic further intensified the "nested crises" affecting the interconnected global world (Kaukko et al. 2021). Many young activists recognise these nested crises require joined-up analysis and action, and "intersectional youth organising and activism are on the rise" (Conner et al. 2024: xxiii-xxiv).

Research suggests that young people's climate activism is often connected to expressing solidarity with silenced groups in society and responding to the "slow violence" (Nixon 2011) of climate change with radical kindness and peace (Bowman and Pickard 2021). More generally, climate justice – an important shared goal of the climate movement (Piispa and Kiilakoski 2021) – connects both ecological and social aspects of sustainability. Indeed, Bowman (2020) suggests that many young activists are making environmental justice claims that directly critique forms of sustainability rooted in the managerialism of ecological modernisation and that remain reliant on a paradigm of "extractivism" and economic growth (Sultana 2023). There cannot be human well-being without creating more sustainable practices, and more sustainable practices cannot be created without respecting the dignity of all human beings, particularly those in the Global South who are facing the greatest burdens of the climate crisis (Sultana 2022). Increasingly too, young people are raising the issue of solidarity with and justice for what philosopher David Abram has called the more-than-human world, a call which scholars are increasingly arguing that youth research and youth work must respond to (Bessant and Watts 2024; Gorman et al. 2024; Pisani 2023; Spannring 2021).

While the youth climate movement is diverse in its demands and means of expressing them, it is clear that many young Europeans crave rapid societal shifts and express deep eco-social disappointment towards the older generations whom they see as being inactive in the face of unprecedented danger threatening humanity as a whole (Piispa et al. 2023). Many young people are calling decision makers to account and seeking concrete solutions to what they see as a systemic failure to address the climate and biodiversity crises. Like Greta Thunberg said in her Davos speech in January 2019: "I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is". Other young people are not waiting for the political system to act. They are creating the world they wish to see by living their values, experiments with collective living and local food, energy and transportation projects (Batsleer et al. 2022). Mass mobilisation of young people on climate issues demonstrates that they feel the need to protest against developments harming human well-being (Chirani et al. 2024). However, the discontent of the young can also be expressed through the form of populism (Foa and al. 2020).

Young people's forms of politics

Young people's political expression in response to the climate crisis exhibits many different styles, views, forms, orientations, strategies, technologies and modes of

being political. Young people's environmental identities, values and motivations are increasingly propelling them away from mainstream politics towards alternative forms of political organisation and democratic participation. Beyond the major mobilisations of the climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion, young people are engaged in environmental action through a range of material practices (for example, bicycle projects, permaculture farming, repair cafes) and spaces for networking, alliance building and non-formal and informal learning (such as climate camps, the European Degrowth Summer School). As a bottom-up response to the inertia of the political system – and their relative structural weakness as participants in national and global climate governance – young climate activists are organising in a variety of ways, seeking association, building community, finding belonging and learning from one another. These prefigurative responses have been described as a form of "do-it-ourselves" (DIO) politics, which Pickard (2022: 732) theorises as:

> a form of participatory politics, whereby citizens do personal everyday acts and/or collective actions outside elections and traditional institutional politics to bring about change. Both personal and collective DIO politics fundamentally involve doing something beyond electoral channels about a grievance or a hope.

Pickard (2022) stresses that for young people, simply doing something is key to responding to existential anxiety and channelling anger into collective action. This offers an important insight into the role of young people's collective action as an effective response to climate emotions.

Despite engaging in widespread forms of unconventional political participation, the DIO politics of young people are not a rejection of democracy. Rather, suggests Batsleer et al. (2022), young activists are engaged in practices that seek a radical rejuvenation of civic life. Faced with the discrimination of adultism in democratic governance structures (Corney et al. 2022) and facing multiple forms of symbolic violence, Batsleer et al. (2022: 13) suggest that young activists resort to: "acts of citizenship", which "emerge from the grassroots and enable those involved to make a claim on and in the public sphere, where previously they have been disallowed and treated with incivility". Therefore their activism can be seen as democratising our democracies.

Young people's claiming of political agency in the climate movement calls into question adultist stereotypes and prejudices about young people, including from the field of youth studies itself. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) have argued that the "epistemological fallacy" of young people is that they are blind to the structures of society and "attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action" (p. 114). Similarly, Côté (2014) has described youth as a stage of "false consciousness" where young people are unable to critically reflect and act on their situations. How might evidence of young people's climate activism, and its impact on European politics and public discourse, inform a re-reading of these debates around the political economy of youth?

Although there are some common elements in the climate movement, it must be acknowledged that young people are heterogeneous and will experience differentiated risks and impacts according to their identities and geographies. Developing a greater understanding of the diversity of European young people's experiences of

the climate crisis as well as the relationship between social identity, climate risk and participation in climate activism is therefore needed. A key concern for this book is therefore to consider how young people's environmental awareness and action has evolved across different European countries. What are the experiences, values and motivations of young people engaged in the movement? To explore this question, the Youth Knowledge Book offers perspectives from Türkiye, France and Finland. Different articles show that despite the global nature of the new climate movement, the practices are also to some extent shaped by national, regional and local realities. This does not, however, mean that they are determined by them.

The role of the youth sector in response to the climate crisis

There is certainly a strong tradition of youth sector engagement with environmental issues, from Scouting and Guiding to International Young Naturefriends and Young Friends of the Earth. However, as a new generation of young people engages in climate activism, Siurala (2022) suggests that European youth policy has tended to keep climate change "at arm's length" (p. 36). And while it is now emerging on the agenda, he notes that its adoption is "accompanied with hesitancy, ambivalence and differences of opinion" (p. 31). Research suggests that this issue is also mirrored in youth work practice. Rannala et al.'s (2024: 7) study of youth worker attitudes across four countries indicated that 71.9% of practitioners felt that issues of environmental sustainability are very important for youth work. While this appears high, it falls significantly below other key ethical considerations for youth workers, such as youth participation (94.8%) and human rights (92.8%). The authors suggest that the lower ranking of environmental sustainability:

> suggests a lag or disconnect between topical issues for young people, such as the environment, and youth workers response. This has important implications for ethical practice. If young people are concerned with issues such as the climate crisis, youth work has an ethical responsibility to accompany young people and address these. (Rannala et al. 2024: 8)

Indeed, while the youth work tradition offers tools to analyse the current condition, the global scale of climate emergency also requires a rethinking of youth work philosophy, ethics and practice. Some youth work scholars have begun to trace a "new ontology" (Bessant and Watts 2024) and an "ecocentric ethics" (Gorman et al. 2024) for youth work practice. Such approaches emphasise relationality over individuality and essentialist universalised categories like "adolescent". They further call for a centring of an ethics of care and reciprocity and changes to youth work education, such as incorporating critical place-based pedagogies into practice.

When rethinking the role of youth work in response to the climate crisis, it is perhaps helpful to point out commonalities between the climate movement and non-formal learning practices. Social movements have long been theorised as spaces of "cognitive praxis" (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) where people learn together in action. Youth work's social pedagogy basis (Corney et al. 2023) therefore shares much with the youth climate movement, given that it has long been concerned by peer relations, the participation of the young and enabling young people to live a good life. Several studies have shown that common activities provide relief from environmental anxiety,

and acting together is a way out of negative feelings, even if particular outcomes are not achieved (Kiilakoski and Piispa 2023). As Panu Pihkala states in his chapter, youth workers already have many skills that they can use to support youth with climate emotions, such as simply being there for young people, sharing time with them and listening when the young want to talk about future plans and career choices. These dialogical and relational aspects of youth work can play a vital role in accompanying youth in response to the climate crisis.

Although policy processes are engaged with by a smaller group of interested, committed and often privileged young people, youth work should maintain its universal focus: all young people have a right to participate and be heard on matters of concern to them in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. If young climate activists are indeed predominantly post-materialist young people expressing cosmopolitan values, as Henn et al. (2022) suggest, what about those who continue to struggle to meet their material needs in the face of inequality and discrimination? While Arya and Henn (2021) suggest that non-activist, engaged "standby youth" are nevertheless aware of and concerned about environmental issues, the question remains: can everyone afford to be green? As Williamson (2021: 58) points out, youth work:

> operates at personal, cultural, and structural levels. It may be both responsive and proactive on a host of issues … Climate is but one issue amongst many. And, when climate does rear its head, does climate justice come before or after wider youth work concerns with equalities and social justice?

This, for us, is a genuine question, which youth workers in different contexts need to reflect on in different parts of Europe in the times to come.

To express the point in rather general terms, this requires that youth work and the youth field consider how to combine perspectives of both social justice and ecological sustainability and build inclusive responses to the challenges of the eco-crisis. One way could be connecting the issues of youth work to wider political and ideological debates. Scholars of youth studies have begun to theorise young people's lives and experiences in the Anthropocene (Kelly et al. 2022) and to ask critical questions about the dominant paradigm of human exceptionalism which is assumed in youth work (Bessant and Watts 2024; Gorman et al. 2024; Montero 2022; Pisani 2023). Pisani (2023: 43) suggests that "acknowledging the violence some of us have wrought on this planet … invites us to ask how youth work might respond relationally, politically, and with ethical accountability?". She calls for a "new relational praxis that decentres the human, while also embracing human-non-human relationships and acknowledging our interdependence" (p. 45). Williamson (2021: 59) agrees that youth work is "not just about people, as many youth work thinkers posit".

A second solution might be asking how current youth policy mechanisms can be used to tackle the climate emergency while also reflecting critically on where these are failing to respond adequately to young people's concerns. Young people have been increasingly engaged by European institutions on the topic of the environment. For instance, the European Climate Pact has opened a formalised space for dialogue with young people, and several hundred young Climate Pact ambassadors have been nominated. Similar climate dialogue and participatory governance initiatives

have been developed at national and sub-national levels. How effective are such mechanisms in creating meaningful spaces for young people's voices to be heard and have impact? Critical perspectives within youth studies scholarship have argued that such mechanisms risk the governmentalisation of youth by policy makers (Bessant 2021). In this regard, scholarly attention has been directed for example towards the European Youth Dialogue (Banjac 2016, Pušnik 2023).

A third alternative is fostering local solutions that can support and encourage young people to experiment and debate these issues. Some of these projects might seem small. It is, therefore, good to emphasise, as Eimear Manning and Valerie Duffy say about global youth work in this volume, that this work is "a journey, and all journeys must start somewhere – but this 'somewhere' may be different for all young people, all youth workers, and all youth organisations".

What this book sets out to do

Young people's manifold democratic expression and action in response to the climate crisis raise several questions this book seeks to explore. Who are the young people participating and what democratic practices – new and old – are they engaged in? How is young people's democratic participation welcomed by the decision-making system that declares to promote youth participation? How is youth climate activism affected by the local and regional conditions in different parts of Europe? What role does youth work play in empowering young people? How should the youth sector work with the young who are not active in the movement? How can we engage positively with the full range of climate emotions? How can we make the necessary changes while at the same time ensuring social solidarity and a just transition for all young people?

While we certainly do not claim to be able to answer all the questions fully, it is important to point out that the new situation needs new solutions. New links between youth policy and environmental policy are emerging. Youth work practitioners need support to consider how to adapt youth work practice. Young people will need new skills and competences to cope with climate change. And yet, of course, there is a process of reverse socialisation where the young might actually be instructing wider society. Some of these questions have only emerged, and therefore there are no clear answers for them. However, it is important to raise these questions and begin this vital dialogue across the youth sector. If the book is successful, the readers will be better equipped to engage in the conversation as we undertake this collective praxis journey.

Chapters of the book

The book is divided into two sections. The first examines how young people are engaging in environmental politics and analyses different ways they have or have not taken part in environmental debates. The second section considers how the youth sector could respond to the eco-crisis and young people's democratic practices. Although the environmental crisis is global, and adapting to climate change needs global solutions, there are local and national differences in how young people take part in politics. The first section of the book examines this with perspectives from Türkiye, Finland and France.

Section 1: Young people's climate activism

The first chapter by Carlos Ortega Sánchez, Burcu Dolanbay, and Anna Montraveta Ru examines grass-roots climate activism in Türkiye. The authors analyse the motivations of young climate activists and describe different obstacles they are facing. They highlight the importance of the Gezi protests, where residents took a stand against a construction project in the Taxim region in Istanbul. The article shows that although different youth movements are global, national settings frame how youth activism may take place. It also offers perspectives on the shrinking civil space in Türkiye, offering both languages of criticism and hope, showing the promise of youth activism but also highlighting the obstacles to youth participation.

The second chapter presents the perspectives of youth in rural France. The author of the article, Théodore Tallent, looks at the specific role of young people in rural areas in the green transformation and adapting to climate change. The author analyses the tensions experienced by young people in rural France between youthful (environmental) awareness and rural scepticism (towards the green transition). The article offers important insights by pointing out that young people have a wide variety of opinions and their attitudes to environmental issues are shaped by social and cultural background factors such as whether they live in urban or rural areas. It suggests that whatever the measures and policy initiatives created, different perspectives must be balanced. Understanding the views of young people living in rural areas needs to be listened to in contemporary Europe. As Tallent notes, "The transition we need must take everybody on board".

Next we travel to the very north: Finnish Lapland. Our third chapter includes the perspectives of the Sami people, the only Indigenous people in Europe. Analysing art-based research done with the Barents Regional Youth Council, Jarmo Rinne, Timo Jokela, Mirja Hiltunen, Korinna Korsstrom-Magga and Aki Lintumäki describe how art-based methodologies can be used to express both political messages and emotional grievances young people have on the current ecological situation. The uniqueness of the northern condition is highlighted in the snow sculptures of the participants. The article offers messages to those interested in how young people are engaged in politics and also on how researchers can co-create environmental projects with young participants. The article is an example of participatory research, or to put this in other words, citizen science. The authors highlight that the use of art offers a concrete way of expressing environmental emotions and leads participants towards new perspectives. The article shows that environmental activism is not only about words, written statements or traditional political measures; it can also be about artistic and bodily experiences.

The fourth chapter moves from the national level to transnational negotiations. Yi hyun Kang, Riham Helmy and Amandine Orsini analyse who participates in international climate conferences where formal negotiations are being held, what their motivations are for attending the conferences and what their impact is on the negotiations. The article is informed by criticisms that environmental activism could be more inclusive. Based on their data, the authors conclude that youth participants in the international climate meetings are more diverse than perhaps sometimes recognised. Critically, the article states that although youth from the Global South

have a strong will to speak up at international conferences, their participation receives relatively little attention in the decision-making process, as well as in the media, compared to climate projects of the Global North. The key message of the article, then, is that if the goal of the just green transformation is to combine the perspectives of both ecological and social sustainability, the questions about global youth cannot be avoided. The authors call for more support for meaningful youth participation of the young people from the Global South.

Section 2: The role of the youth sector in the response to the climate crisis

The second section of the book analyses the role of the youth sector in response to the climate crisis. Although questions about "sustainable youth work" or "green youth work" may be a work in progress (Offenburg Talks 2021), there are already some standpoints youth work or the youth sector can benefit from. The articles in this section highlight that different youth work methodologies, such as being dialogical, supporting youth-led initiatives, concentrating on doing something good together or learning critical perspectives, can be powerful tools in supporting young people to deal with the current state of the climate emergency. The chapters show the need to critically examine current practices and also to examine how one may face the current situation emotionally, ethically and sustainably. As the authors suggest, youth work is about personal and social learning and therefore has an important role in supporting and accompanying young people in responding to the climate crisis.

The fifth chapter analyses the depth of climate emotions. Panu Pihkala states that people working with youth have unique opportunities to help them in encountering climate emotions constructively. Although public debate may have centred on environmental anxiety, the scope of climate emotions is wide. Climate emotions are relevant for pro-environmental behaviour. Youth workers are likely to meet different climate emotions, such as indignation, moral outrage, anger, guilt or hope. According to Pihkala, it is vital to train youth workers so that they have the skills to engage with climate emotions, both proactively and reactively. Describing two projects, Pihkala shows that youth workers can help young people name emotions, learn to understand them better and respond collectively to them. Pihkala shows that youth workers already possess lots of skills that can be used to work with and through climate emotions. At the same time, he shows how useful added information can be and he offers questions for reflection to those who work with youth.

The sixth chapter by Neringa Tumėnaitė, Isabelle Eberz, Richard Francis Apeh, Manal Benani, Amrita DasGupta and Nilendra Nair explores the role of the youth sector in empowering young people to advance just climate action. The article analyses the obstacles young people are facing, such as a lack of funding, intergenerational conflict, adultism and a shrinking civic space. The second part of the article analyses the impact of youth work. Based on a survey, they conclude that youth work has had an impact in helping young people to learn different competences and focus on human rights education. The authors call for a holistic approach, with which the youth sector would be sufficiently empowered to significantly contribute to advancing just climate action.

The seventh chapter of the book, by Eimear Manning and Valerie Duffy, suggests that facing the climate crisis requires global youth work. Based on the work done in Ireland, especially within the National Youth Council of Ireland, they analyse the key principles of global youth work and offer concrete examples of how these principles can be developed and adopted. They present 10 principles of global youth work that can be used to help in promoting the active participation of the young people in society. They offer four examples, each presenting a unique perspective on the topic, including a youth-led approach, a whole-organisation approach, a whole sectoral approach and youth worker support. According to the article, global youth work is needed because it underpins all the values of youth work.

The book concludes with an insightful reflection written by Lana Pasic and Esther Vallado. They analyse the key messages of the book, describe what is already being done in European youth and environmental policy and also show the possible ways forward. Although we are facing a crisis, we can find a way forward to a more sustainable and just society. In this process, both respecting the role of the youth sector and acknowledging the vital role of cross-sectoral and transnational co-operation are needed.

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Section I

Young people's climate activism

Chapter 1

From Gezi to the climate emergency: exploring Turkish grass-roots youth climate activism

Carlos Ortega Sánchez, Burcu Dolanbay and Anna Montraveta Riu

Introduction

Although Türkiye's economic growth has been relatively decoupled from air emissions, energy use, waste generation and water consumption in recent years (OECD 2019), its fast-growing energy demand continues to depend heavily on fossil fuels, thereby posing environmental risks. Türkiye has the second highest exposure to air pollution among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states (OECD Data n.d.). Water pollution, particularly nitrogen contamination in 20% to 50% of surface water, compounds these concerns (Gruère et al. 2020). Projected climate change impacts, including more frequent droughts and intensifying floods, further exacerbate risks (ibid.). In response, Türkiye ratified the Paris Climate Agreement in 2021, committing to achieve net-zero emissions by 2053 and formulating a comprehensive climate change strategy.

These pollution challenges extend beyond Türkiye's borders, with estimates showing 23 966 tonnes of plastic waste entering the Mediterranean Sea daily from the Turkish coast (Kenarli 2024). Swift implementation of effective governance strategies is crucial not only for safeguarding Turkish citizens but also for the broader region. It is imperative to recognise that addressing these environmental challenges is not only about present-day mitigation but also about securing the future for generations to come. Intergenerational equity, a principle that demands the fair treatment of all generations regarding environmental resources and impacts, underscores the importance of sustainable practices and policies. As such, the significance of addressing environmental issues in Türkiye goes beyond immediate concerns, resonating deeply with the well-being and rights of youth and future generations.

This chapter explores the response of Turkish youth climate activist organisations to the climate and biodiversity crises and examines how sociopolitical factors shape their efforts. To investigate this topic, the study scrutinises the perspectives of young climate activists in Türkiye regarding the current sociopolitical and economic conditions that influence their activism. Over the past few decades, Turkish civil society groups, including youth engaged in environmental and climate activism, have been advocating government action on environmental challenges through

non-conventional political participation. Non-conventional activism encompasses a range of tactics such as informal education, countering disinformation, organising lawsuits and staging street protests. For instance, activists may leverage social media campaigns to raise awareness or partake in direct actions such as occupying spaces to highlight environmental issues. However, amid the backdrop of heightened government control (Deželan and Yurttagüler 2020) and economic deterioration, youth activism encounters daily hurdles in effectively addressing these issues.

The chapter begins with a presentation of the study's methodological framework, followed by contextualising the Gezi protests within youth civil society's broader resistance to the environmental crisis. The subsequent section discusses ecological movements led by young people, highlighting motivating factors and obstacles within the sociopolitical and economic climate. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the lessons learned.

Methodology

In accordance with Creswell's (2013) framework, our study employs a narrative study method to investigate the research question. In particular, we draw on the personal experiences of Turkish youth activists to explore their motivations for pursuing environmental and climate activism, as well as the obstacles they face in their daily lives due to various circumstances. Our study further adopts social constructivism as an interpretative framework in order to analyse the responses of our interviewees and answer the research question. Our interpretative framework primarily examines the sociopolitical factors influencing their efforts, which are shaped by social interactions. The primary data source for this study is a series of interviews for which a purposeful sampling was used in order to select the interviewees. Twenty-four organisations operating at the intersection of climate and environmental movements were identified as particularly influential in Türkiye's public sphere. Fifteen youth activists, aged 18 to 30, involved in these civil society groups were approached for interviews. A semi-structured interview format was designed. The names of all interviewees, and in some cases their age, were changed and anonymised, in order to protect their identity. The research question guiding the interviews was: "How do Turkish youth climate activist organisations respond to the climate and biodiversity crises, and how do sociopolitical factors and challenges influence their efforts?".

Five specific questions were developed to explore this inquiry. The first question focused on the activists' member organisation's goals and purposes. The second question addressed the interviewees' roles as climate activists and how they advocate their demands. The third question examined challenges to youth climate activism posed by sociopolitical circumstances. The fourth question aimed to identify potential ways to enhance conditions for climate activists in Türkiye. The final question delved into the role of youth within these organisations, including their numbers, issues related to youth participation and potential improvements.

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved classifying the qualitative data obtained through the interviews into different topics and searching for defining patterns according to the research aims. The study examines the perspective of Turkish youth climate activists on the current state of climate

activism in the country, with a focus on evidence-based interpretation. The Gezi protests were mentioned in all interviews in our sample group, and their impact on young Turkish environmental activists was observed. Consequently, a section on the youth activists' perceptions and the legacy of Gezi in today's movements was included in our research.

Gezi protests and their legacy

Although environmental activism in Türkiye has managed to attract a significant number of people from a wide range of backgrounds, there is very little documented evidence of young people becoming involved in environmental activism until the Gezi protests. In fact, young people that grew up after the military coup of 1980 have been alienated from the political scene, which has manifested itself in low rates of participation in youth activism (Demir 2012, Lüküslü 2009, cited in Koç and Aksu 2015). The Gezi protests were therefore important in terms of the uniquely widespread youth support, praise and celebration. The Gezi protests were consequently significant in challenging traditional beliefs about the passive role of young people in the political sphere (Bee and Chrona 2017).

The movement commenced when urban residents took a stand against a construction project in Istanbul's Gezi Park. Situated in the historically and culturally significant Taksim district, Gezi Park represents one of the few remaining public green spaces in this densely urbanised area. The Gezi Park protests began as a local endeavour to halt the construction of a shopping mall within the park and eventually evolved into a broader movement as other neighbourhoods in Istanbul joined the cause, leaving a profound impact on the country for an extended period. Specifically, the protesters directed their discontent towards the neoliberal urban development strategy of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP), which heavily prioritises large-scale projects like bridges, new highways, tunnels and shopping complexes. Starting out as environmental advocacy, the Gezi protests swiftly garnered support from diverse segments of society.

The role of young people in the Gezi protests was manifold – youth participation through both street protests and social media platforms proved to be a crucial factor at the start and throughout the development of the protests (Cansun 2014). According to research, the average age of the participants in the Gezi Park protests was 28 (Konda 2014), which shows the strong youth presence. The digital participation of young people in the Gezi protests through social media was also notable. According to figures, between 2013 and 2022, the two largest age groups using the internet in Türkiye were 16 to 24 year olds and 25 to 34 year olds, with the 16 to 24 age group being particularly large. In particular, Twitter (currently X) was central to youth participation activism during the Gezi protests, as young protesters mainly used this platform as a tool to spread information and form collective opinions about the protests and the government's response to them.

The young people involved in the protesting came from a wide range of backgrounds. Most of the protesters in the park were college and high school graduates (Farro and Demirhisar 2014). Although the young left-wing and secular demonstrators attracted attention with their presence at the protests, a group of young Muslims

("the anti-capitalist Muslims") were also present, representing non-secular groups among the youth (Koç and Aksu 2015: 295). Moreover, groups of young people from poorer urban areas had a strong presence in the Gezi protests due to their dissatisfaction with losing their original neighbourhoods to urban gentrification (Vatikiotis and Yörük 2016). Besides, the government's noticeable control over the mass media was seen as another reason for the youth to take part in the protests, apart from their environmental concerns (ibid.).

Beyond its immediate goals, the Gezi protests catalysed substantial achievements for the ecological movement. First, they thwarted the government's plans to construct a shopping mall in Gezi Park. Second, the movement marked a seminal moment in popularising and mobilising environmental activism in Türkiye. Third, Gezi's resistance to state intervention was a departure from the usual political passivity. It created a shared memory for future generations of climate and environmental activists and served as a unifying force for collective political engagement in the following years.

Gezi's legacy has become an important symbol of resistance for contemporary youth activism in Türkiye. Thus, it can be argued that Gezi's heritage highlights the intergenerational solidarity among youth activists in recent decades, as many environmental and climate-focused civil society organisations were formed during and after the Gezi process, with a direct link to the Gezi Park protests. These groups include Northern Forests Defence, the Centre for Spatial Justice, Children of Nature, Ekoharita or Polen, among others.

Some of these groups, such as Northern Forests Defence, were founded during the Gezi protests in 2013 as an intergenerational organisation. As the Gezi protests were an inspiration for the formation of the group, they continue to fight against large-scale projects in the Marmara region. In particular, they are campaigning against the implementation of projects such as a third bridge, a new airport or the North Marmara Highway. Their tactics include information campaigns through social media and local or street protests. They file lawsuits and organise workshops and seminars. Other organisations created in the aftermath of Gezi, such as the Centre for Spatial Justice were created with the aim of raising awareness of ecological issues such as the rising pollution of rivers and to work for fairer, ecological and democratic cities and rural spaces.

Other groups, such as Children of Nature, were formed after the Gezi protests. Children of Nature is a student-based organisation that creates vegan clubs in universities and organises workshops and seminars to spread its activist agenda in the community, with the aim of raising awareness of ecological causes and veganism. Similar to Children of Nature, Ekoharita is another organisation that was founded during the post-Gezi process in 2015, and is dedicated to informing communities about ecological issues and best practices to address them. To this end, they publish books on ecologism, combat disinformation and create videos, tools and guides through their intergenerational team.

In the last few years, the focus of environmental and climate activism in Türkiye has been on the local resistance movements, such as Akbelen and Dikmece protests. Although evidence indicates (Evrensel 2023) that young people participated in these resistance movements, it seems that their involvement is limited compared to older

generations. In the following section, we will look at this assumption in more detail and assess the overall situation of youth environmental and climate activists in Türkiye. By analysing the narratives of young environmental and climate change activists, we will explore the main motivation as well as the barriers to youth activism in Türkiye. The main aim of our research is to provide a broad picture of the circumstances of youth environmental and climate activism in Türkiye.

Exploring Turkish grass-roots youth climate activism

Nostalgia and resistance: the impact of Gezi in today's youth ecologist movements

A decade after the Gezi events, the resistance at Taksim park has evolved into an emblematic representation of collective democratic opposition against Türkiye's AKP government's rule and the neoliberal system (Farro and Demirhisar 2014). The distinctive feature of being a collective, horizontal and leaderless experience had a democratising impact on the participants.

As mentioned above, in the wake of the Gezi protests, a plethora of initiatives surfaced to confront large-scale constructions and urban over-expansion. In one interview, Barış (29), who works in an organisation dedicated to climate justice, elucidated: "our organisation was created in 2016 as a result of the institutionalisation of Gezi's protests and the collective experience lived there". Gezi has remained in the memory of those who participated as well as those who were too young to join but witnessed the events through traditional and social media. Above all, the Gezi experience embodied a collective defence of the natural environment. Consequently, a decade later, older interviewees consider that "Gezi was a life-changing event" (Mehmet, 26), in which many of today's activists participated and became aware, and that it "provided the expertise for other resistance movements today such as Akbelen". More importantly, young people acknowledge the decisive impact of Gezi: "everything is related to Gezi, it is part of our lives" (Cem, 28).

In addition to the associations created in the aftermath of Gezi, like the Defence of the Northern Forests, other organisations were ideologically reoriented towards Gezi's values. In this respect, Gezi was the first protest that, while being environmentalist, involved the intersection of feminist, pro-LGBTI rights or anti-assimilation politics of minorities. This is visible in resistance movements such as Dikmece, but also observable in the values of most of the ecologist organisations.

In the case of organisations such as the Association for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Kaz Mountains or the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), a great deal of expertise was developed through the organisation of buses to attend the Istanbul protests or the use of social media – the Gezi experience served as a foundation on which to build and develop new movements, giving continuity to the values of the protests and using the experience gained in the face of new challenges.

A widespread sense of nostalgia for Gezi is evident among the interviewees, even among those younger individuals who did not personally experience the protests.

Our research suggests that the Gezi protests marked a shift in the perception of environmental activism capabilities among the Turkish population, especially the youth. It served as a pivotal moment in understanding today's environmental movements and the role of young activists. All interviewees acknowledge its significance, as many of the current climate activism organisations trace their origins back to Gezi. Fourteen out of the 15 interviewees expressed strong emotional ties to the protests, emphasising that Gezi remains a highly influential reference point and a source of inspiration for their current activism.

For the younger generation, the Gezi movement serves as an ideological beacon. Canan (24), who was only 12 years old when it happened and followed the protests on TV, remembers how shocked she was by the death of Ali Ismail Korkmaz. When she was a university student, she decided to become an environmental rights activist. Similarly, Ali (23), sees Gezi as the moment when Türkiye's "ecological blindness" came to an end and says "it was a breaking point, where efforts were made collectively that influenced today's struggles".

Therefore, the common thread that runs through all the interviews is the longing for the Gezi spirit and the need to continue the struggle, despite the current political climate in Türkiye. For instance, Cem stated that "it is a memory, but the memory is getting weaker because of the government's pressure. NGOs are getting weaker everyday". Similarly, the resistance movement in Dikmece has seen its land and livelihood expropriated for housing developments, Esra (27) states that "the collective struggle lived in Gezi is present in Antakya".

Transformations in Turkish environmental activism: local empowerment, innovative strategies and legal challenges

In Türkiye, local movements tend to alert environmental organisations at the national level. As explained by interviewees from Defence of the Northern Forests, Children of Nature and the İkizköy Environment Committee, an alliance is forged between activists, mostly young people from the cities, and locals, usually elderly or retired people. This alliance gives the local movement the capacity to project itself on a national scale. Orhan (23), a young activist from Istanbul who has participated in protests all around the country, highlights the role of the locals in starting the protests and keeping them alive: "if the villagers in Akbelen had not struggled, no one would have been able to do so. If the people living in the north of Istanbul had not fought for the northern forests, no one would have been able to do so". He described how, when activists arrive in the area, they are able to co-operate with local governments to implement activities such as seminars to raise awareness. Also, they easily collaborate with locals on the organisation of protests and on matters of logistics. Thus, Turkish environmental struggles are characterised by local activism that helps to increase wider engagement. Although Türkiye is home to established international associations and organisations, such as Greenpeace and 350.org, the interviews have shown that grass-roots resistance movements are the driving force behind triggering a nationwide activist response, as shown in the cases of Akbelen and Dikmece.

However, in spite of the high relevance of local activism, there is a growing tendency for young activists to leave the on-site protests and diversify their approaches,

looking for new perspectives that do not lead to confrontation with authorities. As a result of the mounting government pressure on street activism and lack of resources, activists have developed new strategies, seeking innovative means to convey their demands to the public without confrontations with state security forces. In this active quest for fresh perspectives to raise awareness while engaging young individuals in the climate struggle, innovative trends have emerged. Thus, climate activism in Türkiye today is not confined solely to street demonstrations; it extends to the organisation of workshops, seminars, conferences and even environmental festivals. Furthermore, an extensive network is dedicated to knowledge dissemination aimed at enhancing ecological awareness, combating misinformation and countering climate change denialism. In this context, some of these organisations have adeptly channelled the deficiency in street-level presence towards raising awareness through social volunteering projects. Barış (29) notes that through his organisation's initiative to cultivate volunteers for climate justice, young people can actively engage in a struggle without the perceived risk associated with a physical street presence. Simultaneously, they can witness the tangible impact of their efforts at the local level.

Alongside this trend of varying the approaches to activism, organisations are concurrently pursuing legal avenues to complement their street-level advocacy and social media efforts. Although not a common issue, two of the interviewed organisations reported successful legal outcomes. For example, Ali's (23) organisation managed to halt the construction of a harbour in a protected cove in the Aegean Sea, thanks to the discovery of underwater archaeological ruins. Meanwhile, Serkan's (35) organisation states that they have not lost any of their legal cases: they issued 30 lawsuits against mining companies, winning 17 cases, while 13 remain in progress.

Nevertheless, the overall legal landscape remains disheartening for legal activists; proceedings are protracted and cumbersome, frequently requiring experienced personnel and substantial financial resources to endure prolonged periods. This poses a considerable impediment for young people wishing to participate in this arena. Leyla (23) underscores the exorbitant costs associated with legal processes, including elevated court fees and expert consultancy expenses, rendering it practically unattainable for youth environmental associations to initiate lawsuits.

Obstacles to Turkish youth engagement in environmentalist movements

In the pursuit of understanding the obstacles that hinder Turkish youth engagement in environmentalist movements, a multitude of complex factors converge to create significant challenges. These hurdles include spatial barriers, a lack of economic resources and the fear of criminalisation by the media and the authorities.

Spatial barriers and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The spark that ignites Turkish activist movements is closely tied to specific local issues. When these issues are situated in sparsely populated rural areas, the primary

challenge that arises is spatial barriers. All the interviewees pointed out the lack of youth participation in climate protests. Orhan (23) asserts that: "Protests are carried out by locals, especially in small villages like Akbelen", emphasising that "there is a disconnect between young people in urban and rural areas". Using Akbelen as an example, interviewees who mentioned this resistance movement, 10 out of 15, acknowledge that support on social media has been massive, and they have received hundreds of supportive messages.

However, on a local level, spatial barriers in Türkiye emerge as significant obstacles to the activation of ecological movements, especially for young individuals studying or working in urban centres. Nine out of 15 interviewees directly mentioned the challenges they face with transport, highlighting the pivotal role of local projects in catalysing larger movements, particularly in the cases of Akbelen and Dikmece. Thus, the presence of young people in protests to prevent construction, deforestation, etc. is significantly diminished. In this regard, Canan (24), Esra (27) and Cem (26) agree that there has been a growing distancing from the streets and organisations since the Gezi protests, the Ankara bombings of 2015 and the 2016 attempted coup d'etat. All concur that this distancing increased especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Esra explains: "Until the pandemic, we were on the streets to join protests or events, but after 2019, most of the events became digital, so people forgot about street activism". She concludes: "People just separated from each other". Damla (25) adds that "with the pandemics and then the 6 February 2023 earthquake, young people have not been able to even socialise, as most of the education has been [at a] distance".

Government's disempowering discourse

Developmentalism and megaprojects

In Türkiye, there is a clear association between the country's economic progress and megaprojects, which are seen as symbols of modernity. These projects include bridges such as the third Bosphorus Bridge or the recently inaugurated bridge of Çanakkale, highways like the Northern Marmara Highway, large thermal power plants like the one being built in Akbelen, nuclear facilities like the Akkuyu power plant and enormous projects like Canal Istanbul.

Consequently, environmental protection struggles are viewed by a significant portion of the Turkish population as obstacles to the nation's progress. This has led to a polarisation between the government's discourse advocating infrastructure development at any cost and environmental groups accusing it of privatisation and destruction of natural heritage. As a result, the relationship between the government and environmental organisations is far from harmonious and civil society organisations prefer to communicate with local authorities to address their demands and projects. A member of one of the most prominent environmental organisations, TEMA, dedicated to the struggle against megaprojects, states that for holding seminars and carrying out environmental awareness programmes and other larger projects, they prefer to approach municipalities because they feel that the local authority is more responsive to their demands than the national level.

Youth activists as "marginals" and "foreign powers"

The government's discourse has also contributed to the isolation of young environmental activists. Out of the 15 interviewees, five identified themselves as "marginal" and "vandals", referencing President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks about Akbelen activists. During the interviews, there were also mentions of the president's speeches during the Gezi protests when protesters were called "çapulcu" (vandals) and "sürtük" (promiscuous). Consequently, most interviewees agree that, since the majority of the media outlets represent the government's perspective, the media portrays young activists as marginal and vandalistic.

Simultaneously, activists struggle to convey their demands to mainstream media channels. Ayşenur (34), for instance, explains: "The local media are reluctant to report our activities because they receive money from the mining corporations". This limits activists' engagement on social media platforms, especially Instagram and Twitter/X. This fact demonstrates that the marginalisation of environmental activists in Türkiye is exacerbated by both the government's polarising discourse and the lack of media presence for civil society groups. Individuals like Ali (23) emphasise the need for greater visibility to normalise their actions, particularly through support on social media from public figures such as actors or musicians who share the ideas of these organisations, in order to counter their lack of visibility in the media.

In addition, the government's discourse regarding young activists not only marginalises youth activism but also associates it with being directed by "foreign powers". This identification implies that environmental activists are collaborating with foreign entities seeking to divide the nation. This aligns with the government's rhetoric that labels activists as enemies of national development and as enemies of the nation itself. For example, Tulay (25) states that "There is also local news about us in the press: we are labelled as foreign agents". She goes on to explain that "Various inspectors are then sent to our association by the district governorships to which we are affiliated, and fines can be imposed afterwards; they try to deter us". Mehmet (26) echoes Tulay's sentiments and accuses certain parliamentary parties of denying global warming and labelling activists as "foreign powers that want to destroy Türkiye". In a more severe case, Canan (24) asserts that the government's rhetoric contributes to the public's criminalisation of environmentalists, creating rifts not only between young activists and society but also within young activists' own families.

Fear of criminalisation and lack of trust in democratic institutions

The young activists interviewed for this study reported that the fear of criminalisation and marginalisation by political authorities has had a profound negative impact on environmental organisations in Türkiye and especially on youth engagement. In addition to the already mentioned tight government control over the media, all interviewees have decried the absence of democratic structures. In particular, activists face significant pressure, reporting instances of coercion, intimidation and physical violence on a regular basis. For instance, Ali (23) expressed distrust of state institutions highlighting the inability of the judiciary to make impartial judgments. Furthermore, Tulay, aged 25, highlights the challenges their group encounters, noting

that governmental involvement often poses significant obstacles to their work. They describe instances where they face difficulties in disseminating press statements and organising events, particularly festivals, which have consistently been denied permission over many years. Tulay also mentions the perceived surveillance and scrutiny of their activities by law enforcement, attributing much of this to a prevailing sense of fear among young activists, particularly in light of recent investigations and detentions related to press statements.

Similarly, Leyla, aged 23, echoes Tulay's observations regarding the government's recurrent prohibition of festivals aimed at fostering solidarity networks. Leyla emphasises the broader issue of censorship and the shrinking of public space, citing arbitrary inspections as examples of government actions. She underscores the impact on freedom of expression, noting how even legally organised protests are frequently denied permission by administrative authorities under the guise of safety concerns. Leyla also elaborates on the various challenges they face, including detentions and legal proceedings, all of which serve to hinder their activism.

All 15 interviewees reported government pressure to halt their demands, translating into the criminalisation of peaceful protests and increasing legal scrutiny. Eight interviewees explicitly referenced a lack of freedom, with five reporting detention, confiscation of materials, arbitrary inspections of their premises or legal proceedings related to their climate activist activism.

Lack of economic resources

The most significant obstacle preventing young people participating is the lack of resources. Since 2018, Türkiye has been facing a severe financial and economic crisis. This crisis has had a detrimental impact on youth participation as the increasing precarity leads them to perceive the climate crisis as a secondary issue. According to Barış (29), "The precariousness is one of the biggest issues. Youth cannot meet their financial needs, so they cannot engage in climate activism: climate activism becomes something 'trivial'". Ali (23) concurs with Barış: "Youth cannot join [ecologist] groups because they do not have the means to even attend the protests or go wherever they want. When people are struggling for survival, it is 'unrealistic' to ask them to join ecologist movements". When Ali speaks of himself, he expresses serious difficulties in maintaining his activism: "On one hand, I am working, and on the other hand, I am travelling from one resistance to another, constantly incurring debts and loans".

In this regard, all the interviewees have expressed grave concerns about the economic situation of Turkish youth. Also, they face the problem of a lack of university housing, an exponential rise in rental prices and an increase in unemployment. Leyla (23) points out: "There is pressure from all sides, but especially economic pressure. For instance, students cannot afford to rent a home or even find a place to stay, making it very challenging for them to join ecologist movements". She continues: "material conditions really do not allow this: there is both political oppression and economic injustice". In the case of activists, several of them encounter serious difficulties when it comes to paying fines or hiring lawyers under the growing political pressure put on them.

Discussion

The research findings, described in the preceding section, show that in Türkiye local activism serves as the catalyst for national engagement. As Knudsen (2015: 18) puts it: "Most of the protests discussed here were initiated by rural or small-town inhabitants who more often than not tried to mobilise 'above politics'. Yet, protest has often been most effective when national and more 'urban' NGOs or movements were involved". These observations align with the theories put forth by Özler and Obach (2018), asserting that local campaigns forge unconventional alliances among locals and activists, circumvent ideological disparities between ecologist organisations and prioritise the direct mitigation of threats (such as halting construction or forest logging).

Similarly, while Özler and Obach (2019: 777) argue that "these local struggles are rarely successful", our research has revealed instances of notable success, indicating that some of these movements often achieved their broader aims. In this regard, Knudsen's (2015, 307, as cited in Orrnert 2020: 13) observation that "many hydropower projects have been cancelled or postponed after courts ruled against contractors" seems to accurately depict the realities outlined in the interviews.

Knudsen (2015) argues that there are difficulties in translating a local "apolitical" movement and implementing it on the national agenda through politicised groups, despite protests typically starting locally and translating to the national level. Although the local plays a significant role in Turkish environmental activism, there is a scarcity of studies on this aspect. Neas et al. (2022: 8) emphasise that the literature places a strong emphasis on mass mobilisations like Fridays for Future, but there is an evident lack of studies analysing local or specific movements.

The lack of economic resources presents a second obstacle to youth participation in environmental movements. According to the interviews conducted, activists expressed serious concern about coping with rising inflation. Prendergast et al. (2021) conducted an international study on activism in various cities worldwide and concluded that there is no direct relationship between economic security or insecurity and participation. Moreover, they argue that precarity can be an activating factor for protest, as young people may feel "deprived of a decent future" or "betrayed by their governments" (2021: 100). However, the interviews carried out for the present research revealed that many respondents are struggling with economic pressures as they struggle to finance their basic needs. They feel burdened by debts in a country that is immersed in an economic crisis, and many express not being able to afford to participate in environmentalist movements, especially if they happen in rural areas, because of the costs of transport, accommodation or even the materials required for the protest, such as paper or paint. This aligns with the findings of Orman and Demiral, stating that the youth in Türkiye "cannot afford their textbooks, have big worries for the future and are unable to realise their capacities fully in the face of coercive isolation" (2023: 1 349). For this reason, in Türkiye, many young people do not consider joining the environmental movement. Young activists are contemplating leaving it, or in both cases, they are seeking new perspectives such as online participation. In this regard, the conclusions of Julia Weiss's study in southern European countries align with those in Türkiye, as she states that "online

participation is perceived as less costly and therefore more easily accessible even during times of crisis, which is when Pacheco and Plutzer (2008) expect decreasing levels of participation" (2020: 7).

However, the greatest obstacle to youth participation has proven to be the growing authoritarianism, isolation of activists, their criminalisation and marginalisation. A highly relevant study on the isolation of young activists is Yabanci's (2021: 494) work on government organisations in Türkiye and the progressive marginalisation of non-affiliated youth. Government-funded youth organisations have displaced critical youth unable to compete with "resourceful government-oriented youth organisations", organisations representing the government's Islamic and nationalist morality against those perceived as a threat to the nation and state. Yabanci's ideas are crucial to understanding the widespread sense of marginalisation felt by young activists.

Similarly, according to the interviewees, the official government narratives criminalise environmental activism, which is in line with Kurtiç's (2022) findings that President Erdoğan's public statements attack the legitimacy of grass-roots movements and criminalise them, claiming that he is the "sole and best environmentalist". Kurtiç argues that this is an attempt to assert control over the rhetoric of greening and redirect the environmental agenda for the government's own ends. Moreover, our research once again confirms Knudsen's theory (2015, cited in Orrnert 2020) that the global nature of young climate activists' struggle leads to accusations of being agents working for foreign governments.

Through the isolation and criminalisation of young climate activists, pressure on them has been legitimised. Thus, the complaints about the lack of freedoms from the interviewees are visible in the securitisation of protests, surveillance or blocking the protests for the safety of the demonstrators. In this regard, Bowman's study portrays this trend as global: "the climate strikes take place in a global context in which legislative frameworks regarding the right to democratic expression are increasingly authoritarian". The author adds: "worldwide, the typical responses of the state to direct action for environmental causes have been surveillance programmes, criminalisation of protesters and heavy-handed policing, including the militarization of protest policing" (2020: 11).

Turkish youth have responded to these obstacles by diversifying their activism strategies. Activist campaigns have gradually shifted towards social media platforms like Twitter (now X), which has had a decisive role in the protests of the last decade (Vatikiotis and Yörük 2016). According to the study by Wielk and Standlee (2021: 34), this approach helps protect the activists' identities while disseminating information and engaging in multiple political movements and narratives simultaneously, building new connections. Based on interviews conducted in Türkiye, these impediments have been exacerbated since the Covid-19 pandemic and the growing insecurity due to fears of terrorist attacks and the 2016 attempted coup d'etat. Turkish activists argue that these factors, coupled with the aforementioned obstacles, have led to a progressive abandonment of the streets for online platforms. Although the use of platforms like Twitter began in Gezi as a means of communication, networking, giving voice to protests and demands and calling for action (Doğu et al. 2022), it

now appears to have lost its ability to transmit to physical space. In the light of these developments one can argue that activism has retreated to online spaces and its organisational and call-to-action character has been lost.

However, the findings suggest a trend towards diversification of activism strategies to overcome the mentioned obstacles. This has been defined by many scholars as "do-it-ourselves" activism. Pickard (2019: 5, in Neas et al. 2022) defines it as "acting politically without relying on traditional collective structures, such as political parties and trade unions to inform, organise, and mobilise in a top-down way". Thus, multiple strategies have emerged from grass-roots groups, ranging from specialisation and activism to new educational approaches. In this regard, the main finding of this study lies in the ability of grass-roots movements to detach themselves from centralised movements and establish networks with local groups and governments to build joint awareness and protest strategies.

Conclusion

The research addressed the response of Turkish youth climate activist organisations to climate and biodiversity crises amid current sociopolitical challenges. It aimed to uncover the diverse landscape of grass-roots youth climate activism in Türkiye, influenced by the participatory and leaderless nature of the Gezi protests a decade ago. Despite progress, Turkish youth face numerous obstacles, including spatial barriers exacerbated by the pandemic, government developmental discourse, fear of criminalisation, economic instability, burnout, university apoliticism and disinformation. Interviews highlighted the need for democratic structures, increased civil society involvement and international support for sustaining youth environmental activism. Challenges such as spatial disparities and government opposition hinder full engagement, necessitating strategies to bridge gaps and alleviate economic constraints.

Given the crucial role of the European Union (EU) in supporting youth participation and engagement, through the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, and the priority given to the subject of sustainability, this study recommends that European institutions should continue providing their support for young people in Türkiye, through initiatives such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

However, there is a need for greater awareness and promotion of mobility programmes to prevent isolation among Turkish activists and foster collaboration across borders. Despite the enduring legacy of the Gezi protests, the study underscores the complex interplay of historical, local and political factors shaping contemporary youth climate activism in Türkiye and the need to promote effective and sustainable youth-led environmental initiatives.

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Chapter 2

The challenges of the green transition for youth in rural France: addressing discontent, building a just transition

Théodore Tallent

Introduction

During an official visit to New Delhi (India) in April 2022, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen underscored the pivotal role of young people as advocates for climate action (Anima et al. 2022). These words, coming from a leading politician in Europe, are part of a more general discourse. They reveal a consensus around what is called the Climate Generation, a generation of young citizens who display more pro-environmental attitudes and have a growing awareness of the consequences of climate change. Academic research has explored and confirmed the role of age in shaping environmental attitudes, including support for environmental policies (Douenne and Fabre 2020). However, such research often overlooks the diversity within this demographic, particularly in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, gender, experiences, aspirations and, notably, place of residence (Wyn and White 1997). This chapter investigates the presumed homogeneity in youth environmental attitudes, focusing on the underexplored aspect of rural versus urban residency.

After the Yellow Vests (*Gilets jaunes*) movement in 2018-2019 and recent protests by farmers in Europe, there is an expectation that those in rural areas might display more negative attitudes towards the green transition. As underlined by previous research, there is a general belief that, when it comes to the green transition, urban dwellers are more willing to act than rural dwellers (Guilluy 2018; Joly and Auffret 2022), a rural "green discontent" confirmed by recent surveys (Arndt et al. 2022). This view is seen as the logical consequence of the material impacts of the transition in these territories, where low-carbon policies often lead to higher costs (Lamb et al. 2020; Vona 2021). However, discontent about the transition in rural areas, although real, is sometimes seen as negatively correlated with age (being seen as more common among older ruralites). The generational question is indeed usually cited by public figures to underline the higher environmental concern of young citizens over older people (Ballew et al. 2019). What about the

intersection between place and age? Despite recent work on this relationship outside the climate sphere (for example Adolfsson and Coe 2022), there has indeed been very little attention given to understanding the specific position of young people in rural areas when it comes to the green transition and the challenges it creates – a group that is usually under-represented in climate youth movements (Prendergast et al. 2021).

Taking the specific case of France and building on the European commitment for a "just transition" (European Commission 2021), this chapter will try to analyse young rural dwellers' attitudes towards the green transition, focusing on (contested) climate policies. Relying on fieldwork conducted in rural France in 2023 and on quantitative analyses of surveys on rural youths' attitudes, I explore the multifaceted aspects of discontent towards the green transition among them. I will argue that while young people in rural areas are highly aware of the necessity of a green transition, they are also highly conscious of the potential costs that the transition will represent for them as well as its sociocultural and political impacts. Consequently, despite their generational concern (young people being, on average, more concerned; McCright et al. 2016), their "rural embeddedness" is also shaping discontent (Cramer 2016). In a way, they are situated at the conflicting crossroads between their age and their location, between youthful (environmental) awareness and rural scepticism (towards the green transition). This analysis calls for a just transition that accounts for the specificities of this discontent among youth in rural areas and addresses both material and sociopolitical concerns. I also conclude with specific policy recommendations for European policy makers interested in strengthening the just transition framework.

Literature

A growing body of research has explored the environmental attitudes of young people, underlining the general tendency for young Europeans to be more concerned with climate change (Henn et al. 2022; McCright et al. 2016; Poortinga et al. 2019; Van der Linden 2015), to vote more for Green parties (Devine-Wright et al. 2015) and to show greater support for environmental policies (Douenne and Fabre 2020). This research highlights how young people can be catalysts for change, evidenced by their escalating mobilisation and application of pressure on governments for environmental policy reforms (Han and Ahn 2020).

Nonetheless, treating youth as a homogeneous group overlooks the diversity within this demographic (Wyn and White 1997) and it is thus obvious that more work is needed to understand the attitudes of specific subgroups. There has been a burgeoning literature trying to overcome this challenge. Recent research has for instance underlined the specificities of young people engaging in climate activism, showing that climate youth movements see an over-representation of women and highly educated individuals (de Moor et al. 2021). Among the less-studied subgroups, there is one that usually receives less attention in climate research: young people in rural areas. This group has already been at the core of original research in social sciences, studying their perspectives on specific issues like equality (Cuervo 2014) or exploring their political, social, cultural and civic attitudes and behaviours (for

example Farrugia and Ravn 2022). However, while some work has demonstrated that young rural dwellers were usually under-represented in climate youth movements (Prendergast et al. 2021), very little is known about their attitudes and general perspectives on the green transition.

This oversight is particularly glaring given that young people in rural areas are uniquely positioned at the intersection of generational environmental awareness and the specific challenges of rural residency. Indeed, a growing literature demonstrates the specific costs that rural dwellers are facing when it comes to the green transition, mainly through higher energy and transport prices and threats to professions and livelihoods (O'Sullivan et al. 2020; Vona 2021). Building on this work, emerging quantitative research has pointed out that the perception of increasing financial costs in rural areas could feed higher opposition to the green transition (Arndt et al. 2022). However, more research is needed to understand how this costly transition is precisely perceived by rural dwellers. Focusing on these spatial aspects is a promising avenue for research.

Beyond rural dwellers as a whole, little is known about the specific position of the youth in rural areas. While they belong to a generation that is usually perceived as being at the forefront of climate action, they are also located in specific territories that suffer from the costs of the green transition (O'Sullivan et al. 2020). The question of how they perceive these costs is still partly open, but more work is also needed to understand other dimensions of their attitudes. While we know that the impacts of the transition vary across space, we also know that place, as a territory with its own context, culture and social identities, also shapes individuals' sociopolitical attitudes beyond sociodemographic differences (Cresswell 2004; Jacobs and Munis 2019). It is hence likely that young rural dwellers' attitudes could be shaped by cultural and social dynamics that could distance them from young urbanites.

This gap becomes more critical considering the substantial policy efforts at the European level to mitigate the uneven costs of the green transition. With its Just Transition Mechanism (European Commission n.d.), the European Union is indeed trying to alleviate the costs of climate policies and compensate for their distributional impacts (Pye et al. 2019), as well better including the youth (European Commission 2021). A general commitment to a just transition was also present in the Paris Agreement, and national translations have proven to be beneficial in some specific settings (for example in Spain; Bolet et al. 2023). However, while the national, European and international efforts to account for the imperative of a just transition are worth noting, understanding the reception and perceived fairness of these policies among specific subgroups, like youth in rural areas, remains uncharted territory.

This chapter aims to bridge this gap by examining the justifications behind the discontent among young people in rural areas or their resistance to the green transition (Arndt et al. 2022). It seeks to unravel how this unique subgroup reconciles their inherent environmental consciousness with the tangible burdens of climate policies, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of youth attitudes to environmental change.

Method and data

This chapter will rely on a mixed-method approach, mixing insights from fieldwork conducted in spring and summer 2023 in the east of France with general quantitative analyses of rural youths' attitudes to the green transition and related policies.

To start with, I present quantitative figures derived from a nationwide survey conducted in France in 2021 by the French Agency for the Environment (ADEME) and entitled the "Baromètre des Représentations sociales du changement climatique" (Boy 2022). This survey asked a representative panel of 1 560 French individuals their opinion about a wide range of environmental questions. In this chapter, I focus especially on those related to specific low-carbon policies (see Appendix). To simplify my analysis of survey questions, I create two specific variables: a rural variable, representing all people living in a village (< 2 000 inhabitants) or a small town (< 20 000 inhabitants), and a youth variable, representing people between 15 and 25 years old. There were 571 respondents from the rural areas defined above. Of these, 244 were young respondents, 87 of them from less populated rural areas, and 157 from small towns.

The core of my analysis relies on fieldwork conducted in rural areas of the east of France during the year 2023. Over the course of several weeks, I conducted 37 interviews (lasting from one to two hours) with 43 different individuals (31 individual interviews and six with couples), living in different places (isolated village, declining countryside, dynamic rural areas, periurban areas, etc.) and with different socio-economic characteristics (gender, income, education, occupation). I selected them through a mix of the snowballing method and purposive selection, constantly aiming to access a wide pool of individuals. I followed the approach of Cramer (2016) and Fitzgerald (2018) in this regard, using prior contacts, relying on the snowballing method to obtain the necessary trust from people and contact directly with local mayors or representatives. Among this pool of individuals, nine were young individuals (ages 18-26), also matching these criteria. The interviews, complying with ethical requirements (prior informed consent), were semi-structured, relying on a set of general topics for discussion (such as environmental concerns, relationship to nature, daily environmental practices, opinion about the green transition and climate politics) and a list of 15 specific climate policies I wanted to discuss with them. The list, constructed with different surveys, can be found in the Appendix.

The limited number of interviews necessarily limits generalisability. However, as shown by a growing body of qualitative research (such as Deville 2022), the intense reliance on a handful of exemplary interviews, although uncommon, can increase the understanding of specific situations as they allow a more precise grasp on the reality, perspectives and rationales of specific individuals. This, in turn, helps support the identification of complex mechanisms and, consequently, of more general conclusions. In this chapter, I use only a handful of examples but most analyses are valid for the vast majority of respondents.

Table 1: Presentation of the nine youth interviewees[1]

Name	Occupation/description	Socio-economic background (parents), self-reported	Location
Morgane	Recent graduate, soon to become a physiotherapist in a nearby village	Working class	Rural
Lola	Second-year university student, who recently left her village to study in a metropolis	Middle class	Urban and rural
Marie	Employee in a transportation company after being employed in a clothes shop	Working class	Rural
Tom	Manager of a local transportation company (Marie's boyfriend)	Lower-middle class	Rural
Emilie	Schoolteacher living in a very rural area with a group of farmers	Middle class	Rural
Maxime	Construction worker, no higher education	Working class	Rural
Paul	Store salesperson working in Luxembourg but living in France	Upper-middle class	Semi-rural
Enzo	Arts student in Belgium (Brussels), originally from the region	Middle class	Urban and rural
Justine	College-educated engineer working in the industrial sector in Germany	Middle class	Semi-rural

Young people in rural areas and the green transition: generational awareness, rural embeddedness and discontent

Before presenting the results, I describe briefly the relevance of my focus on a single country: France. France presents a particularly compelling case for examining the intersection of young rural dwellers and the green transition, for two primary reasons. First, the country witnessed a historic event with the Yellow Vests movement in 2018-2019. This uprising, initially sparked by opposition to a carbon tax, evolved into a broader challenge against political institutions. Significantly, the movement had its origins in France's "peripheral" areas, predominantly rural and peri-urban regions (Colomb 2020; Walker and Blavier 2022). This context makes the exploration of attitudes to climate policies among young people in rural areas especially pertinent,

1. Names have been changed and specific places are not be mentioned to preserve anonymity and comply with ethical requirements.

given the movement's lasting impact and its occurrence just five years prior. Second, France's demographic composition further underscores the relevance of this study. Overall, one third of French residents live in areas ranging from sparsely to very sparsely populated, while two thirds reside outside a major urban centre (INSEE 2019). With approximately 17 million individuals aged between 3 and 24 living in these rural areas as of 2018, representing about 30% of the youth population, the examination of their perspectives on climate policies becomes particularly pressing.

Attitudes of young people in rural areas to climate policies: between generations and places

To better comprehend the attitudes of young rural dwellers to the green transition, a preliminary analysis of ADEME's 2022 Barometer was conducted. I first evaluated the support to a wide range of climate policies, differentiating between young individuals in rural areas and all non-youth rural dwellers (Figure 1). As displayed in Figure 1, young citizens are more likely to find a low-carbon policy desirable than other individuals. Out of the 11 policies tested here, it is indeed the case for seven of them.

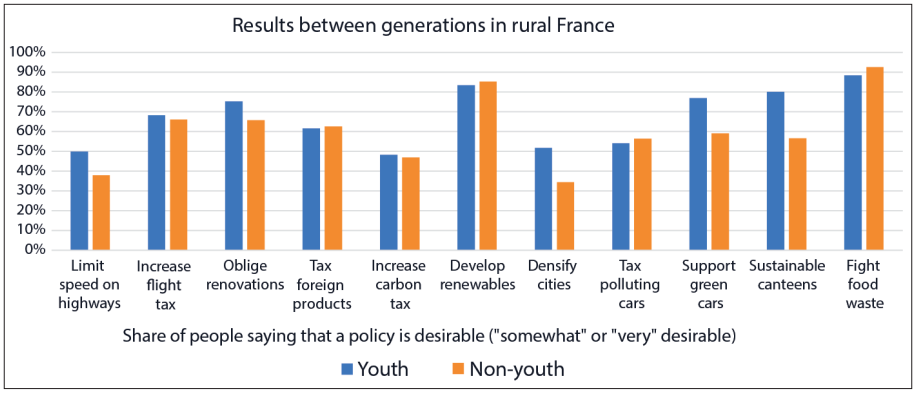

Figure 1: Support for low-carbon policies

This quick analysis reveals that young people in rural areas are more inclined to support climate policies compared to the broader rural population. However, this finding, while somewhat expected, doesn't fully capture the distinct characteristics of the rural youth as a generationally and spatially defined group. Beyond the confirmed intergenerational differences within rural areas, another question arises: how do attitudes towards climate policies differ between youth in urban and rural areas? This interterritorial variation offers a critical dimension for understanding the broader landscape of climate policy support among young people (Bonnie et al. 2020).

With ADEME's 2022 Barometer, I also evaluated the support for different low-carbon policies, differentiating between young respondents in urban and rural areas (Figure 2). As displayed in the chart, young urbanites are more likely to find a low-carbon policy desirable than young people in rural areas. Out of the 11 policies tested here, it is the case for nine of them. The exceptions are the two policies related to food, with a slightly higher desirability among young people in rural areas.

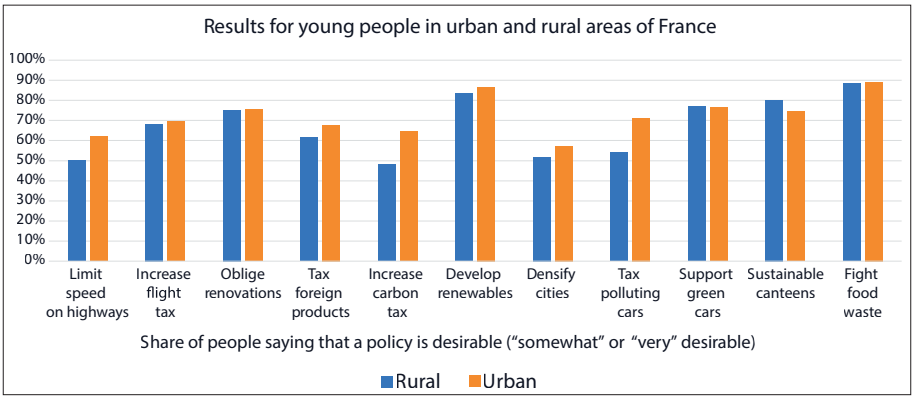

Figure 2: Support for low-carbon policies

Unveiling the perceived challenges posed by the green transition to young people in rural areas

During most interviews, the young inhabitants in rural areas I spoke with exhibited a significant level of "rural embeddedness". Being "embedded" in their specific rural environment, they formed opinions on climate policies not only based on the material constraints associated with rural life, such as distance and low density, but also on their deeply ingrained sociocultural identities and representations, for example the central role of cars in rural settings.

Material constraints and financial costs as decisive factors of discontent

While most of the young interviewees show general environmental awareness and support for the green transition, they also display moderate to significant discontent for several reasons. The main dimension of this resistance is, unsurprisingly, related to the material constraints imposed by the green transition on rural dwellers. For instance, when asked to react to certain policies, Morgane is quite critical of some transportation policies, like taxes on vehicles or fuel because "it is complicated in a village to move around with a bike, the car is essential here … whereas in cities young people don't even get a driving licence". Several young interviewees in this area also criticise the cost that these policies impose on rural dwellers, mentioning a low-emission zone in the closest metropolis that would particularly penalise them when they go to work or simply move around. "It is a good thing", they argued, "but it's complicated" for them. Maxime underlines the material necessity of using a car in rural areas – something that the green transition is (he believes) threatening: "We have a lot more consumption in terms of petrol... We're forced to be 'vehiculated' here".

Furthermore, material discontent not only stems from the formal constraints of rural areas (low density and high distances), where cars are relied upon, but also on the financial costs the transition imposes on rural dwellers precisely because of this materiality. For instance, coming from a lower-to-middle-class background,

Morgane refers to her rural context to insist on the financial cost of the transition: "we need to take care of the environment, but this requires having enough money". She believes that people in urban areas are more aware of these issues, like her sister living in Paris, but also have "objectively" more options to be sustainable, like going to thrift shops. Like her, many believe that urbanites (and urban politicians) do not understand the costs and burdens imposed by these policies. She says: "People in cities don't realise. Fuel is already so expensive for us … and we don't have a choice, it's impossible without a car". Justine displays a similar line of thought:

> Inevitably, for example, when we talked about banning petrol or diesel cars, if you live in a big city you're not impacted by this decision. Similarly, if you live in the middle of Paris and don't have a car, you're not affected by the decision to "tax more polluting vehicles".

Beyond the question of transportation, she also highlighted the issue of (un)employment in de-industrialised rural areas like the one she grew up in and the risk that the green transition can pose to the remaining industries and jobs.

The role of rural identity and sociocultural representations

Beyond materiality, rural identity and place-based sociocultural representations are central in the formation of opinions among young people in rural areas regarding policies. Not only do they show lower levels of support because these low-carbon policies materially and financially impact them more, but also because their opinions are informed by place-based heuristic (Cramer 2016), both in the form of identity and representations. These representations are collective cognitive constructs, resulting from a set of values, norms, ideas, beliefs and cultural symbols that shape the way we see the world. After capturing the idea of rural identity below, I will show that their specific representations are shaping young rural dwellers' views about the transition.

Most interviewees frame (at least some of) their answers along the urban–rural line and use their rural embeddedness and consciousness (Cramer 2016) as a tool to criticise policies that are deemed too costly, burdensome or simply culturally unacceptable. For instance, Morgane first argues that the environment "comes up more with people from the city", partly because of education but also due to a different local culture. She says that "maybe people here are interested in it, in its way, I don't know. But I'd say less than in the city and in higher education".

Grounded in their rural identity, all interviewees use, at least occasionally, cultural (rural) cues to support their opinions and, eventually, dismiss some policies. They do so for policies like the densification of towns, arguing that buildings would not "fit" where they live. This point of view is for instance expressed by Marie: "for me, a village is full of little houses and the church in the middle; buildings are for the city". Moving from buildings to energy, Morgane then criticises windfarms as being "ugly" and potentially "destroying the landscape" (see Zöllner et al. 2008). Many, like Paul, believe that renewable energies like windfarms or solar panels "impact the scenery" of rural areas. Renewable energy development and construction are not the only types of climate policies clashing with the sociocultural representations of young people in rural areas – so are policies targeting meat consumption. Emilie and Morgane both explain that they often eat meat with their family, justifying it by

referring to their historic "family of farmers" (Morgane) where meat has always been culturally central, but also referring to the alleged biological importance of eating meat (Emilie). Morgane further expands on this cultural dimension: "This culture of 'you eat a lot because you work a lot' is still very present". These are only some examples among many that show how young people in rural areas mobilise rural imaginaries and cultural representations to form an opinion about policies.

Between the urban and the rural: student mobility, education and the metropolis

Among the youths I interviewed, two were born and raised in rural areas but are currently studying at the university in large urban centres. Being at the crossroads between rurality and urbanity, their cases are particularly relevant to better comprehend the divide between urban-dwelling and rural-dwelling youth. The example of these young individuals indeed shows that as they start living in large towns and cities and acquire higher education, their attitudes progressively evolve and they show greater support for climate policies. However, because of their deeply rooted rural identity and frequent stays at their parents' home, their answers still display a sense of rural embeddedness.

For instance, Lola shows a high level of support for policies but acknowledges that this is largely due to her being in a "committed group" of friends at the nearby university, situated in the regional capital, where these issues are often debated. Similarly, Enzo explains how his life in Brussels is modifying his environmental views. Lola also acknowledges that her attitude towards a policy like low-emissions zones stems from the fact that she now lives in a large city, but she understands why rural dwellers would dislike them. Furthermore, she points out that her friends in the regional capital were more aware and willing to support climate action than her friends from high school who stayed in the village. This supports the argument that place of residence and education interact, with higher education leading to growing awareness and policy support among the youth raised in the countryside. Part of the explanation could be the acquisition of higher cultural capital through access to higher education in cities (Bourdieu 1979). This echoes my discussion with Marie who repeatedly mentioned that she and her working-class friends did not know or question what these policies implied in terms of emissions reduction but believe that urbanites, who are more likely to discuss these issues and have higher education, would be likely to have this knowledge.

However, while education and (ecological) knowledge do vary between spaces and across interviewees, variations in attitudes cannot solely be down to educational differences. Young people in rural areas are expressing higher discontent not only because they have, on average, a lower level of education.

Expressing broader political discontent: from rural identity to rural resentment

I have, for now, presented the attitudes of young people from rural areas to climate policies as largely relying on their perceptions of material costs and sociocultural constraints, partly rooted in questions of education. However, as rural dwellers form

their opinions through a place-based heuristic, this process sometimes translated into broader political discontent. As Cramer (2016) explained in her seminal work, "rural resentment" is fuelled less by formal reality (inequality) and rather by the feeling of not being heard or understood and the perception of distance and untrustworthiness of political leaders. In this study, this is very vivid in some interviewees' answers, as in that of Marie who believes that rural dwellers oppose these policies because "they don't feel that the state listens to them". She added that "around me, we think that [politicians] are 'in the word'" (that is, they speak but do not act), "they don't live like we live … they barely ever come here … they don't realise the impact of their policies". In a nutshell, "they don't see it, they don't live it". This is why, according to many interviewees, Green parties do poorly in rural areas. They have "good" ideas but "they never go out" and do not get that the priority, in villages, is "purchasing power … everything revolves around this". Similarly, and despite underlining at first that she was very keen on preserving the environment, Marie displayed another discourse when we started talking about the role of politics in accelerating the transition. She frames her answer around her rural identity, fed with rural resentment and the feeling of not being heard and not being understood. She shows a significant distrust towards politicians and the state, a feeling that is more largely shared among the rural population (Stein et al. 2021).

Morgane offers a similar criticism. According to her, politicians (and especially Green parties) "want to put in place stuff that are not possible … people behind [these policies] do not understand that it is not possible here to take the bike". She is convinced that policy makers "do not pay attention" to local ways of life, simply because she "is not sure that political parties live in villages". Consequently, and like Marie, she believes that "most people do not feel listened to", especially regarding environmental questions. This feeling is, at least to some extent, shared by most interviewees. These results echo work from the literature on the "geography of discontent", which demonstrates that residents of rural peripheries have lower levels of trust for politicians (Mitsch et al. 2021) and a greater feeling of disconnection and of not being heard by the government (Jacobs and Munis 2022), leading to a higher likelihood of voting for populist and radical parties.

As shown in this part, rural youths represent a particular subgroup of young individuals who express both high environmental awareness of and relative scepticism (and even discontent) towards certain aspects of the green transition. While they emphasise the cost and burden that low-carbon policies impose on them (on their purchasing power, jobs, wealth, etc.), they also rely on their rural identity and identification with their territory to dismiss some policies. According to them, the green transition would create inequalities between territories and disregard rural ways of life. However, what seems to make the rural youth group unique is the feeling of being stuck between two different, sometimes conflicting, identities: rural and young. In the simplest terms possible, young people in rural areas are of course young, but they are also connected to the rural environment. What remains to be seen is how they could align some of their environmental concern and general attitudes with the reality of living in a rural area – both in terms of the objective constraints (such as reliance on cars) and more subjective aspects (like rural identity and resentment).

Bridging the divide: a just and inclusive transition for young people in rural areas

Confronted with the challenge of engaging in a costly and, sometimes, untrusted transition, young people in rural areas are bringing policy making to a crossroads: will the green transition deliver fair, inclusive and, eventually, desirable policies for them?

Solving the objective challenges posed by the transition for young people in rural areas

To answer the above question, it is first important to reflect on the objective challenges (material and financial) they are confronted with. Young people in rural areas, contrary to their urban counterparts, and in many ways like older rural dwellers, face the heterogeneous impacts of the transition (Lamb et al. 2020; Peñasco et al. 2021; Vona 2021). They need to move around with their cars but are penalised for this (by carbon taxes, low-emission zones, etc.). They also need to abide with a changing landscape (with renewable energy development) and to pay for higher energy consumption (for fuel and heating). Consequently, high levels of (youthful) environmental concern may not consistently translate into pro-environmental attitudes about policies deemed to impact oneself and one's community negatively (Faburel et al 2021; Levain et al. 2022).

Building a just and inclusive transition for young people in rural areas means acting on the material and financial burdens that are heavily imposed on them, compared to youth in urban areas. This is especially the case with mobility, as high constraints might lead young people in the countryside to leave for urban centres, thereby depriving their former home areas of a vital age group. Morgane repeatedly points out the issue of cost, arguing for instance that she "does not have the money to buy a new car" and that fuel was "already expensive enough". This is why Paul wants "to put benefits in place" to compensate for the effects of these policies. Marie also insists on the issue of purchasing power and the need to incorporate these concerns into low-carbon policies. Her boyfriend, Tom, joined the conversation to harshly criticise policies that were threatening his company's jobs in group transportation – and his identity as a worker in this industry. Furthermore, all the nine young interviewees are unanimous in calling for policies whose costs and benefits are spread more evenly. According to Lola, "everyone has to be on the same footing" with the carbon or plane tax for instance, whereas she believes that "rich people and politicians" do not make the same effort. Morgane also believes that "everyone should be targeted with these policies" because "people are ready to make an effort if others [do] too".

Addressing the complex sources of youth discontent in rural areas

Beyond bridging the divide between the urban and rural youth by delivering material and financial justice, there also needs to be a reflection on the complex sources of discontent in these places. Providing the means for young people in rural areas to translate their concern into greater support for more stringent policies will require acknowledging the peculiarities of their context.

Many interviewees pointed out that the challenges faced by young people in rural areas were not solely a matter of material burden, but also one of trust and resentment (Cramer 2016). Applied to the case of the green transition, rural resentment is likely to prevent any appropriation of these policies by a proportion of young people in rural areas. When asked about ways to make policies more acceptable, Morgane replied, before mentioning the issue of cost, that politicians should "reach out to people, ask them questions, see what they would be prepared to do for the environment". She then mentioned the need for benefits but added: "but especially with regard to politics, [they need to] come towards people … everywhere … to me who lives in a village, and to all categories of jobs". Furthermore, as pointed out before, most interviewees, in all age groups, show signs of mistrust and were sceptical about the ability of the state to deal with this transition fairly (Fairbrother et al. 2019). While one could expect young people to be more aware and supportive of climate action, the interviews seem to indicate that young people in rural areas echo the narrative of the older generations. Not only do they feel ignored and unjustly blamed for their perceived inaction (in their daily practices but also in their opposition to some policies), but they also feel that politicians and urbanites do not always understand their ways of life and identity. Living in rural areas is more than a material condition, it is also a matter of belonging to a community with specific social representations and cultural imaginaries. A transition that ignores this unique identity is unlikely to gain the support of young people in rural areas.

Conclusion

The green transition is at the source of multiple challenges for young people in rural areas. Often portrayed as environmentally conscious per se, young people, as a complex and heterogeneous group, are at the centre of these difficulties. Among young people, place of residence plays an important role in the formation of their perceptions about the environment and the low-carbon transition. In particular, the experience of living in "the rural" (Förtner et al. 2021), in terms of both the reality and identity derived from it, contributes to shaping specific attitudes among young people in rural areas. On the one hand, they belong to a generation displaying a particular awareness of the situation and a generally positive consideration about the need for climate action, hereby offering a slightly more general outlook towards the transition than older rural residents. On the other hand, they face significantly higher costs than young people in urban areas, both material (in terms of burden) and financial, because of the impacts these policies have in rural areas. As they evaluate these costs quite negatively and perceive them to be unevenly distributed, they tend to express greater discontent. Beyond an objective appraisal of the cost of the transition, the discontent among young people in rural communities is also fuelled by not only a perception of relative injustice but also by the feeling of not being heard, understood or considered. This chapter has hence shown that young people in rural areas are somehow stuck between two realities and identities, sometimes diverging: that of their age and that of their place of residence.

Expressing concern and awareness at times, discontent and rural resentment at others, young people in rural areas call for action to bridge a dual divide. In a way, the just and inclusive transition that this chapter is arguing for needs to bridge the gap between generations and territories. The transition we need must bring

everybody on board, and age should not become a discriminatory factor. I propose several recommendations below for strengthening the just transition framework.

Policy recommendations

1. **Enhancing the Just Transition Fund.** The Just Transition Fund (JTF) is a crucial mechanism for addressing the disparities caused by the green transition. However, its effectiveness could be improved with specific strategies targeting young people in rural areas. This could include the following.
    - 1.1. **Targeted financial support.** Allocate a portion of the JTF specifically to programmes and initiatives that benefit young people in rural areas, ensuring they have the resources to engage in and benefit from the transition. This could be in the form of subsidies for starting environmentally friendly businesses/projects or grants for pursuing studies in environmental fields.
    - 1.2. **Capacity building and education.** Implement educational and skill-building programmes to prepare young people in rural areas for new green jobs, ensuring they are not left behind in the shift to a low-carbon economy. These programmes would focus on developing skills in sustainable agriculture, renewable energy and environmental conservation, tailored to the specific contexts of rural areas.
    - 1.3. **Innovation hubs in rural areas.** Establish innovation and entrepreneurship hubs in rural areas, focusing on green technologies and sustainable practices. These hubs would provide resources, mentorship and support for young people in rural areas to develop and implement innovative solutions.
2. **EU Rural Youth Climate Council.** Establish a council or advisory body composed of representatives of young people in rural areas from different EU countries. This council would provide insights and recommendations on rural-specific environmental policies and initiatives. It would interact directly with the JTF.
3. **Enhanced connectivity and access.** Improve digital and physical connectivity in rural areas to ensure that young people in rural areas have equal access to information, education and opportunities related to the green transition.
4. **Promote a collaboration between young people in rural and urban areas**. Encourage projects that bring together young people in rural and urban areas to work on environmental issues. This could help bridge the rural–urban divide and promote a more inclusive approach to environmental activism.
5. **Integration with broader policies.**
    - The recommendations should be integrated into broader EU policies and strategies, ensuring a cohesive approach that aligns with overall goals of sustainability and social justice.
    - Collaborations with local governments and community organisations can facilitate the implementation of these recommendations, ensuring they are grounded in local realities and needs.

Appendix – ADEME Barometer and low-carbon policies

List of measures included in the analysis of citizens' attitudes to low-carbon policies

Lower the speed limit on motorways to 110 km per hour	Densify cities by limiting the number of single-family homes in favour of apartment blocks
Increase taxes on air travel to encourage rail travel	Increase taxes on vehicles that emit the most greenhouse gases
Oblige homeowners to renovate and insulate their properties when selling or renting them out	Encourage the use of low-polluting or shared vehicles (such as car-pooling schemes) in traffic lanes, reserved parking spaces, etc.
Increase the price of consumer products that are transported by polluting modes of transport	Make it compulsory for public catering establishments to offer a vegetarian, organic and/or seasonal menu
Increase the carbon tax	Reduce food waste by half
Develop renewable energies	

List of climate policies discussed during interviews (translated from French to English)

1. Lower the speed limit on motorways to 110 km/h
2. Increase taxes on air transport
3. Ban short-haul flights when it is possible to take the train
4. Require homeowners to renovate and insulate their homes
5. Make products manufactured abroad more expensive
6. Increase the carbon tax on gas, petrol and coal
7. Develop renewable energy
8. Densify cities by limiting suburban housing in favour of apartment blocks
9. Increase taxes on polluting vehicles
10. Ban the sale of new diesel cars within 15 years
11. Limit access to city centres to electric cars only
12. Require canteens to offer a vegetarian, organic and seasonal menu
13. Build and install wind turbines
14. Increase the tax on household waste to encourage people to waste less
15. Close power plants that run on coal or gas

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Chapter 3

Co-research through art-based action enhancing young people's climate citizenship

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Introduction

Climate change, global warming, biodiversity loss and species extinction are all current and highly interconnected issues in social and political discussions. Plenty of information on climate change is available, particularly from a scientific perspective. However, climate change is not solely a scientific phenomenon; it is also a social phenomenon that profoundly impacts social and political realities. Public debates on climate change often become polarised, heated and even misleading. There is a need for more research on climate change as a societal reality to understand its social and political significance better.

The research project "On the frontline of the climate crisis", funded by the Kone Foundation, focuses on young people's climate-related participation and involvement as well as their feelings, views and sensations concerning the crisis. The project began on 1 September 2022 and is scheduled to run until the end of 2025. The project is co-ordinated by the Youth Research and Development Centre Juvenia, affiliated with the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, with collaborative support from the Faculty of Arts and Desing's degree programme in Art Education at the University of Lapland. While most of the project activities take place in Finland, primarily in Lapland, Central Finland and South-Eastern Finland, the project also seeks opportunities for co-operation with young people across national borders in a broader geographical context.

The project aims to generate new knowledge about young people's awareness of climate change and simultaneously examines their perspectives and sentiments related to the crisis. It analyses subjective attitudes, involvement, agency positions and young people's participation through participatory action research in the context of climate change and climate citizenship. The core methodological toolkit includes art-based action research (ABAR) and co-research. Based on this premise, research is conducted in collaboration with young people participating in the project's workshops. The actual work, involving art creation processes, adheres to the fundamental

principle of co-research, treating young people as equal partners in research, with the ability to have a say and influence in all research phases.

Young people are generally aware of climate change and exhibit a high level of awareness about the crisis. Most consider climate change to be a fact. Many of them perceive it as a phenomenon that generates a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity. They are genuinely concerned about this phenomenon and the unpredictable consequences they will face in the future (see, for instance, Sanson et al. 2019: 201-202; Skovdal and Benwell 2021: 59).

Most of the younger generation express concern about the climate crisis. According to a study by Hickman et al. (2021), conducted across eight countries and among individuals aged 16 to 25, 59% of participants reported being worried or extremely worried about the climate crisis, with 65% feeling that governments have failed young people. However, the climate crisis is a complex and multifaceted issue, eliciting a spectrum of emotions among young people, ranging from sadness to despair but also hopefulness. They perceive the phenomenon strongly but maintain a sense of hope that the impending crisis can be averted or, at the very least, its consequences can be mitigated (see Hickman et al. 2021; Piispa et al. 2023).

In this chapter, we aim to elucidate how art-based activities can contribute to the enhancement of young people's climate citizenship. Our study delves into their self-perceptions as capable actors and legitimate participants in the public discourse about the climate crisis and its alleviation strategies. Along with studying young participants' emotions – encompassing hopes, visions, concerns and worries – related to climate change, the "On the frontline of the climate crisis" project also includes an empowering and socially strengthening dimension that aligns seamlessly with the project's overarching goals.

Through art-based activities, it is possible to create opportunities for young people's voice to be heard and provide them with a channel to participate in public discussions on issues that concern them. In this context, artistic interventions can be seen as an effort to bolster the sociopolitical agency of young people and bring forth a new, subjective approach to proposing sustainable initiatives to combat the climate crisis.

According to numerous studies, being part of a community, experiencing belonging and positive participation impact individuals' subjective well-being and boost their self-perception as members of society. Participation, as we understand it in this chapter, can be defined as the opportunity to influence and contribute to public, social and political matters and as a means to shape an individual's personal life (see, for instance, Claridge 2004; and Hoffmann et al. 2023).

Today's youth will be in debt in future because of the climate crisis

Youth in the Northern and Arctic regions, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, face a unique set of social challenges due to their geographical location and the specific circumstances of living in the Arctic. These challenges can vary depending on factors such as the community's location, Indigenous or non-Indigenous status and access to culture, education and other resources, all of which are connected to Arctic sustainability (Fondahl and Wilson 2017; Tennberg et al. 2019).

One of the most pressing challenges is the impact of climate change. Young people in the Arctic are witnessing the effects of it first-hand (Karlsdóttir and Junsberg 2015). Arctic nature is changing rapidly due to global warming and the colonial use of natural resources, often linked to the promotion of the green economy (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011). From a distant perspective, the northern landscape may appear as an untapped resource awaiting use for mining, forestry and wind turbines. However, every part of Sápmi, also known as the Sami homeland – a region spanning the northern portions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia – has historically constituted the landscape used by the Sami people since the melting of the land ice.

The changes in nature, caused by global needs as well as climate warming, have cumulative effects on the livelihoods, knowledge systems, social life and well-being of the people living in the Arctic (ibid.). According to Stephen (2018), these changes disrupt traditional ways of life and affect the social and mental well-being of young people, which can be distressing and cause uncertainty about their future.

Sami youth represent the future of the sole Indigenous community in Europe. Their political endeavours for a sustainable future are led by the Sami Youth Council, established under the Sami Parliament in 2011. The main objective of the Youth Council is to promote the cultural and language rights of Sami youth around Finland and to strengthen Sami youths' sense of belonging to the Sami culture. The Youth Council promotes Sami cultural and language rights, in addition to formulating proposals and initiative statements and crafting other declarations for the Sami Parliament. Council members collaborate with various youth associations and participate in other governing bodies in Sápmi. They actively engage with Indigenous communities worldwide, partaking in events and conferences such as the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples and the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (Nuoraidráđđi 2023).

Overall, the political atmosphere in the North and the Arctic is oriented towards co-operation and establishing a distinct space for Sami Indigenous representatives. The primary channel for young people to engage with decision makers is through participation in youth organisations. Nevertheless, the sluggish bureaucratic processes may frustrate young people, who often desire to witness direct outcomes, prompting them towards activism.

In terms of political engagement and exerting influence, Sami youth, broadly speaking, share similarities with the youth demographic in Finland. While some young individuals reported voting and engaging in formal political processes, the majority emphasised their involvement through daily personal actions. These actions include adopting dietary practices that prioritise vegetarianism, engaging in environmental conservation by collecting litter from natural settings and favouring second-hand clothing purchases from flea markets. In addition to these individualised forms of influencing and taking responsibility, the youth cohort demonstrates a greater propensity for direct civic activism compared to older generations aged 30 and above (Hantula et al. 2024: 19).

Young people's eager engagement and endeavours aimed at preventing climate change, advocating low-carbon production solutions and endorsing sustainable

development is constrained by a lack of direct means and channels for influencing. Additionally, a lack of confidence in their efficacy to effect meaningful change in mitigating the impacts of the climate crisis contributes to this limitation. The "On the frontline of the climate crisis" project endeavours to address this imperative by providing a platform for youth co-research facilitated through art-based action methods.

Art-based action research in youth research in the North and the Arctic

The concept of art-based refers to social interactions or gatherings that centre around the creation of various forms of art. These activities can encompass a wide range of artistic expressions, such as visual arts, performing arts and literature (Leavy 2018). Scholars at the University of Lapland (Jokela and Huhmarniemi 2022a; Jokela and Huhmarniemi 2022b) introduced the concept of New Genre Arctic Art to highlight art-based projects that are situationally grounded in the North and Arctic locations but often address circumpolar and even planetary megatrends like climate change. The term refers to social and political activist art in which participants are seen as co-artists and the art-based action as a shared learning and development project. The ethos in art-based activities is parallel with the fundamental principle of co-research in which all participants are democratically treated as equal partners in research, having a say and opportunity to exert influence in all phases of research process activities (see Rättilä et al. 2023: 52-53).

Art-based activities in the Arctic region are not yet considered research as such, even though they are often multidisciplinary and research-oriented in nature. A special methodology called art-based action research (ABAR) has been developed alongside art-based activities to enhance their development, analysis and sharing of results.

According to Jokela (2019), ABAR is a methodological approach that integrates artistic expression and creative methods into the qualitative research process. ABAR combines action research principles with various artistic forms to engage participants in meaningful ways, encouraging them to express their thoughts and experiences through art. This methodology transcends traditional research techniques like surveys and interviews, offering a unique and dynamic approach to understanding complex issues. ABAR operates through iterative cycles that include goal setting, art-based interventions, reflections, data analysis and the presentation of results through research publications and artistic productions. This cyclical nature aligns with the action research approach, as it focuses on practical problem solving and development-oriented outcomes. This approach allows researchers to collect a variety of data, including visual artefacts, documented performances, narratives and creative expressions. Combining these artistic expressions with reflective analysis enhances understanding and engagement throughout the research process.

According to scholars (Jokela and Hiltunen 2023; Jokela et al. 2019), ABAR is highly participatory, involving active engagement from all participants, unlike traditional research methods that treat participants as passive subjects. Researchers and participants are considered co-researchers, equal partners in the research endeavour. This approach values the knowledge, expertise and perspectives of all stakeholders, including community members and those with lived experiences related to

the research topic. Participants, individuals and communities actively contribute to various research stages, fostering reflection and dialogue among participants. Co-research in ABAR aims to empower participants by giving them a voice in the research process. This approach empowers participants, community capacity building and potential social change. Having a chance to influence the dialogical process in which both art and research are created fosters an individual's subjective well-being, empowering the participant's self-efficacy and self-perception as a full member of society (Hoffman et al. 2023: 4-5).

As the ABAR methodology has been developed at the University of Lapland and in its circumpolar networks, it emphasises collaboration with Northern and Arctic communities, including Indigenous peoples, making it a fundamental aspect of this approach (Jokela and Huhmarniemi 2022a). Researchers, artists and community members work together to identify research questions, develop artistic projects and implement culturally sensitive solutions. This collaborative effort ensures that research outcomes are relevant, culturally sensitive and respectful of the Arctic communities involved.

In ABAR, artistic methods are not just tools for data collection but also integral to the analysis and communication of findings. Researchers (Jokela 2019; Jokela and Hiltunen 2023) point out that this approach values creative expression as a means of comprehending and addressing complex issues. The use of art in research allows participants to articulate their experiences and perspectives effectively. This is why ABAR is particularly prevalent in addressing social justice issues, activism and community engagement. It seeks to bring about positive change often by drawing on insights from various disciplines, including environmental science, anthropology and social work. This interdisciplinary approach fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges of youth in the Arctic and aims to influence policy, advocate change and promote sustainable practices. ABAR projects serve as a powerful medium for advocacy and raising awareness from the local level to the global scale.

From these points, we see that ABAR with youth is a dynamic and inclusive approach to conducting research. It leverages the power of art to engage participants on an open but profoundly emotional and creative level, leading to more meaningful insights and potentially transformative outcomes. By collaborating with local communities and adopting a participatory approach, ABAR ensures that research is culturally sensitive, socially responsible and relevant to the needs and desires of the young people involved. This innovative methodology has the potential to drive positive change in and beyond Arctic communities.

Impact of art-based activities on youth in the Arctic

In previously implemented art-based action research projects involving youth, aligned with the objectives outlined in the New Genre Arctic Art agenda, discernible and positive outcomes have been achieved. ABAR projects have shown profound positive social impacts on youth, offering transformative experiences and ways of addressing the unique challenges they face. These activities empower young people to express themselves uniquely, conveying thoughts, emotions and experiences

that may be difficult to express verbally. Beyond personal growth, art-based activities influence various aspects of their lives, communities and society as a whole (Hiltunen et al. 2021a).

Collaborative community and environmental ABAR projects, such as winter and environmental art, hold particular significance in the Arctic context (Jokela and Huhmarniemi 2022a). They empower Arctic youth to explore their identities, voice concerns and actively shape their narratives. Participation in these activities enhances communication skills, fosters teamwork and boosts self-esteem, contributing to greater confidence in all aspects of life.

Art-based projects encourage community engagement and foster a sense of belonging, social interaction and conflict-resolution skills (Hiltunen, Mikkonen and Laitinen 2020). They provide a non-confrontational platform for addressing conflicts promoting open dialogue and empathy (Hiltunen et al. 2021b). Art also serves as a catalyst for positive social change, enabling Arctic youth to raise awareness about environmental concerns, Indigenous cultures and rights, and other pressing community concerns (Huhmarniemi et al. 2021).

ABAR projects often explore diverse cultures, traditions and perspectives in the North and Arctic, bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. According to Huhmarniemi and Jokela (2020b), these projects promote cultural sustainability by teaching traditional art and craft forms to contemporary art and storytelling. Art-based activities help preserve and pass on rich cultural traditions and Indigenous knowledge, fostering cultural continuity and community pride. Artworks created collectively often work as a revitalisation (Jokela and Huhmarniemi 2022b) and become symbols of community identity. They provide a creative outlet during challenging times, promoting resilience and adaptive coping processes.

Digital media skills, including photography, video and visual communication, offer effective platforms for storytelling and self-expression among youth. Cultural exchanges between Arctic communities and other regions through art exhibitions and digital platforms broaden perspectives and promote cross-cultural understanding (Manninen and Hiltunen 2016)b. These activities nurture artistic talents, provide a sense of belonging and empower young voices.

ABAR with Arctic youth is shown to create a safe and supportive environment for the expression of emotions and opinions, communication with other sectors of society, creativity, relationship building and life skills development. Beyond individual growth, these activities contribute to the social well-being, cultural richness and empowerment of young people in the Arctic, fostering positive change and resilience in the face of unique regional challenges. ABAR's co-research with young people provides us with information on how these processes can be planned, supported and developed and what occurs within the processes.

Youth in the Barents region addressing the climate crisis and striving for a sustainable future

For the Climate Crisis project, an opportunity for collaboration with the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) materialised when the project facilitated artistic

workshops and collected research material at BRYC's annual meeting. The Barents Regional Youth Council acts under the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). The BEAC is an intergovernmental collaborative organ promoting stability and sustainable development in the Barents region, which covers the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia.

The BRYC was established in 2004 with the aim of promoting the interests of young people living in the Barents region and providing a platform for people-to-people co-operation among regional youth. The council consists of 15 members aged 18 to 30 from Sweden, Finland, Russia and Norway, along with one representative of Indigenous youth from the entire Barents region. Since 2018, the BRYC has been an official member of the Barents Regional Council (BRC), which serves as the most significant channel for the BRYC to promote the interests of Barents youth to regional and national decision makers. Over the years, the BRYC has organised both annual and occasional events on various relevant topics and has frequently collaborated with other youth communities and projects (BRYC 2023).

The Barents Regional Youth Annual Event, hosted in February 2023 in Rovaniemi, Finland, served as a platform for the participation of young individuals from across the Barents region. Under the theme Think Green, the event, orchestrated by the BRYC, provided a collaborative space for young people to engage in climate activism and express their views, thoughts and visions through art-based workshops centred on sustainable development and climate change. The art-based programme, conceived and executed by the project in collaboration with the university's art education students at Lapland University, involved graduating students, professional artists, art educators and researchers. These individuals played pivotal roles in guiding and collaborating with young participants across various forms of New Genre Arctic Art (Jokela et al. 2021).

Event attendees received information through an open invitation disseminated by the BRYC via social media channels. Approximately 25 individuals from Norway, Sweden and Finland, as well as Russian youth residing outside of Russia, participated. Notably, all participants exhibited a keen awareness and profound interest in matters of sustainability and climate change, expressing a strong desire to influence these issues actively. Some participants had backgrounds in activism, while others were engaging with BRYC events for the first time. The BRYC assumes a pivotal organisational role, serving as a platform where young individuals within the Barents region can articulate their opinions and perspectives.

Art-based workshops as an arena for self-perception and dialogue

The Think Green event featured a broad and diverse selection of art-based workshops. All of them were conducted at the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland, which offered the best possible facilities and work tools. The workshop themes revolved around questions related to the climate crisis and a sustainable future in the North. The primary goal of the workshops was to initiate a dialogical process in which young people could engage and express their thoughts about the rapid changes in their living environment. The workshops aimed to stimulate

artistic creativity and spark new ideas, insights and visions, enabling participants to see and experience things in new ways. The working ethos was rooted in dialogue and mutual respect. The art-based actions were designed and supervised by young students, with a special focus on the young participants, which also raised interest in the activities.

Participants registered in advance for two main workshops, and on the spot they also had the opportunity to join non-stop activities. The main workshops included "Dancing with nature", "Sustainable design", "Artivism" and "Winter art". The non-stop workshops comprised "Media art", "Community art" and "Light painting". The most popular workshop was "Sustainable design", where the chance to receive professional supervision in technical design and 3D printing enticed participants.

The idea of a sustainable future, designing and printing tools yourself and avoiding mass production, attracted the participants with design programmes, testing and printing. The Artivism workshop was carried out by Media Art, designing stickers, mostly with hard-hitting statements about the decision makers' slow reactions to the climate crisis. In the outdoor workshops, Dancing with nature and Winter art, the participants were directly involved with nature and the outdoors in the university campus environment. The fresh February day in Rovaniemi, with glistening snow, brought the cold Arctic winter close. The physical experience awakens senses that are difficult to express in words but create unforgettable memories (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. "Dancing with Nature" is a New Genre Arctic Art model emphasising a sensitive understanding of nature and the environment. Physical movement serves as a learning process, fostering kinaesthetic bodily knowledge and providing a means of expressing and addressing climate-related emotions. (Photograph 2023 by T. Kervola)

The non-stop workshops provided a space for participants to sit down and discuss as well as engage in play, modification and experimentation with new materials and tools. In the Media Arts room, attendees had the opportunity to play with and program LEGO robots, involving them in various drawing tasks. The robots sparked discussions about the potential future of humans coexisting and collaborating with artificial intelligence and the opportunities it may present. Additionally, a Media Arts installation created by art education students highlighted the extensive plastic pollution in seas caused by human activities.

In Figure 2, there are samples of the participants' opinions and thoughts. On the workshop's common comment board, participants wrote severe and distressing remarks about the situation. The community art workshops offered hands-on work with northern materials. Participants were invited to carve their thoughts and wishes about climate and sustainability onto reindeer antlers. These antlers were assembled into an installation (see Figure 2, photograph 1) resembling the traditional Sami hut, serving as a contribution to the only Indigenous people in Europe at risk of losing their traditional livelihoods due to the various impacts of climate change.

The light painting workshop inspired participants to play and experiment with how light can be captured through photography, forming lines and shapes. Participants perceived light painting's abstract expression as an effective method for processing thoughts and feelings related to climate change – an enormous, abstract phenomenon that is challenging to comprehend. The abstract light paintings served as an expression of their emotions and thoughts. Discussions, seeking solutions and brainstorming about the future were natural components of the workshops.

Figure 2. The event raised awareness of Arctic identity, Sámi culture and the vulnerable northern environment. Photo on the left by A. Lintumäki 2023; photo at the top center by S. Poutiainen 2023; photo at the bottom center by A. Lintumäki 2023; and photo on the right by A. Lintumäki 2023.

The Think Green event culminated by gathering participants' works into a small exhibition, serving as inspiration for further discussion and the final panel. During

this panel, the young people collectively contemplated their possibilities to influence and contribute to a sustainable future. The BRYC subsequently reports the outcomes of the annual event to the Barents Regional Council (BRC). The participants, in agreement during the final panel discussion, emphasised the significance of youth collaboration and networking – an awareness of not being alone as climate activists in the world of adult decision makers.

Reflections on art-based action research at the BRYC event

The creative artistic activities nurtured and expanded participants' thoughts about the topic and supported them in connecting and exchanging ideas in a safe and respectful environment. The workshops also encouraged them to explore their emotions and feelings and to understand and cope with their frustrations and sorrow regarding the catastrophic situation posed by climate change and their future. Engaging in art within ABAR processes can provide new insights into one's inner world and help to articulate experiences, feelings and perspectives more profoundly. In ABAR processes, participants reflect on the process itself and its outcomes, and their own subjective emotions and thoughts leverage the power of art to engage participants on an open but profoundly emotional and creative level, leading to more meaningful insights and potentially transformative latent outcomes. The seeds of change are poised to germinate.

The project primarily focused on art workshops, where artistic procedures and activities were designed to highlight the critical concerns of young people in the Barents region in the context of the climate crisis. Young students leading the workshops, along with young doctoral art educator students and project researchers, participated in young people's discussions as part of their roles as supervisors and co-researchers in the research process (Rättilä et al. 2023). Some of the students will use the event activities and the data collected from their workshops as research data for their theses.

Research-wise, co-researching is epistemologically interesting because it brings out the implicit power relations in research and compels researchers, as well as other participants, to ponder such issues as who holds the power (the final say) in the research and whose voice conveys the scientific "truths". In the research conducted during the BRYC's Think Green event, young participants/co-researchers were regarded as methodological keys, shedding light on their ethnicity or specific subculture/group, its cultural codes and their way of life. According to the core principle of co-research, academic researchers do not possess intellectual superiority or "better" knowledge than other participants or co-researchers, especially on issues related to their own lives. Deploying both ABAR and co-research gradually increases real-time mutual understanding and sharpens participants' interpretative power within the pondering group (Levin 1998).

One of the developers of hermeneutical philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004), distinguished the human ability to understand and interpret things as a natural human characteristic. The skill of understanding and interpreting is essential in the study of human interaction in ABAR and co-researching.

During the workshops, participants reflected on their actions and discussed the process, their feelings and thoughts. They also contemplated the potential impacts of their actions. They delved into issues regarding climate change and how (un)noticed the voice of activist youth truly is in the ears of decision makers and within the wheels of bureaucracy. Their discussion paralleled the findings of studies on how youth voices are heard at the governmental level (see, for instance, Hickman et al. 2021).

Hands-on activities and the safe, confidential atmosphere in the creative artistic workshops steered participants' engagement with sustainability and climate change in more tangible ways. The youths' direct feedback after the workshops was divided between their work in climate activism, contemplation about an uncertain future and creating visual expressions of sorrow, fear and anxiety. Their feelings were not particularly happy or hopeful.

The workshops that served climate activism (such as the artivism stickers and the community art workshop in which participants carved statements on reindeer antlers) were highly appreciated. According to the participants, these platforms, where they could write, carve and design their opinions on the current situation, were inspiring and inspirational. It felt liberating and gave them a sense of delivering a direct message to the world.

The workshops with a more meditative and philosophical approach provoked deep thoughts and memorable feelings. The outdoor workshops, like winter art and the professionally supervised dancing with nature workshop, compelled participants to work at minus 15°C in glistening snow within the vicinity of the university campus. The feeling of freezing wind and snow in one's hands was seen as a metaphoric or symbolic form of co-research in ABAR, where the environment and surrounding physical world were regarded as integral components of the study. The challenging working conditions also reminded participants of the vulnerability of humans when interacting with nature. Nevertheless, despite extreme working conditions, participants said they felt a genuine connection with nature.

The various techniques in the media-based workshops captured participants' interest. The university's equipment, which provided the possibility to learn designing and 3D printing and playing with and modifying robots, was highly appreciated. The light painting workshop provided tools and practical knowledge for using a mobile phone camera to express abstract feelings through photography. According to those who participated in the light painting workshop, the technique was engaging. It provided a means of bringing out something colourful, abstract and somewhat ambiguous from within themselves and their thoughts. Overall, the workshops offered both valuable and new information about techniques and different tools in combination with hands-on work and memorable experiences. New friends were found, and new face-to-face connections were established, which will be of importance in future co-operation.

On the second day of the event, the exhibition of the artworks created by participants served as a catalyst for the panel discussion organised by the BRYC. Four young people were invited onto the panel and the council members hosted the discussion. The panel discussion began with the presentation of each panel participant,

revealing that all young participants were activists with backgrounds in climate and environmental issues. The discussion led to truly revealing and sensitive personal stories about what the daily life of a young activist can be like. The great empathy and dedication for their cause and activism, as well as a burning desire to commit to activism for nature, can have fatal consequences for the activists themselves. Very often, they face adversity not only from adults but also from people their age. They informed the audience that they devote an enormous amount of their time to campaigning for the climate, saving the environment, rescuing the forests and the hills and advocating Indigenous rights. They also described how they often feel alone and experience severe burnout. They mentioned that they do not have time to eat or sleep, and their studies and secure daily life are endangered. The revelations of these young activists left the audience deeply moved and speechless.

The panel discussion reminded us all that, in the end, we are not alone on this planet. Events like Think Green are necessary to bring youth from sparsely inhabited areas together to share their views and discuss their own culture and way of life. As one of the panellists said, "Together, we are stronger!". Another participant admitted that creative activities, such as painting, singing and writing, help her overcome her anxiety about the world's destruction and give her the strength to continue her activism (excerpts from the recorded panel discussion).

Concluding remarks

Artistic works produced in co-research and art-based research processes combine and integrate elements of research and art. This enables the capturing of young people's experiences and provides information about their subjective views on participation and inclusion. The analysis of the material collected at the BRYC Think Green event in Rovaniemi aligns with previous studies on youth participation and consultation. The discussions, interviews and artistic productions (especially the culture-jamming "adbuster" stickers created in the media workshop) expressed a certain amount of distrust toward political decision making. Young people do not have much confidence in their ability to influence climate change, or at least, from their point of view, policy making is very slow to deliver desired outcomes.

On the other hand, the participants, almost without exception, found that dealing with climate-related emotions in a concrete way through art is interesting, anxiety-relieving and, at best, even empowering. Several participants mentioned that they had gained new knowledge about climate change and its impacts, as well as new motivations, ways and tools to campaign against it. For many participants, engaging in hands-on activities, making concrete things happen and expressing their inner world through art was a thought-provoking and captivating new experience. Hands-on activities and emphasising practical tasks help them to understand complex and abstract issues, such as climate change, active citizenship and sociopolitical participation.

From the perspective mentioned above, facilitating participation and involvement through art-based activities is inspired by the idea of social pedagogical strengthening and the notion of critical emancipatory knowledge interest. According to the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas (1968), critical theory, emphasising change and emancipation, seeks to unveil societal power dynamics while emphasising

the significance of equality and equity in societal participation and inclusion. The central idea of Habermas's theory of knowledge interests is to analyse the societal conditions and prerequisites for knowledge and knowing. The purpose of critical emancipation is to liberate individuals from unjust societal conditions. In the BRYC case, that unjust condition is young people's limited opportunities to participate in and influence a matter that is crucial for their future.

People's subjective experiences in their daily lives construct a body of knowledge, and this body is structured into societal knowledge. In critical emancipation, knowledge is conceived as something intrinsically motivated by societal concerns. Critical emancipation aims to unveil social power relations and conditions, thus attempting to pave the way for a change in societal conditions. From this perspective, socially motivated knowledge interests are more fundamental than an interest in "knowledge for the sake of knowledge" (Habermas 1968: 213-214, 348). ABAR and co-research can serve this kind of attempt in which individual participants actively foster dialogue among the group, enhance advocacy and raise awareness, similar to what seemed to happen in the BRYC workshops. Coming together, sharing visions, dreams, concerns and thoughts through dialogue, and making things happen through the arts amplify the active involvement and participation of young people as architects of social transformation and legitimate partners in building a sustainable future. In this ambition, ABAR and co-research have the potential to strengthen human beings as actors with resources, aspirations and a capability to act towards aims and goals (Buber 1999; Therborn 2013: 49).

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Chapter 4

Youth at international climate negotiations: profiles, motivations and impacts

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Introduction

Young people have been prominent climate advocates globally and they are also becoming increasingly visible in global climate politics. They have participated in Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since COP1 in 1995 (see Figure 2 below). The number of youth participants has significantly increased at recent COPs, particularly since 2021: while the average number of youth participants in climate COPs remained at several hundred for more than two decades, from COP26 in 2021 and on, thousands of youth representatives participated in these forums.

Some of the reasons behind the surge in youth participation in the climate movement can be the growing acknowledgement of the consequences of climate change and the emergence of the Fridays for Future movement. After it was initiated by Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish woman, Fridays for Future has become a worldwide youth-led climate movement. Youth climate actions in conjunction with Fridays for Future have emerged in all the Council of Europe member countries (Gorman 2021). The movement's high profile and large follower base have drawn the attention of policy makers and researchers to youth participation in climate politics, especially through youth protests (Neas et al. 2022; Sloam et al. 2022). However, there is still a significant knowledge gap about how youth participate within policy processes, such as the international climate negotiations of the UNFCCC COPs. While recent studies have started to examine the representativeness and participation of youth at the COPs (for example Marquardt et al. 2023; Thew 2018; Thew et al. 2021), we still lack detailed data and information about the profiles and backgrounds of youth participants in these spaces. This chapter attempts to give limited insights into the following questions. Who are the youth participants in international climate conferences where formal negotiations are being held? What are their motivations for attending the conferences and what is their impact on the negotiations?

These questions are especially relevant as the current portrayal of youth-led climate movements and climate activists seems to focus on "white", "well-to-do" youth, particularly from the Global North (Hayes and O'Neill 2021; Yu 2022). While the Fridays

for Future movement has significantly inspired many young people around the world and motivated them to act for the climate, the same movement has contributed to strengthening stereotypes of youth climate activism among the public. Neas et al. (2022) also observed uneven attention on youth mobilisation in the Global North in academia. Youth worldwide, especially those living in vulnerable environments that experience disproportionate effects of climate change, have already been taking action at different levels, showing their interest and capacity to lead climate movements. However, the attention from the media, politicians and even scholars is often given to specific categories of youth, leaving little space for showcasing the work of young people from around the world.

Thus, this chapter looks in particular into the backgrounds of youth advocates attending international climate conferences, by examining the data collected at COP27 and the 17th Conference of Youth (COY17), a youth-focused event held just before COP27. It starts with the methodological framework used for data collection and analysis and then examines the role of youth in climate negotiations, the profiles of youth participants at COY17 and COP27 and their motivations. Finally, we discuss the impact that youth participants had on the COP27 negotiations and propose recommendations to policy makers based on our findings.

Methodology for research into young people's role in international climate negotiations

While conducting a desk review of relevant sources of information, it became clear that there is a lack of data on youth participants in international climate negotiations. The meaning and significance of youth climate movements and their global action are being increasingly discussed (Marquardt et al. 2023; Thew et al. 2021; Yona et al. 2020), but it is rare to find analyses based on aggregated data on youth participants within international processes. Thus, primary data-collection methods that can fill this gap were chosen.

The data for this chapter were collected at COP27 and COY17. These events were held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November 2022 and were attended by more than a thousand youth participants.[2]

The first step towards identifying youth at COP27 was making a systemic inventory of youth participants. YOUNGO, the official youth constituency for the UNFCCC limits their individual membership to people up to 35 years old and organisational membership to youth-led or youth-focused organisations. As the participants' ages are not officially disclosed, however, we used the following proxies to find youth participants in the official lists of COP participants published by the UNFCCC Secretariat counting as youth participants :

- Organisations and individuals that have keywords related to youth in their conference registration information;

2. To reflect the direct voices of youth participants in these climate conferences, one youth organiser of COY17 co-wrote this chapter with two researchers. Additionally, one co-author attended COY17 and COP27 to observe youth participants on site and conduct semi-structured interviews and two surveys. This way, we tried to reflect youth participants' direct voices in these international climate change processes.

- YOUNGO members;
- Organisations admitted to UNFCCC as youth organisations;
- Organisations accredited to the UN Environmental Programme as youth organisations;
- Organisations and individuals that have youth-related keywords when referred to in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin's UNFCCC COPs coverage.

Twelve keywords were selected for identifying youth participants on the official participant lists as well as in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin. Those keywords are "youth", "young", "student", "child", "scout", "boy", "girl", "kid", "jeune" (young in French), "étudiant" (student in French), "joven" (young in Spanish) and "jugend" (youth in German). When the names of organisations, sub-organisations, departments or positions included one of those keywords, we counted the participants as youth participants. We excluded student participants from the host countries of COPs, assuming that those participants attended the COPs for educational purposes rather than for youth representation (see more details in Orsini and Kang 2023).

In a second step, the registration information of COY17 participants was used to analyse the aggregated profile of youth participants at the event. The information was submitted voluntarily by the participants during their application process to the COY. The registration information data was first anonymised and accessed only for the relevant data for this chapter.

Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 86 youth and non-youth participants at COY17 and COP27. These interviews were undertaken to inform the Youth Earth project. Among them, seven interviews conducted with 10 interviewees (including YOUNGO members, national youth delegates, NGO participants and a young journalist) were directly used for this chapter. Other interview results were used as background information. The interviewees' names have not been disclosed in this chapter unless they explicitly agreed to have their names mentioned in our research.

Finally, we circulated two online surveys during and after COY17 and COP27 via direct contact with the participants at the venue or social media networks (LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram). While the survey for COY17 participants was in English as it was the event's official language, the survey on COP27 was distributed in English and French to reduce the language barrier for non-English-speaking participants. Twenty-six participants from COY17 and 33 participants from COP27 responded to the surveys. Among this total, 45 respondents answered the free-format question regarding their motivation for participating in the conferences. We acknowledge the limited generalisability of the survey and interview results due to the relatively small number of respondents. The findings of this chapter, therefore, might not be generalisable to all young people taking part in climate advocacy, but they do give us a glimpse of the motivation of this sample of youth participants in international climate politics.

Profiles of youth participants at COY17 and UNFCCC COP27

Characteristics of youth at COY17

The Conference of Youth (COY) is an annual event that takes place before each climate COP. It has been taking place since COP11 was held in 2005 (United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children Youth and Climate Change 2010). The COY is often organised for two to three days near the COP venue by YOUNGO, the official youth constituency of UNFCCC and local youth organisations. The purpose of the COY is to provide a space for young people to build their capacity ahead of the COP and ensure that their voices are featured in international climate negotiations. This is done through: capacity-building workshops on the effects of climate change; skill-building workshops on fundraising, public speaking, etc.; cultural exchange opportunities; and development of a policy document or a position paper representing young people's voices (COY17 2022).

The most substantial output at COY – a position paper – is compiled by YOUNGO, based on the consultations organised with young people through local and regional COYs in different countries before the global COY. This document presents young people's demands on various topics related to climate negotiations and it is delivered to the decision makers at the COP so that they can consider it in the process of climate negotiations. At COY17, the Global Youth Statement was produced based on a compilation of the outcomes from 81 local COYs and seven regional COYs (YOUNGO 2022). In the process of local and regional COYs, youth can engage within local as well as regional climate policies, which is another purpose of the COY's process. Some demands from young people were included in secondary COP decisions as well.

At COY17, held in Sharm el-Sheikh between 2 and 4 November 2022, 1 101 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 were registered as official participants (Table 1). According to the registration forms, the majority of participants came from Africa (52.50%), followed by Asia (26.25%), South America (7.90%), North and Central America (6.45%), Europe (6.36%) and Oceania (0.54%). As COY17 was held in Egypt, it is not surprising that African participants were the majority of participants. However, it is interesting that the number of participants from Asia and South America exceeded that of Europe or North and Central America, which are generally considered the Global North. One reason behind this is the relatively lower threshold for attending COY rather than COP for young people without UNFCCC accreditation. Youth from the Global South with fewer resources for obtaining UNFCCC COP badges use COY as a window for participating in global climate politics.

In total, there were slightly more male participants (51.68%) than female participants (46.87%). While more male participants than female participants from Africa attended COY17, there were more females than males from all other regions except for Asia, which had a balanced gender ratio. We find a large number of young women at COY17, as is the case also with climate movements in general, but we must also be aware of the social and cultural factors that affect their participation and impact the gender ratio across different regions.

Table 1. COY17 delegates by regions and gender

	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Total	Percentage
Africa	238	337	3	578	52.50%
Asia	142	143	5	289	26.25%
South America	52	34	1	87	7.90%
North and Central America	41	27	3	71	6.45%
Europe	38	27	5	70	6.36%
Oceania	5	1	0	6	0.54%
Total	516	569	14	1 101	100%
Percentage	46.87%	51.68%	1.49%	100%	

Zooming in on the origin of COY17 participants, the dominance of African and Asian countries in the event is evident. Table 2 presents the countries that provided 20 or more youth participants. There was a strong presence of youth from West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Senegal) and South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal).

Table 2. COY17 participants by country

Country	Total
Egypt	101
India	53
Nigeria	36
Pakistan	35
Senegal	26
Nepal	23
Bangladesh	21
Cameroon	21
Ghana	21
Morocco	21
Chad	20
DR Congo	20
Kenya	20

The dominant presence of Africa and Asia at COY17 can be partly explained by the event location, which was more accessible from these regions. However, the geographic proximity cannot be the sole reason for their prevalence, especially given that most COY participants had to pay their own participation costs. Table 3 shows that the majority of youth participants received only partial funding from the organiser (accommodation only), meaning that they had to pay for their own transportation and meals. Also, 16.71% of the participants were self-financed

without any financial support from the COY organising team. Additionally, young people frequently encounter difficulties with visa approval when they try to attend international conferences, and COY17 was no exception. Indeed, Thew (2018) has pointed out that financial and administrative constraints are generally observed for most youth participants at COPs. Such a situation is exacerbated for many from the Global South. Nevertheless, participants from the Global South had a strong presence at COY17.

Table 3. COY17 participants by funding status

	Self-funded	Partially funded	Total
Africa	137	441	578
Asia	21	268	289
Europe	11	59	70
North and Central America	9	62	71
South America	6	81	87
Oceania	0	6	6
Total	184	917	**1 101**
Percentage	16.71%	83.29%	**100.00%**

A similar conclusion can be extracted from participation data for the Virtual COY held in August 2021 before COP26. This event imposed fewer constraints on attendance in terms of material and administrative requirements for participants. Most of the participants in the Virtual COY were from African or Asian countries (see Figure 1). These findings imply that youth in the Global South are as enthusiastic as those from the Global North, if not more so, in terms of engaging in climate politics.

Figure 1. Origin of the participants at the Virtual COY in 2021 (Source: YOUNGO, www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=120578883640555andset=pb.100079967021969.-2207520000)

Affiliation and gender of youth participants at COP27

According to the Youth Earth inventory built on the above-mentioned proxies, the number of youth participants at COP27 was 1 634, a record high compared to previous COPs (Figure 2). As Figure 2 indicates, youth representation at UNFCCC COPs significantly increased at COP26. Compared to COP25 where 686 youth participants attended, the number more than doubled at COP26 in Glasgow, reaching 1 336. While the majority of those participants were affiliated with NGOs, it is notable that the number of youth participants within governmental delegations also increased.

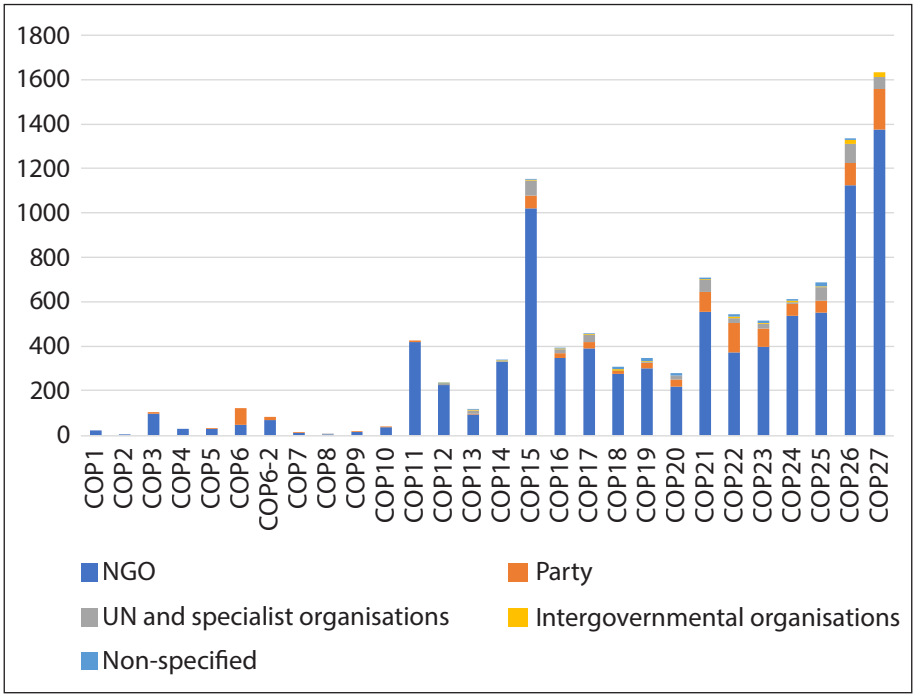

Figure 2. Number of youth participants at UNFCCC COPs

Focusing on COP27 youth participants, the gender and affiliation of participants were analysed based on their registration information (Table 4). First, in terms of gender, nearly 60% of youth participants were female, whereas 39.5% were male. In terms of affiliation, most youth participants in COP27 were affiliated with NGOs. The second largest number of youth attended the conference within party delegations. Meanwhile, youth representatives from the United Nations (UN), specialist international organisations and intergovernmental organisations were the least numerous. As NGO representatives are given observer status at COPs, most of the youth participants had no access to closed meetings where critical issues were negotiated. Instead, youth affiliated with NGOs organised side events and bilateral meetings with party delegates to deliver their claims outside the negotiation rooms. Consequently, the majority of youth participants had limited influence on the negotiation process.

Table 4. COP27 youth participants by gender and affiliation

	Female	Male	X (unspecified or other)	Total
NGO	833	538	3	**1 374**
Party	108	74	2	**184**
UN and specialist organisations	30	22	/	**52**
Intergovernmental organisations	13	11	/	**24**
Total	984	645	5	**1 634**

However, the increased number of youth participants at COP27 as party delegates (Figure 2) indicates that national governments are increasingly recognising the need and value of youth participation within the negotiation rooms, and that young people are also becoming more aware of their need to engage through such channels. At COP27, there were 184 youth participants with party badges, and this was the highest number of youth participants with party badges on record. For example, at COP26, there were 100 youth party delegates, up from 55 at the previous COP. Interestingly, the countries with the largest number of youth delegates within their national delegation were mainly from the Global South (see Table 5 – countries with four or more youth delegates in their national delegation at COP27). Many West African and small island countries ranked high in the number of youth participants registered as party delegates. However, we need to be cautious about whether the meaningful participation of young people from all regions in negotiations was guaranteed, as being present at the conference does not always mean meaningfully participating in the decision-making processes.

Table 5. Countries with four or more youth party delegates at COP27

Country	Number of youth participants registered as party delegates
United Arab Emirates*	37
Liberia	14
Benin	6
Burkina Faso	6
Niger	6
Gambia	5
Marshall Islands	5
Bahamas	4
Canada	4
Mexico	4
Mongolia	4
Palau	4
Solomon Islands	4
Togo	4

*The United Arab Emirates was the host country for COP28.

While we do not have the exact information on the non-party participants' regional distribution at COP27, the Youth Earth inventory implies that active youth participants at UNFCCC COPs do not only come from the Global North. The official lists of participants do not include nationality information. However, we counted the number of youth participants who attended COPs five times or more since COP1 in the Youth Earth inventory and searched for their profiles online. Among 43 youth participants counted in the analysis, the number of participants from Africa was as large as those from North and Central America (12 people each), followed by Europe (8), Asia (6), South America (1) and Oceania (1). This result indicates that the active engagement of African youth at COPs is not just a recent phenomenon.

Is there a Global North bias in youth climate movements?

The analysis of the profiles of COY17 and COP27 youth participants shows that while there is a widespread assumption that climate change concerns youth who are mostly "white" and "well-to-do" from the Global North, youth from the Global South had a strong presence at both conferences. Also, Global South countries have actively institutionalised youth participation in their national delegations, as can be seen in the number of COP27 youth party delegates. These findings indicate that the recent popular image of youth in global climate politics probably does not appropriately reflect the willingness and voices of young people from the Global South. Our findings also resonate with previous criticism about the "exclusionary narratives" in favour of specific youth (white activists from the Global North) when covering youth climate activism, while youth in the Global South, Indigenous youth and youth of colour have been historically proactive in environmental movements (Bowman 2020; Haynes 1999; Hunt 2022; Sloan Morgan et al. 2023).

Meanwhile, the gender balance of COY17 differs from previous studies, which found more participation of female youth in recent youth climate movements in the Global North (de Moor et al. 2020; Fisher and Sohana 2021; Kang and Orsini 2023; Knops 2021). It implies the need for more investigation into the social and cultural conditions behind youth participation in different regions. Also, more support for female African youth participation opportunities in international climate conferences might be necessary to achieve gender balance in regional youth participants, and acknowledgement of existing activism.

The motivations of youth participants at COY17 and COP27

The second query we had about youth participants at COY17 and COP27 concerns their motivations for attending those international conferences.

After a qualitative assessment of the answers to our online surveys, we identified eight categories of motivations and coded the answers accordingly: 1) networking; 2) strategic learning; 3) raising public awareness about climate change; 4) gaining knowledge; 5) representing young people's voices; 6) representing their country; 7) expressing prior interest in environmental issues; and 8) advocating environmental protection in the negotiations. When more than one motivation was detected in the same answer, we coded several categories.

The most frequent answer from the survey respondents from both events was their prior interest in environmental protection, followed by networking, gaining knowledge, advocating and raising public awareness (see Figure 3). The number of answers regarding strategic learning, representing the voice of young people or their own country was relatively smaller than other answers.

A small difference in the proportion of answers between COY17 and COP27 respondents was also detected. While COY17 participants were interested in networking and gaining knowledge, COP27 youth participants were more motivated by raising public awareness, expressing their prior interest in environmental issues and advocating environmental protection in the negotiation process. As COY17 was a youth-focused event, not for making decisions, COY17 participants did not have a strong motivation for strategic learning, representing the voice of young people or their country in the event.

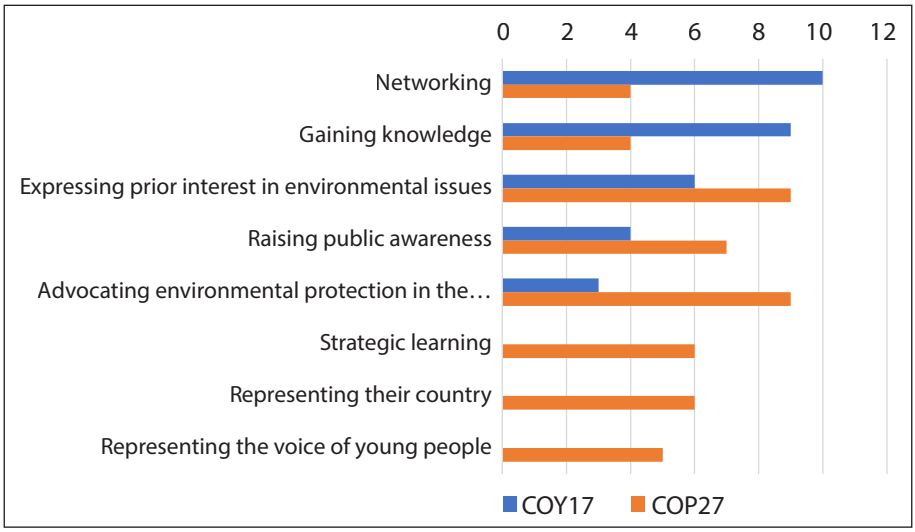

Figure 3. Motivations of youth participants attending COY17 and COP27

The survey respondents' answers indicate that youth participants at these international climate conferences are well aware of the purposes of these events and their roles within them. Unsurprisingly, youth are primarily motivated by their prior interest and concerns about climate change, but they attend the events for other reasons, too. At COY17, a youth-focused event, participants concentrated on getting to know fellow youth climate activists and learning from each other about local or regional activities. Meanwhile, youth participants at COP27 aimed to demand from policy makers ambitious environmental protection policies and deliver messages to the public through their own activities at the COP.

Youth impact at COP27

This section looks at the impact of youth participants on COP27 based on three indicators: i. the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan; ii. youth-relevant programmes during the COP27; and iii. interviewees' responses.

The first indicator is how young people were referred to in the main COP27 decision: the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan. The plan mentions "youth" 11 times, "children" seven times, "young people" once and "intergenerational equity" twice (Gulugulu and Shekhar 2022). There was a slight increase in the number of mentions of children and youth compared to the Glasgow Climate Pact at COP26, which mentioned "youth" 10 times, "children" five times and "intergenerational equity" once, although it must be acknowledged that such a change is marginal and cannot be taken as implying a greater impact by young people on climate negotiations. The main COP27 decision also specified how children and youth could be included in decision-making processes. Following COP26, it was the second time that COP decisions referred to youth as an important agent of climate policy implementation processes, and the level of acknowledgement of youth within the decisions has been strengthened. Article 87 of the plan mentions children and youth as "agents of change" in climate change actions and encourages parties to include children and youth in "designing and implementing climate policy and action" as well as to consider "including young representatives and negotiators into their national delegations". This article was particularly prominent compared to previous COP decisions because children were mentioned in addition to youth as agents of change in decision-making processes.

The second indicator is the institutionalisation of youth participation at the COP. Many youth-relevant programmes were put in place for the first time at COP27. This has been the case for the Children and Youth Pavilion. Pavilions are built by parties, international organisations or NGOs in order to communicate their positions to COP participants, and they signify that there is a designated space for a specific group to organise events and meetings. Furthermore, a COP President Youth Envoy was appointed by the COP27 presidency for the first time (Modéer et al. 2023). The Youth Envoy promoted youth participation in the preparation of COY17 and COP27, often representing youth voices in mass media and official meetings. Additionally, the first youth-led Climate Forum was held during the COP and attended by high-level policy makers (Modéer et al. 2023). This one-day conference was organised on Youth and Future Generations Day to address climate mitigation and adaptation issues in an intergenerational manner. The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan (Article 88) acknowledged those changes and encouraged "future incoming Presidencies of the Conference of the Parties to consider doing the same" (UNFCCC 2022). All these changes show the strengthened institutionalisation of youth participation at the COP.

Third, the enhanced recognition of youth at COP27 was also noticed by the youth participants themselves. The majority of 86 interviewees whom we met at COY17 and COP27 were of the opinion that the voice of youth in climate politics has increased. Those who attended more than one COP said that they could feel enhanced attention from non-youth participants compared to previous COPs. Of all the pavilions surveyed by UN1FY (2022), the youth constituency of the Water and Climate Coalition, 65% ran youth-relevant activities during COP27. At the same time, many youth participants expressed concerns regarding the risk of "youth washing" and tokenistic approaches at COPs. For example, the Children and Youth Pavilion was crowded almost all the time during the COP, with several visits from high-level politicians and mass media. However, instead of a meaningful dialogue, many of the politicians' visits lasted for a short time, followed by group photo-taking sessions.

Despite the signs of growing youth impact at climate negotiations, it is increasingly essential to question whose voice is heard among over a thousand youth participants at these international climate conferences. The proportion of the Global South youth was not smaller than the Global North youth during COY17 and COP27 as we showed above, but many youth participants had a common opinion that major media attention often went to youth from the Global North, in a disproportional manner, as can be seen in the case of Vanessa Nakate being removed from the photo in Davos in 2020 (Evelyn 2020). Such recognition led some European youth participants to refuse to conduct interviews with us when we approached them. Instead, they recommended fellow youth from the Global South for our interviews, pointing out that their fellows' voices were not gaining proper attention from the media and the public.

We also observed a disconnection between youth who participated as party delegates and as NGO representatives at COP27. Although this phenomenon was not specifically applied only to youth, the gap between party and non-party youth participants was deeper than that of non-youth participants. This is because many youth participants attended with observer badges and they do not have established networks with party negotiators, being newcomers to the COP negotiation process. The youth participants inventory (see Methodology section) supported this field observation, showing that 8 233 out of 9 163 youth participants from COP1 to COP27 had attended the event only once. At the same time, most national youth delegate programmes provide COP participation opportunities only once or, at the most, twice during the term, which limits the delegates' network opportunities with non-party participants. According to our interviews with several national youth delegates to COP27, youth delegates with party badges were also advised not to participate in action and protests during the COP as such actions could be contradictory to their parties' official positions and practices. Consequently, communication between party and NGO youth participants was weak during the negotiation period, and it was hard for youth from NGOs to approach party delegates without extraordinary effort, except in some designated sessions such as bilateral meetings. This situation is ironic given that the number of youth participants and attention to youth voices have increased, largely due to youth climate activism outside the negotiation rooms.

Conclusion

Based on our findings and analysis of youth participants at COP27 and COY17, it can be concluded that youth participants in international climate conferences are more diverse than is usually reported about the youth climate movements worldwide: many youth participants from the Global South attend international conferences despite financial and administrative constraints. It was found that such a strong presence is linked to their motivation, which starts from their regional, national or local engagement in climate politics. Most of the youth participants interviewed were already active at different levels, ranging from working within the established systems to taking part in climate action and protests. They organised local and regional COYs, led the Fridays for Future movement or founded their own NGOs to address climate issues. Their participation in COP27 and COY17 was, therefore, often motivated by the need for more advocate action at higher levels and networks beyond their own communities.

While youth participation is increasing in international climate politics, more effort needs to be made for fair and meaningful participation of youth. In order to achieve such a goal, there are several points to consider, particularly for policy makers at national, regional and international levels.

First, proper recognition of the willingness of young people from the Global South to learn and participate in climate politics is required for fair support and attention to their contribution. Our findings show that youth from the Global South have a strong will to attend and speak up at international conferences. However, their active participation receives relatively little attention in the decision-making process or the media, compared to Fridays for Future or other youth-led initiatives in the Global North. Therefore, the high number of Global South participants does not lead to their impactful participation in the COP negotiations. It is important to institutionalise the inclusion of their voices in the decision-making processes. Ensuring that young climate activists from the Global South are rightfully recognised in climate negotiations and in the global media would not only make their participation fair but also encourage more youth around the world to participate in climate actions.

Second, meaningful participation of young people as a whole should be promoted, which includes increasing their participation in decision making. In this context, the focus could be put on youth delegates within national delegations: more and more programmes are being created to empower and bring youth to decision-making tables (such as the Youth Negotiators Academy's Young Negotiators Programme and the Climate Reality Project Latin America office's "Juventudes Embajadoras por el clima" programme), but youth delegates' activities are still marginal during the negotiations because of the limited time dedicated to working with them (and most of the youth delegates attend the COP only once). Consequently, their roles are often limited to experience sharing or network building with their peers. Support for the meaningful participation of young people, particularly from the Global South, and recognition of their contribution, could be strengthened, so that their voices could be heard more and their presence made more visible in international climate politics.

Finally, it would be beneficial for climate policies to encourage youth-led activities from local to international levels by providing material and financial support. The COYs at local, national, regional and global levels are organised voluntarily by those who are willing to contribute to the policy-making process. The outcome of annual COYs, such as the Global Youth Statement, suggests the degree of their expertise and commitment to climate politics. However, financial support for youth-led events often does not cover all the cost of the events and participants' travel, as we can see that most of the participants received limited funding for their travel to COY17.

Youth participants attend climate negotiations with clear motivations such as advocating climate protection and raising public awareness. The importance of youth participation in climate politics is increasingly recognised in COP decisions. Now, it is necessary to pay attention to whose voice is heard and how youth can engage more meaningfully in international climate politics, while avoiding the risk of youth washing and tokenism. When the willingness of youth around the world for climate action meets adequate support, the synergy could bring transformative changes to our society, which are urgently needed now.

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Section II

The role of the youth sector in the response to the climate crisis

Chapter 5

Youth work and climate emotions

Panu Pihkala

Introduction: climate emotions and anxiety

> "As youth workers we can and should create more empathetic, human spaces where we can address the difficult (not necessarily negative) emotions that come with the ecological degradation of our planet."
>
> So, I ask him what methods he uses: "Theatre of the oppressed, body movement, game-based learning, gestalt exercises … These tools can facilitate personal growth, connecting with others and taking responsibility with regard to social and ecological issues."
>
> And does it work? "It's difficult to measure results objectively but I believe that If we help youngsters to connect with their bodies and emotions, they will better cope with all these ecological issues and we will see amazing results." (Youth worker Adrià Sonet, interviewed in Buj 2021)

The climate crisis evokes many kinds of emotions and feelings: these are broadly called climate emotions (Pihkala 2022b). Young people have been found to report climate emotions more than other age groups (see for example Hyry 2019; Minor et al. 2019), probably due to many reasons. While there is always diversity among young people, many of them care deeply about climate matters, because these affect their futures so strongly. Especially since the year 2018, new forms of youth climate activism have emerged, and climate emotions have been spoken about openly in many forms of this activism (see for example Diffey et al. 2022; Fine et al. 2023). Climate matters are a major part of the world in which contemporary youth live and people working with youth have special opportunities to help them encounter climate emotions constructively.

The most often discussed climate emotions have been climate anxiety (also called climate distress) and climate grief, but several others have received significant attention, such as guilt, anger, worry and hope (see for example Brophy et al. 2023; Coppola and Pihkala 2023). Fundamentally, there can be numerous kinds of climate emotions, corresponding to the scope of emotions in general (Pihkala 2022b). Furthermore, even a single emotion can function in different ways in different situations: emotions are not simple and climate emotions cannot simply be divided into good and bad ones (Chapman et al. 2017; Kurth and Pihkala 2022). For example, instead of trying to define whether pride or guilt is essentially more motivating for pro-environmental behaviour, it is important to study the contextual dynamics of these emotions, since both can sometimes be motivating (Adams et al. 2020).

Climate emotions can differ in relation to temporal length, intensity and people's consciousness about what they feel. There can be long-time moods and short-lived but intense emotions or "affects" (Hamilton 2020). For example, a person may feel a general sad mood because of the changes that climate change brings, and during this mood there may emerge feelings of anger, guilt or even occasional enthusiasm. Sometimes people are more conscious of their climate emotions and sometimes people feel the emotions in their "bodyminds" without being aware of them (the concept of "bodymind" refers to the intimate connections between body and mind; for further discussion on this, see Semetsky 2013).

Climate anxiety and distress are wide-ranging concepts which can be used in various connotations. Sometimes they are used as umbrella terms for difficult emotions and mental states which are significantly affected by climate issues (Clayton 2020; Pihkala 2020a). In more nuanced usage, they refer to more strictly defined anxiety and/or distress, but even these concepts are wide-ranging. Anxiety can manifest itself as "practical anxiety", which helps to react to potential threats (Kurth and Pihkala 2022), or as a strong and paralysing anxiety (Taylor 2020). There can be various levels of distress (Pihkala 2024a) and low moods and depression are also closely related phenomena (Budziszewska and Kałwak 2022). Thus, there is a need for critical analysis of the ways in which various commentators use these kinds of concepts, and various kinds of usage in the context of young people may have different ethical and practical implications (Pihkala et al. 2024). For example, environmentally active young people themselves have criticised overly pathologising interpretations of climate anxiety (Diffey et al. 2022).

Sometimes people use the concepts of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety as synonyms, but many scholars, including myself, have argued that it is important to separate these: there can be eco-anxiety which is not strictly related to climate change. Thus, climate anxiety is a major part of eco-anxiety, and climate emotions are a major manifestation of eco-emotions (Marczak et al. 2023a; Pihkala 2022b).

Broadly, eco-anxiety and climate anxiety are related to the process of trying to relate to and adjust to the socio-ecological state of the contemporary world (Hickman 2023; Pihkala 2022a). This is a psychological task for people of all ages, but it is a pertinent developmental task and a psychosocial challenge for contemporary young people (Vergunst and Berry 2021). In previous research, based on wide-ranging literature reviews, I have argued that coping with eco-anxiety and ecological grief requires: a) opportunities for some kind of positive action; b) grieving losses and engaging with tasks of ecological grief; and c) self-care and sometimes distancing oneself from the ecological crisis so that one can replenish one's resources (Pihkala 2022a). All these happen in a relational manner; it is not simply an individual process.

Young people would benefit from information about these kinds of processes and they need social support and trustworthy adults who can support them in such processes. This, however, requires that adults themselves engage with their eco-emotions and attitudes. The processes of supporting young people with their climate emotions are thus intertwined with processes of supporting those who live and work with youth (Hickman 2020; Laine 2023).

In this chapter I will discuss the implications of climate emotions for young people and youth work on the basis of interdisciplinary research and practical experiences. I have personally participated in designing surveys for the study of climate emotions (Hickman et al. 2021; Hyry 2019; Pihkala et al. 2022) and in the analysis of interviews of young climate activists (Coppola and Pihkala 2023). I have studied ways in which eco-emotions could be engaged with in education (Pihkala 2017; 2020b) and I have worked as an adviser on related projects in the education and social and health sectors. Together with colleagues, I have designed and led various kinds of workshops on the topic, both with young people and youth workers. Compared with other countries, there has been much work around climate emotions in Finland, and I will introduce practical projects related to youth work and climate emotions from Finland. While these projects have provided important experience, it must also be acknowledged that my position as a white Finnish male, born in 1979, affects my interpretation of the world and a variety of perspectives are needed. Personally, I have tried to learn from marginalised and Indigenous perspectives both in Finland and internationally, and I am part of the international network Existential Toolkit for Climate Justice Educators (Existential Toolkit for Climate Justice Educators 2020).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. After the introduction to climate emotions given above, I will discuss four important aspects related to climate emotions: their connections with action, well-being, ethics and democracy. Next, empirical research about climate emotions is briefly introduced, after which I move towards practice. Several methods of working with youth climate emotions are discussed, such as naming emotions, providing validation and recognition, reflecting on various factors which shape climate emotions and various ways of coping with them. The concept "youth worker" is used broadly to mean both professional and volunteer youth workers and other people who work with young people either full-time or part-time using non-formal methodologies.

Four aspects of climate emotions: action, well-being, ethics and democracy

Many researchers have been interested in the relationship between climate emotions and action. Furthermore, climate emotions are part of the complex dynamics related to young people's well-being, their ethical views and issues around democracy.

Emotions are related to information and motivation, and thus their connections to any action are profound. Research has shown the relevance of climate emotions for pro-environmental behaviour but also the high complexity of related phenomena. Simply feeling a certain climate emotion does not yet lead to certain behaviour: also included are other factors such as values, levels of efficacy and opportunities for action in a given social and economic context (Chapman et al. 2017; Innocenti et al. 2023). Overly simplistic notions related to climate emotions and action do not respect the complex life worlds of young people (Coppola and Pihkala 2023; Hickman 2023), and nuanced study of climate emotions is very important in research about youth climate activism (Walker and Bowman 2022).

The links between emotions and well-being are also complex. It is well established that if negative emotions are not encountered constructively, this can decrease

well-being and affect functionality (Barrett et al. 2016). This is evident in relation to strong forms of climate distress (Heeren et al. 2022), but there can be many different emotions included in such phenomena, such as internalised guilt or complicated grief (Pihkala 2020a). On the other hand, many emotions can increase a felt sense of well-being, such as feelings of empowerment and togetherness experienced in environmental activism (Landmann and Rohmann 2020). Climate emotions are not simply negative or positive in relation to well-being, but what is elementary is how various emotions are engaged with (Ojala et al. 2021).

Ethical issues around climate change can evoke many kinds of emotions, but a feeling of injustice is especially common among young people. More specifically, this can include emotions such as indignation, moral outrage and anger (Antadze 2020; Bergman 2023). Climate change evokes complex questions related to the responsibility of both individuals and collectives, and feelings of guilt and shame are a major part of the spectrum of climate emotions (Bryan 2020; Jensen 2019). Many climate emotions are moral emotions: they are related to ethical behaviour and norms (Kurth and Pihkala 2022; Mosquera and Jylhä 2022).

Climate emotions are related to issues around democracy in several ways. First, climate emotions are present in young people's views about intergenerational relations and research shows that many young people feel a lack of recognition from adults for their climate attitudes and emotions (Galway and Field 2023; Hickman et al. 2021). Second, issues related to democracy in climate matters can themselves evoke climate emotions in young people, such as indignation or enthusiasm (Knops 2021; Piispa and Kiilakoski 2022). All this can have significant implications for democracy and intergenerational relations.

Fundamentally, emotions help people to engage with various events they encounter. For example, feelings of sadness and grief help people to engage with felt losses: both to process changes and to learn to cherish what remains (Greenspan 2004; Solomon 2004). However, both individuals and collectives may have negative attitudes about either emotions in general or about certain emotions in particular. Sadness/grief is a poignant example of this: researchers have long noted that there are profound challenges in industrialised societies in engaging constructively with sadness (Horwitz and Wakefield 2007). When sadness in general is challenging, then climate sadness or grief is even more so, because it is a newer phenomenon and climate issues include many social and political contradictions (Cunsolo and Landman 2017; Goldman 2022).

Research results about climate emotions

Research about climate emotions is now growing fast, but there is a need for much more research and various contextual studies. In relation to youth climate emotions, we know much more about certain European countries than others. In relation to youth workers and climate emotions, there is very little research in general yet about the topic. Some pioneering youth workers have created methods for engaging with climate emotions (Buj 2021), but the emotions of youth workers themselves are an unknown area. There is some literature about climate emotions of climate experts (Jovarauskaite and Böhm 2021) and about the implications of climate emotions for

fields such as psychology and therapy (Budziszewska and Jonsson 2022) or social work (Lysack 2009). In the broad field of environmental education, including education for sustainability and other sub-fields, there is a longer research tradition about ecological emotions (Ojala 2007; Zeyer and Kelsey 2013), and that research is in many ways relevant for youth work.

In 2021, together with an international team led by therapist and researcher Caroline Hickman, we studied the climate emotions and cognitions of 10 000 young people, aged 16 to 25, from 10 countries worldwide (Hickman et al. 2021). Several European countries were included. The results show that young people feel many kinds of difficult climate emotions and that they are in general very disappointed about climate inaction by the governments of the world. The democratic implications are strengthened by the fact that 39%, a global average, of young people reported to having been felt dismissed or ignored by others when they have tried to speak of their climate concerns.

Table 1: Climate emotions self-reported by 16-25-year-old Europeans, 1 000 respondents in each country (Hickman et al. 2021)

Table 1														
	Sad	Grief	Afraid	Anxious	Depressed	Angry	Helpless	Powerless	Guilty	Ashamed	Despair	Hurt	Optimistic	Indifferent[1] [PPP2]
Finland	54	58	54	49	33	48	54	47	43	38	49	25	26	30
France	64	45	67	50	22	60	51	68	51	48	49	31	23	18
Portugal	71	23	71	60	39	59	33	58	54	39	37	34	22	15
United Kingdom	63	35	62	60	36	55	55	55	53	51	41	41	25	26
Notes														
Words for emotions sometimes function slightly differently in different languages, such as grief and depression. This might explain, for example, the strong difference among Portuguese respondents between recognition of sadness and grief.														

National and regional studies in Europe also show the wide existence of climate emotions among youth. In Finland, we conducted a national survey about climate emotions in 2019, and the youngest respondents reported, on average, more climate emotions than the older ones (Hyry 2019; Sangervo et al. 2022). The annual Finnish Youth Barometer of 2021 included several questions about eco-emotions. Some 59% of Finnish youth had discussed climate anxiety during the last six months, in one way or another. As much as 76% answered yes to the question about whether they have felt sad about biodiversity decline and extinction of species. Over a third, 35%, reported having felt inadequate in their climate behaviour, but 75% reported having

felt good when they have engaged in pro-environmental behaviour (Pihkala et al. 2022). All this testifies to the strong presence of environmental and climate issues in the lives of Finnish youth, even while there is diversity among them.

Especially stronger climate anxiety has been studied in various European countries, such as Portugal (Sampaio et al. 2023), France (Mouguiama-Daouda et al. 2022) and Italy (Rocchi et al. 2023). However, many researchers have argued that various methods are needed to explore also milder but significant forms of climate anxiety (van Valkengoed et al. 2023; Wullenkord et al. 2021). Research about various climate emotions is growing, and new measures have been proposed. Ágoston and colleagues studied climate anxiety, grief and guilt in Hungary (Ágoston et al. 2022a, 2022b), while Marczak and colleagues developed a measure of eight climate emotions and explored that in Poland, Norway and Ireland (Marczak et al. 2023a, 2023b). There is a need for more research that takes into account the complexity of climate emotions and the various factors that have an impact on young people's climate emotions and their attitudes towards them.

Factors affecting climate emotions

Many kinds of factors affect young people's experiences of climate emotions. Crandon and colleagues have studied socio-ecological modelling of these factors and listed them as follows.

- Individual factors, such as physical vulnerabilities, temperament, psychological traits.
- Microsystem factors, such as attitudes and experiences in relation to climate change by family and peers.
- Mesosystem factors, such as school, workplace and/or community attitudes and experiences in relation to climate change matters.
- Exosystem factors, such as the character of media coverage of climate issues, government action or inaction in climate politics, societal divides or unity in climate matters, opportunities for young people to participate in the formulation of climate policies.
- Macrosystem factors, such as cultural background, spirituality/religion.
- Ecological factors (Crandon et al. 2022).

When working with youth climate emotions in a given country or region, these kinds of factors need evaluation so that the phenomena can be better understood. Climate emotions are relational phenomena (Kałwak and Weihgold 2022) and they are connected with political and social factors (González-Hidalgo and Zografos 2020).

Disciplines such as sociology of emotion, social psychology and psychosocial studies can further help to understand the various dynamics of climate emotions. Scholars point out that there is a need to evaluate emotion norms and social discourses around climate emotions (Neckel and Hasenfratz 2021). There may be social endorsement of certain climate emotions, such as hope, and discouragement of others, such as grief. Sociologist Norgaard noticed already in the early 2000s in her fieldwork in Norway that there can be "socially constructed silence" around climate issues and climate emotions (Norgaard 2011). People felt for example sadness about losing

snowy winters, but did not speak about this openly. Sometimes people themselves are not fully aware of what they feel: unconscious climate emotions may sometimes be noticed by psychologically skilled observers such as therapists (Hoggett 2019). People often need a safe space and a prompt to recognise what they feel, and various ways in which youth work can provide these are discussed next.

Various contextual factors and intersectional justice issues can have a strong impact on both climate emotions and their display. For example, some youth are more impacted by climate change, and some have more social capital to engage with their climate emotions. Gender, race and social status all impact climate emotions and dynamics around them. For example, some young people who do not identify as men have reported more climate emotions in Finnish studies (Hyry 2019; Pihkala et al. 2022). The climate emotions of people who suffer from oppression may be on average different from those commonly experienced by other, more privileged people: for example, anger, disappointment and powerlessness may feature even more strongly among youth who suffer from oppression (for further discussion, see Sasser 2023). One special group comprises young people from Indigenous backgrounds. For example, Sami youth from northern Europe often feel strong climate emotions because global warming threatens their culture's traditional ways of living, such as reindeer herding (Jaakkola et al. 2018).

Youth work and climate emotions

It is important to emphasise that youth workers already have many skills that they can use to support youth with climate emotions. Simply being there for young people, sharing time with them and listening to them is helpful. Many traditional issues in youth work, such as listening when they want to talk about future plans and career choices, are highly important in relation to climate issues and emotions. Youth workers can help young people to see that very many kinds of tasks can help in building more caring societies: explicit environmental work and action is one important part of this, but there are many possibilities.

In addition to general support, it is important that youth workers have the skills to engage with climate emotions both proactively and reactively. Proactively, youth workers can provide information about climate emotions and at the same time create atmospheres where these topics are valid, which helps youth to talk about climate emotions when they need to. Various kinds of skills can be educated proactively. Reactively, youth workers need skills to respond to climate change-related events and news which touch the young people they work with. Examples of these kinds of triggers include local climate change-shaped events, such as unusual weather phenomena or even natural disasters, and global news such as the publication of a new and alarming climate science report.

It is highly important that youth workers gain organisational support and peer support for working with climate issues and climate emotions. Support and understanding from supervisors is important, but this is not always available, and sometimes a few youth workers need to function as gradual changers of paradigms in their organisations. This requires determination and it is crucial to find at least some trusted peers. Networking with people and organisations from other fields, such as psychology

and environmental education, can be very helpful. At least online support is always available from related organisations (Climate Psychology Alliance 2023). Related websites offer various materials and activities, and some of them are introduced next.

Naming and recognising emotions

One very important method in working with youth and climate emotions is learning to recognise various different emotions and to name them. Research has shown that these abilities help people in many ways: emotions can then be talked about and it is easier to direct their energies individually. This dynamic has been observed in general in the literature about "emotional literacy" or "emotional intelligence", and it seems crucial in relation to the socially contested terrain of climate emotions (Hamilton 2022; Ojala 2022).

One useful tool for this is the climate emotions wheel. It was produced by an organisation called Climate Mental Health Network and since it is partly based on my earlier research (Pihkala 2022b), it was natural for me to participate in its formation.

Source Climate Mental Heath Network (ClimateMentalHealth.Net)

Figure 1. Climate emotions wheel

The wheel can be used to explore one's own emotions and it can help people to notice different emotions that others feel. There are practical resources available for doing different activities with the wheel (Climate Mental Health Network 2023). For example,

the wheel can be used for self-reflection, in small groups and in educational settings. The objects of various climate emotions in the wheel often have differences: for example, in the "Positivity" segment, the emotions are most often related to climate action, not to climate change itself.

Another easy-to-use but powerful activity is using the mind map of eco-emotions, which has been used in several countries (Pihkala 2020c). The simple act of intuitively writing down one's eco-emotions or more specifically climate emotions often results in new self-information for people. It is preferable to do this with a pen and paper, because of the connection between the hand and the brain, but technical devices can also be used and sometimes this is important in relation to accessibility.

In Finland, we have also used eco-emotion cards – "Ympäristötunnekortit" – in workshops with young people (SLL Kainuun piiri 2021; the deck is being translated into English at the moment). Such a deck of emotion words and special eco-emotion words, such as "solastalgia", can be used in many ways: for example, as a warm-up activity where people pick up cards, or as a more extensive activity where people build common or desired sequences of eco-emotions with the cards ("solastalgia" is a neologism which refers to loss of solace and feelings of nostalgia because of environmental change; this form of ecological grief was coined by Glenn Albrecht; see Albrecht et al. 2007).

All these methods provide public recognition for the existence of various climate emotions. There is thus a dimension of validation in these activities.

Two examples of projects from Finland

Two practical projects from Finland can be used to describe methods of working with climate emotions among young people and to give ideas for possible local adaptations of similar methods.

From 2019 to 2021, the educational project "Toivoa ja toimintaa" ("Hope and action") developed resources for emotionally sensitive environmental education. Justice issues and globalisation were important themes, but special attention was given to climate education. The project was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and run by the Finnish Association of Biology and Geography Teachers (BMOL ry). The co-ordinator of the project was experienced climate educator Pinja Sipari. Two experts were hired part-time to develop materials and participate in facilitating workshops: myself and Eeva Kemppainen. The main target group were teenagers between 13 and 19 and their teachers (Toivoa ja toimintaa 2020).

The project had two major emphases: emotion-related activities and participatory action. New kinds of activities around eco-emotions were developed, both self-reflection and group activities. Videos were produced to help educators and students to engage with the topic. In workshops, teachers were invited to reflect on their own eco-emotions and they were encouraged to discuss the topic with their students. One such session is described in the supplement to my article about eco-anxiety and education (Pihkala 2020b), and similar kinds of workshops can be used to introduce climate emotions to youth workers.

The project is also a good example of the close connections between formal education and youth work. Formal education often adopts learning methodologies such as volunteering or place-based education which are really close to youth work. These are especially important in relation to subjects such as climate emotions, where outdoor methods can be very useful and the methodology in general needs to be dialogical, empowering and learner-centred (Marks et al. 2023; Pihkala 2024b). Engaging with climate emotions is thus a subject area where co-operation between formal education and youth work is much needed, and some youth work methodologies might prove to be paradigmatic in dealing with these issues.

"Ilmasto-ajatuksia" ("Climate thoughts") was a project led by the youth work development organisation Nuorten Akatemia (Youth Academy) and funded by Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto in 2020. (Ilmastoajatuksia – Opas nuorisotyön ilmastokasvatukseen 2020). In the project, climate emotions and attitudes in youth work were surveyed and guidelines for constructive engagement with the topic were produced via interdisciplinary co-operation. Together with Pinja Sipari, I participated in the project's steering group and we also channelled experiences and methods from the "Hope and action" project to this one.

A short guide about working on climate change with youth was produced, including a section on climate emotions. The major areas of emphasis in the guidebook and in the project were as follows.

- Providing trustworthy information about climate change and youth, including climate emotions.
- Normalising climate emotions and discussions about climate matters in youth work spaces.
- Encouraging youth workers to:
    a. reflect on their own climate emotions and attitudes;
    b. utilise the skills that they already have, such as listening and providing safe spaces for this topic area;
    c. be good role models for youth in relation to climate matters and climate emotions.
- Providing guidelines for constructive climate discussions with youth.
- Opening people's minds to various possibilities for climate action.

In both projects, the dynamics of both individual/small group climate action and the sociopolitical need for structural change were discussed. One aspect of this is that at least in Finland, there can be a tendency in youth work to focus too much on singular actions, such as recycling in youth spaces, at the expense of structural and political aspects of climate action.

The activity involving the mind map of eco-emotions was used in both projects, and educators and youth workers were encouraged to use the activity with young people, if the conditions were suitable. The youth workers who participated in the pilot sessions for the "Climate thoughts" project were encouraged to spread the message throughout their regions.

There was no actual research about the impacts of these projects and the study of such influences is always difficult. Feedback from the sessions was generally very

positive, but naturally the participants were volunteers, and in the workspaces there was the challenge of engaging with workers who have more distanced attitudes to climate matters.

Activity: reflecting on factors that affect climate emotions

In the "Hope and action" project in particular there were various self-reflection activities for educators in relation to eco-emotions and their social dynamics. The following is a new activity which can be used to analyse dynamics around various climate emotions both in relation to youth and people working with youth. This can be used either as a way to plan future work and take contextual matters into account, or even with youth themselves in an applied form.

There are several possible ways to do this in practice. First, the organiser(s) should themselves think about the reflection questions. Then one option is to do so with a group of youth workers. With youth, the focus can be on just some of these dynamics, or then there can be several sessions which focus on various aspects and complement each other. Having a graphic figure which names various dimensions and includes empty spaces next to them can be a handy tool (see for example the figure in Crandon et al. 2022). With audiences, it is important first to introduce the topic and provide the rules for a safe space.

Societal and cultural level

- How does our culture affect a particular emotion in general (for example, cultural attitudes to displays of anger) and this emotion within the context of the climate?
- Has there been public discussion about this climate emotion in our country? If so, in what way? Has the emotion been profiled as simply positive or negative?
- What kind of media coverage is there about climate change and climate emotions and what are the impacts of this media coverage? Is "solutions journalism" available?
- Are there social groups or minorities in our country who are especially strongly impacted by climate change and thus experience a lot of climate emotions?

Local community

- Are climate emotions spoken about in our community? And if so, in what tone and manner?
- Are there safe spaces for engaging with climate emotions (with psychologists, for instance)?
- Are there young people whose social or ethnic background makes it difficult for them to engage with their climate emotions in our community? How does my background affect my role in this regard?

Local environment

- Does climate change already show in our local environment? If so, in what ways? What kinds of emotions do these changes evoke?
- Do these changes directly affect some youth in our community?

Education

- In relation to youth, what kind of education has there been about climate change? Has there been any education about climate emotions? What kind of additional information and skills would people need?
- In relation to youth workers, has my education included learning about: a) climate change; b) climate emotions? What kind of additional information and skills would I need? Where could I get that from?

Institutions where people study or work

- What kinds of attitudes and norms are present in relation to climate change and climate emotions?
- Are these issues talked about in public? If so, in what way?
- Is talk about climate emotions possible only for people from some social and ethnic backgrounds in our institutions?

Family and peers

- How has my childhood family influenced my eco-emotions and the norms I feel in relation to them?
- How do my social groups and peers influence my eco-emotions?

Personal history and temperament

- How does my personal history and temperament affect: a) my emotions in general; and b) my eco-emotions in particular?
- What kinds of relations with ecosystems and various species have shaped my environmental identity and how? How does this history impact my eco-emotions?

Coping with climate emotions

It is highly important to give information to youth and youth workers about ways in which climate emotions can be coped with constructively. In the best circumstances, these kinds of methods can be tested and learned in practice, but this requires facilitators and trainers, which then requires preparation and usually funding (unless they are willing to do this pro bono, as some psychologists have). Below, important aspects and methods are briefly introduced.

Attitudes towards emotions. There is a need for an emotion-positive attitude: understanding that emotions fundamentally serve life, even while there can emerge various problems in relation to emotions (Greenspan 2004). Youth workers can in many ways advance this kind of attitude, for example by the ways in which they talk about emotions and by being living examples of grounded persons who both feel things and are capable of dealing with emotional energies.

Advancing emotional literacy. These issues, which have been discussed above, also help with coping with emotions. The ability to discern various emotions is sometimes called emotional granularity.

Supporting youth to understand social dynamics and difficulties around climate issues and emotions. Climate issues often generate social tensions. It is important to help youth discern why this is so and to provide them with the social skills for negotiating tensions.

Embodied and cognitive methods to engage constructively with emotions and distress. This includes anxiety management skills and other psychological skills, about which there is much literature available. Methods include abilities to calm down and focus on breathing, embodied methods such as conscious trembling or pushing a wall for a couple of seconds, and mindfulness. General psychological literature can be utilised here, but with the condition that the cause of the anxiety or distress is taken seriously: climate anxiety is not just over-exaggerated anxiety sensitivity (Doherty et al. 2021). Youth workers can make these forms of literature or website links publicly available and can recommend them to any young people who need them.

Outdoor methods. Being outdoors is not a simple thing in relation to eco-emotions, because seeing natural things can remind people of ecological problems and cause distress. However, therapists have argued that there are many potential benefits for eco-emotions via outdoor work, if difficult emotions are engaged with wisely (Buzzell and Chalquist 2009; Rust 2020). The broad fields of eco-psychology, ecotherapy and environmental education offer many methods for this.

Creative and art-based methods. Emotions are holistic phenomena and thus holistic, creative methods can be very helpful in engaging with them. There is a wide range of possible methods here, for example painting, creative writing, making music, drama and dancing (Lehtonen and Pihkala 2021). Youth workers often have skills in various creative methods and they can provide spaces for young people to make art out of their eco-emotions.

Integrative methods. Many effective methods combine many of the aspects above. One example is the eco-psychological method "Work that reconnects", developed originally by Joanna Macy, Molly Young Brown and colleagues. This method combines arts, embodied methods, group discussions and other tools so that people can draw strength from gratitude and encounter their difficult eco-emotions (Macy and Brown 2014). Some European youth workers have used these methods for climate emotions (Buj 2021). For encountering environmental damage, the Radical Joy for Hard Times movement and activity includes an interesting methodology (Johnson 2018; Radical Joy for Hard Times 2023).

Learning to identify cases where people need strong support for their climate anxiety, distress or depression. While most climate anxiety/distress seems to be moderate, at times there is a real danger of breaking under the weight of distress (Marks and Hickman 2023). People with many vulnerabilities are more in danger, but even privileged youth may feel strong climate anxiety/distress/depression. There are anecdotal reports of suicidal behaviour where climate crisis has been reported by youth as the cause (Brown 2021). Together with psychological professionals, youth workers need to monitor these situations when they can.

Supporting youth to find life paths where they feel able to make a positive impact. Youth often wrestle with issues related to climate responsibility and efficacy. Youth workers can help them to see that many kinds of life paths and career choices can be linked with environmental ethics (see the work of Sandra Horea as described in Buj 2021).

Concluding words

I will bring together key messages from this article by using two memory lists: one related to key topics and tasks for research, and one related to possibilities for youth workers.

Memory list: research about young people, climate emotions and youth work

There is a need to learn about and critically analyse:

- climate emotions felt by young people;
- public discourses and attitudes about youth climate emotions, including various emotion norms in various youth groups;
- the role of contextual factors and various intersectional justice issues in relation to climate emotions;
- climate emotions felt by people working with youth;
- attitudes of people working with youth about a) youth climate emotions; b) climate emotions in general; and c) about their own climate emotions;
- ways of coping constructively with various climate emotions and their combinations in a given context, including various methods for youth work.

The following are recommendations for youth workers who wish to help youth with climate emotions. They are based on a reading of interdisciplinary research and various psychological recommendations on the topic, as well as practical experiences in Finland and the United States.

Memory list for youth workers about working with climate emotions

- Making a determined decision to learn more about young people's climate emotions.
- Thinking about various factors that affect different youth in the region in relation to climate emotions (social status, gender, race, etc.).
- Committing to self-reflection: how do I feel about climate change and how does that affect my work with youth and climate issues?
- Seeking peer support and, if necessary, other support.
- Remembering that one needs not to be perfect: a sincere intention and attentive listening will already help youth.
- Providing resources for youth to:
    a. learn to recognise and name climate emotions;
    b. analyse how contextual factors affect climate emotions;
    c. cope with difficult climate emotions such as anxiety and grief;
    d. think about a wide array of methods for climate action.
- When possible, facilitating discussions about climate emotions in a safe manner.
- In relation to youth climate activism, using resources such as Hickman's and Pihkala's process models to help youth see the importance of seeking balance and practising self-care/community care and to realising that mood changes are natural.

- Exploring possibilities for art-based and outdoor methods in relation to climate emotions.
- Committing to transforming to less carbon-intensive habits, and being a role model in a way that is contextually possible.

Youth workers have many opportunities to function as important facilitators and supporters amid a growing climate crisis. At their best, these activities also support the youth workers themselves.

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Chapter 6

Redefine and re-engage: the role of the youth sector in empowering young people to advance just climate action

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Illustration by Coline Robin

About the study

Youth-led initiatives have been pivotal in bringing climate change to the forefront of the political agenda. Due to the interconnectedness of global economies and environmental degradation, this chapter highlights the need to advocate systemic shifts in the approach to the climate crisis. With a focus on equitable climate action,

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the study probes the depth of the youth sector's contributions to the climate justice agenda and explores the degree of empowerment young people feel in addressing climate issues.

This chapter highlights multiple obstacles and constraints, including gaps in knowledge, limited funding and resources, inflexible funding systems, shrinking civic spaces and fear of retaliation. Addressing these issues could enhance the effectiveness of youth-led climate initiatives. We argue that despite numerous challenges, youth work has an important role to play in shaping a sustainable future. It emphasises the potential of young people to drive meaningful and enduring change in the fight against the climate crisis.

Introduction

> Youth must be politicized and empowered. Most importantly, youth must have the will and the capacity to transform things … [climate change] is not an environmental issue alone; it is an issue that is deeply social, ethical, political and cultural.
>
> (Margarita Declaration on Climate Change, 2014)

As inheritors of a planet burdened by environmental challenges, young people are not regular stakeholders; they serve as key catalysts for transformative climate action. As youth activist Greta Thunberg points out, "If solutions within the system are so impossible to find, then maybe we should change the system itself?" (UNFCCC 2018).

Grounded in pursuit of systemic change, we aim to address the deep interlinkages between how global economies function and their interrelatedness with environmental degradation, shifting the focus from climate action to climate justice. We acknowledge that the pursuit of just climate action is a multifaceted undertaking, intricately interwoven with broader societal concerns. Therefore, in this chapter, we go beyond the confines of environmental discourse to explore the interconnectedness with domains such as social justice, economic equity and collaborative efforts across continents.

The study highlights the ways in which youth work and the youth sector aim to enact just climate action in order to preserve the planet. Drawing inspiration from the narratives of grass-roots movements and Indigenous activists, this chapter endeavours to redefine the prevailing narrative surrounding youth involvement in climate action and put it in a wider context. Informed by literature, a survey, expert interviews and focus group discussions, the study addresses the main barriers that youth workers and organisations face on a macro level. These include tackling discourses based on "extractivist" views of nature, which are rooted in neoliberal logic that discards other "ways of knowing".

The chapter highlights the needs of youth workers and youth leaders who aim to advance just climate action: meaningful inclusion of youth in policy and decision making, ensuring a safe civil space and sustainable funding, and addressing inequalities within Europe, as well as globally between the Global North and the Global South. We argue that only by enacting a holistic approach can the youth sector be sufficiently

empowered to significantly contribute to advancing just climate action, propelling society towards a more equitable, just and sustainable trajectory.

Research perspectives

Towards systemic change

The 2019 Lancet Countdown report (Watts et al. 2019) has illustrated that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect young people, impacting them both physically and psychologically. Consequently, this motivates young individuals to take action and advocate intergenerational justice and meaningful inclusion in policy and decision making.

Yet many scholars have argued that this is not enough and requires a transformation of the system overall. There are many possible ways to achieve such change. Morrison et al. (2022) describe six types of radical interventions, which range from immediate and short-term approaches to long-term and transformative changes. The latter include interventions that tackle asymmetrical power relations, the lock-in of exploitative and extractive systems and the neoliberal economic systems that underpin them. Meanwhile, short-term and "tactical interventions", such as civil disobedience and protests, aim to raise awareness of the need to address root drivers. They can create powerful social movements (Fridays for Future) that increase the pressure for a more fundamental shift.

The large-scale global youth climate strikes, in particular, have raised global awareness since 2018 (Gorman 2021; Neas et al. 2022), demonstrating that youth have transformative potential. Nevertheless, it is justified to question whether youth work and the youth sector in general are contributing factors to the needed systemic change. Skott-Myhre (2005) highlights that youth work risks losing its revolutionary potential and becoming rather complicit in the current systems:

> Each time that we offer a course in job skills without including a section that explains the exploitative nature of youth employment within multinational corporations, we are complicit in the continued exploitation of these youth. When we provide youth workers to corporations that do not pay benefits and offer a non-living wage, without offering classes on labor organising, we are complicit with the status quo.

Thus, the question remains: does youth work effectively encourage young people not only to adopt sustainable practices like recycling and reducing plastic use but also to grasp wider social and economic issues? According to Skott-Myhre (2005: 142-143), much of the revolutionary potential of youth work (such as street-based services and community-based programming) has been lost and has ended up "appropriated as mechanisms of control and capture in which youth are seduced into contact with 'helping professionals'" and then subsequently rehabilitated as dutiful citizens of late-stage global capitalism.

Although the aforementioned study focused on the transformation of youth work in general, the same principle could be extended to climate action, highlighting the importance of not merely promoting environmental practices but also fostering an understanding of the broader social and environmental issues at play. This sentiment

is echoed in the work of Sukarieh and Tannock (2015: 27), who highlight that positive youth development and youth participation can be easily used to present a facade of engagement with radical, grass-roots politics but in fact fosters a generic and benign set of designated youth skills and competences. However, it may not provide enough support for young people to shift the status quo. That is why, we argue, it is not possible to reach environmental well-being without addressing climate justice, which requires recognition of global perspectives and interlinkages.

Although European countries have been actively engaged in climate action and youth climate movements, it is important to emphasise that an international perspective is needed to address climate change effectively. The global nature of climate change affects all countries, regions and communities, regardless of their geographical location (IPCC 2018). While the European Union has been pursuing the most ambitious climate policy objectives of the major economies (Oberthür and Dupont 2021), determining the future trajectory of global emissions requires international co-operation. Climate change does not respect borders; its consequences can affect distant regions and international co-operation is necessary to address issues like transboundary air pollution and the displacement of climate refugees. An international approach allows for a diversity of perspectives and experiences to inform these solutions. The youth climate movement is also a global one, with activists from various countries and regions advocating climate action. Solidarity and collaboration among European youth and young people from all parts of the world can play a significant role in building a robust and united front and setting equitable, collective targets and frameworks. Therefore, the study aims to highlight the experiences and opinions of youth workers and youth policy experts from both Europe and worldwide.

Climate justice: towards social transformation

> If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is tied up with mine, then let us work together. (Indigenous activist Lilla Watson)

In essence, climate justice is a social movement that "uses social justice to frame the issue of climate change" (Stapleton 2019: 734) in order to challenge the "extractivist" neoliberal and neo-colonial logic as the root cause of the problem. In a further refined definition, the Center for Climate Justice at the University of California describes climate justice as a process that recognises the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities and marginalised groups around the world. By seeking solutions to address the root causes of the climate crisis, it also addresses a range of social, racial and environmental injustices, thereby calling for systemic change.

The notion of climate justice is not limited to academia but has been translated into policies and political statements as well. For example, Resolution 2307 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2019) on the legal status of "climate refugees" recognises that the "industrialised member states of the Council of Europe carry a particular responsibility to the countries of the global South" affected by human-made climate change and has called for enhanced co-ordination, mediation and funding with non-European partners.

However, climate-induced injustices not only occur between countries of the Global North and South but also affect marginalised communities within the Global North, who, despite typically contributing fewer greenhouse gas emissions, bear the most of the burden (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014). For example, research conducted by the European Environmental Bureau (2020) found that European policy making has so far not adequately addressed the needs of marginalised communities, enabling a scenario in Eastern and Central Europe where:

> Roma [people are]... disproportionately affected by environmental burdens, such as pollution and environmental degradation stemming from waste dumps and landfills, contaminated sites, or dirty industries. The consequences are devastating health impacts ranging from infectious diseases to mental health issues.

Climate change also disproportionately impacts the indigenous Sami community in northern Europe, and they continue to be excluded from policy making. Anni-Sofia Niittyvuopio, an activist representing the Youth Council of the Finnish Sami Parliament, said: "We have traditional knowledge, and we have the solution for stopping climate change. But governments don't want to use them because they don't see it as profitable", and she emphasises that the "indigenous [communities] are not heard in the conversation" (Hermann 2021).

In general, it is more challenging for minorities and Indigenous people to tackle and cope with climate change because it is another layer on top of the already existing discrimination that they face (Baird 2008). In addition, certain ways of interpreting and understanding the world have been dismissed and "othered" in the current neoliberal economic system and understanding, which views nature as an entity dedicated for resource extraction and exploitation. This is:

> working against the natural balance of life – as evidenced through severe impacts such as climate change, biodiversity decline, ecosystem degradation, water pollution and shortage, and poor health of people – increasingly disconnecting people from the land and from each other (Cameron et al. 2021).

Therefore, in addition to the inclusion of the perspectives of youth in Indigenous perspectives,[4] there is also a need to recognise multiple "ways of knowing" (Shallwani and Dossa 2023) and use them to define the strategies for solving climate change (Cameron et al. 2021).

Youth participation in climate policies and action

The current political climate is scarred by declining levels of trust in governments and their ability to solve complex problems (Schlosberg 2019). In this context, young people are often portrayed as apolitical or as politically disinterested, which has resulted in the dismissal or downgrading of their political actions (Kiilakoski and Piispa 2023; Pickard 2022). Pickard (2022) shows that this misleading interpretation

4. Indigenous knowledge systems are not monolithic. Some commonalities include deeper connection and understanding of nature (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005).

has become established because younger generations tend to make less use of traditional channels for political participation, such as voting, than their older counterparts.

When considering a more comprehensive view of political involvement, encompassing activities like participating in protests or signing petitions, it becomes evident that youth political engagement is, in fact, on the rise. This phenomenon has been described as the "paradox of youth participation" (Crowley and Moxon 2017: 16) and is substantiated by the large-scale global climate protests that have taken place since 2018 (Gorman 2021; Neas et al. 2022). The shift of young people towards practice-based movements is strongly linked to the lack of authentic and inclusive democratic processes and output (Schlosberg 2019), as well as the sidelining and silencing of young people in policy and decision making Gorman (2021).

In the realm of climate action, individuals are motivated to engage in climate activism for a multitude of reasons, ranging from personal experiences to broader societal and structural influences (Piispa and Kiilakoski 2022; Wahlström et al. 2019). Studies on the climate protests in 2019 revealed that young people were driven by instrumental as well as political motivations. For example, Martiskainen et al. (2020) found that the strongest motivation shared by most climate activists is concern for the planet, environment and climate, along with a desire to influence public opinion and policy. Other (less strong) reasons include broader societal motivations like solidarity, social justice and anti-capitalism stances. Direct experiences of the consequences of environmental degradation have also acted as powerful motivators.

Impact-wise, some studies have argued that young people have been more successful in mobilising than influencing policies. For example, Kenis (2021: 142) notes that youth climate strikers in Belgium "were highly successful in terms of mobilising large numbers of people and succeeded in putting climate change at the heart of the public agenda for months on end; [however] it subsequently declined without leaving many tangible results". While the direct and causal political outcomes may have been limited as the necessary systemic change has so far failed to materialise, the discourse around climate change has changed, and attention to it has increased, exposing the global passiveness to act and uniting several groups behind the cause (Han and Ahn 2020; Neas et al. 2022: 6). Additionally, Gorman (2021: 21) cautions against measuring the impact of the climate strikes only with a focus on policy change as "expressive motivations indicate that youth participation in the strikes lies somewhat outside of conventional political participation's emphasis on institutional engagement for policy change". Further impact of climate strikes might be additionally hindered by its former perception as social unrest, with Crowley and Moxon (2017: 25) revealing in their study of youth participation in decision-making processes that "youth activism and protests" are seen as non-legitimate and threatening forms of participation and that "public authorities prefer other, more traditional forms of youth participation". However it should be noted that the perception of youth climate protests has evolved over the years and gained legitimacy within the conventional policy-making processes.

Regardless of the mixed impact assessment, it does not seem that youth climate action plans will cease. This chapter aims to explore how youth workers and youth

leaders understand equitable climate action and what they identify as the main barriers. We raise two key questions: First: has youth work and the youth sector been successful in empowering just climate action in Europe and worldwide? Second, drawing inspiration from narratives of grass-roots movements and Indigenous activists, expert interviews and focus group discussions, we ask: what is necessary for youth work and the youth sector to be sufficiently empowered to significantly contribute to advancing just climate action?

Methodology

The scope of the study

Initially, the study was designed to encompass regional trends and nuances while maintaining a balanced representation within Europe. However, a climate justice perspective underscores the need for a broader, intersectional and global approach when examining climate change and emphasises that climate change mitigation efforts should be worldwide and inclusive of historically marginalised and less culpable regions in terms of climate challenges (Schlosberg and Collins 2014). Consequently, the study extended its outreach to include global communities of practice as depicted in Graph 1. These communities, while not based in Europe, actively engage in, co-organise and collaborate on projects with European counterparts in climate-related fields. This expansion serves to address the existing research gap, which has predominantly focused on youth climate action in Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Neas et al. 2022).[5] Overall, the research study has garnered participation from diverse geographical regions, reflecting its inclusive approach and capturing multiple regional perspectives. To ensure European views are adequately represented, this study filtered and compared responses from Europe with those from partner regions. The findings reveal substantial similarities within the global community of practice.

This study does not aim to provide "ultimate truths" or conclusive answers. Instead, it should be viewed as an exploratory investigation that identifies specific trends and highlights experiences within the youth sector's community of practice. We acknowledge that by focusing on youth practitioners and policy makers actively engaged in youth work or affiliated with youth organisations, this study might overlook perspectives that could offer more critical insights. We have noted typical limitations inherent in qualitative research, such as a limited number of responses, English-language barriers and the potential challenges with ensuring digital access, and find that expanding the scope and advancing this research in subsequent studies would be a worthwhile pursuit. The gaps in existing academic research will be addressed later in the study.

5. The research gap between the Global North and Global South is not only limited to studies related to youth climate action but also extends to youth studies in general. "The implications ... are that much theorising and literature assume a universality of experiences, understandings, values and aspirations that ignore ways of knowing, being and understanding that emanate from the Global South" (Wood 2023: 170).

Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. The first phase employed an analysis of secondary published sources, including academic articles and policy recommendations from the Erasmus+ Worldwide consultation (2022) project. This encompassed participatory research methods and acknowledged the expertise of individuals with first-hand experience of youth work and climate action, empowering young people as active agents in shaping research. The second phase included both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. The quantitative component relied on a survey that included a combination of open-ended and closed questions, capturing respondents' demographic information, skill development, feedback on experiences and activities they have been involved in.

Phase 1 secondary analysis – participatory research

This research study builds upon insights garnered from the Erasmus+ Worldwide consultations,[6] engaging over 50 young participants in discussions on youth movements and climate justice, youth access to funding and youth participation in local and international governance. The consultations involved capacity-building workshops where young individuals took the lead in co-developing policy recommendations in their respective areas.

Originating as a global dialogue, the Erasmus+ Worldwide consultation brought together young individuals from Europe, Africa and Asia, including diasporic youth of African and Asian descent. This diverse assembly worked within different topic-based teams to identify challenges and needs related to enhancing youth engagement in local and global governance, addressing climate justice issues and ensuring funding is accessible for youth initiatives. These insights were developed through online capacity-building workshops, which informed subsequent policy recommendations. To ensure rigour, the recommendations were reviewed during an online public consultation, allowing for feedback from the working teams and other stakeholders active in the youth sector.

Building upon the outcomes of this comprehensive process, the current study homes in on the empowerment of young people in advancing just climate action, exploring the accompanying challenges and opportunities. Recognising the interconnected challenges within the climate and youth sectors, the study adopts a broad perspective, incorporating insights from experts not only in Europe but also from around the world.

Phase 2 analysis – primary research

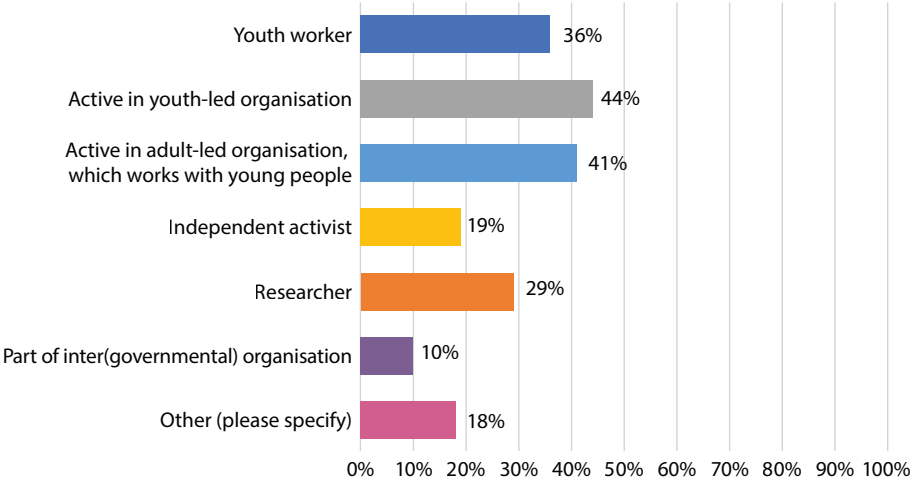
Primary research used a mixed-method approach involving qualitative and quantitative data.

6. Two of the authors of this study (Neringa Tumėnaitė and Richard Francis Apeh) were engaged in the development and execution of the Erasmus+ Worldwide consultation.

Survey – The quantitative component, the survey, received responses to 17 questions from 78 members of various communities and organisations involved in youth and climate policy as well as youth work (see Graph 1). The survey was shared across the social media channels of Erasmus+ Global Partnerships, Erasmus+ Worldwide and the research team, as well as in the WhatsApp groups of young people, including those meant to co-ordinate action and share information surrounding the UN Climate Conferences COP27 and COP28, starting 9 September 92023. The vast majority of responses were collected by 13 November 2023, with a few additional responses received up to 29 January 2024.

A substantial portion of respondents are active in youth-led organisations or adult-led organisations that work with young people (44% and 41% respectively) or are youth workers (36%). Among "others" were occupations such as respondents who run "home ed co-ops", "healing arts" practitioners and a young person with "strong political and ethical views" who takes part in demonstrations. This represents a wide range of experiences and a set of interpretations of what constitutes climate action.

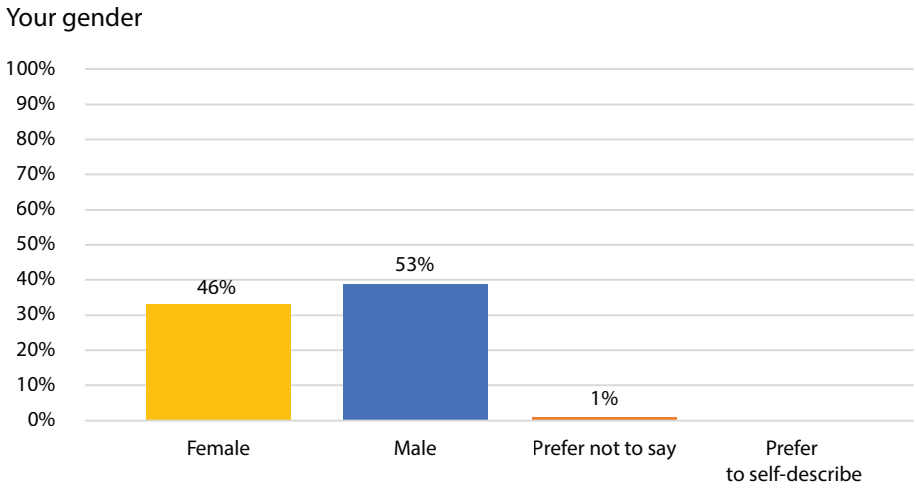
Which of the following describe your profile? (Please choose all that apply)



Graph 1. The profile of survey respondents (globally)

The survey respondents had quite a diverse geographical distribution across predominantly four regions: 33% (n=26) were based in Europe, 36% (n=28) in Sub-Saharan Africa, 13% (n=10) in the Middle East and North Africa and 10% (n=8) in Asia.[7] Overall, the survey had a slightly higher participation of men, constituting 53% (n=41) of respondents.

7. A few respondents were from South America, North America and Oceania (8%, n=6). Their responses are reflected in the overall statistics ("globally"), and included in the regional comparative analysis jointly under "Other".



Graph 2. The gender of survey respondents (globally)

Focus group – The qualitative component involved an online focus group discussion with nine members who consented to participate anonymously, having indicated their interest through a survey form. They were presented with the findings of the survey and assisted the research team in interpreting them. The focus group experts were selected randomly by inviting the people who expressed their interest in taking part in the survey. At the end of the survey, the respondents were asked if they would be interested in taking part in a discussion with the researchers, and if they answered "yes", they could register via a new link to ensure anonymity. Additional invites were sent out to the delegates of the partner organisation, UNITED for Intercultural Action.

Individual expert interviews – In parallel, two co-authors conducted individual semi-structured interviews with eight experts, and each interview lasted about half an hour. These experts were selected through a process of selective sampling, based on their areas of work (NGOs, activists, policy makers) as identified by the research team. The responses from these interviews were then transcribed and the research team organised the responses into themes that emerged during the analysis.

Findings: challenges and impact of youth work

Think local, act global in both action and policy

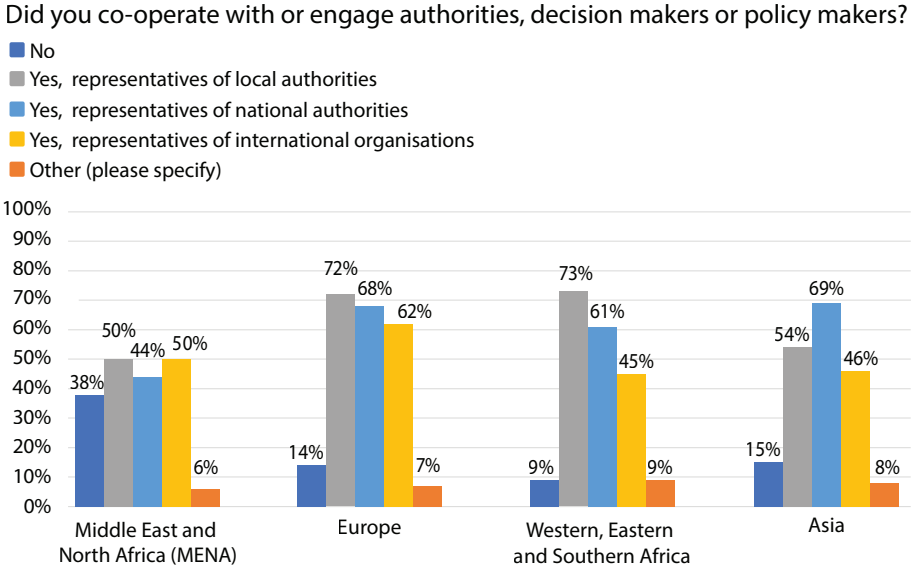
As part of the survey, respondents were asked about their contributions to climate action and whether this included organising projects on this topic. The survey revealed that out of those who initiated projects, a substantial 72% (n=56) had ensured an interregional or international dimension. This high percentage underscores the globalised nature of youth initiatives, suggesting a tendency to cross borders, both figuratively and literally, to create change. In contrast, 28% (n=22) of the initiatives were solely local or national in scope. These focused on more

region-specific challenges, catering to local needs and demographics. Such widespread international collaboration among the majority of initiatives lends credence to the observation that modern youth are globally connected. The rise of digital platforms and technological advancements has facilitated this interconnectivity, allowing young individuals to easily engage, collaborate and share ideas on an international scale (Pickard 2022).

This not only amplifies their voices but also enriches their initiatives by pooling diverse experiences and insights from across the world. One of the interviewees, Olaf Scheepers, a member and chairperson of the European Youth Parliament, expressed similar views on the need for both local action and global co-operation:

> I feel that more local action will definitely have a strong impact, like what the youth can do in their immediate surroundings and their neighbourhood is very important. But for some of these larger issues, there is simply no way that everything can be tackled at local levels; there needs to be robust platforms for international co-operation among youth activists and policy makers. Climate change is a global issue, and so we absolutely need international co-operation and a combined effort to keep pushing forward.

In terms of co-operation with public stakeholders and decision makers, the majority of survey participants self-evaluated as being highly proactive and successful in their outreach. However, not all areas of participation had been deemed equal: on average, most of the co-operation with authorities, decision makers or policy makers happens on a local (60%, n=46) and national level (48%, n=37) and only 36% (n=28) include international co-operation. Overall, the self-reported co-operation with international organisations was highest in Europe, while co-operation with local authorities was notably strong in both Europe and Western, Central, Eastern or Southern Africa; and national-level co-operation was highest in Asia and Europe.

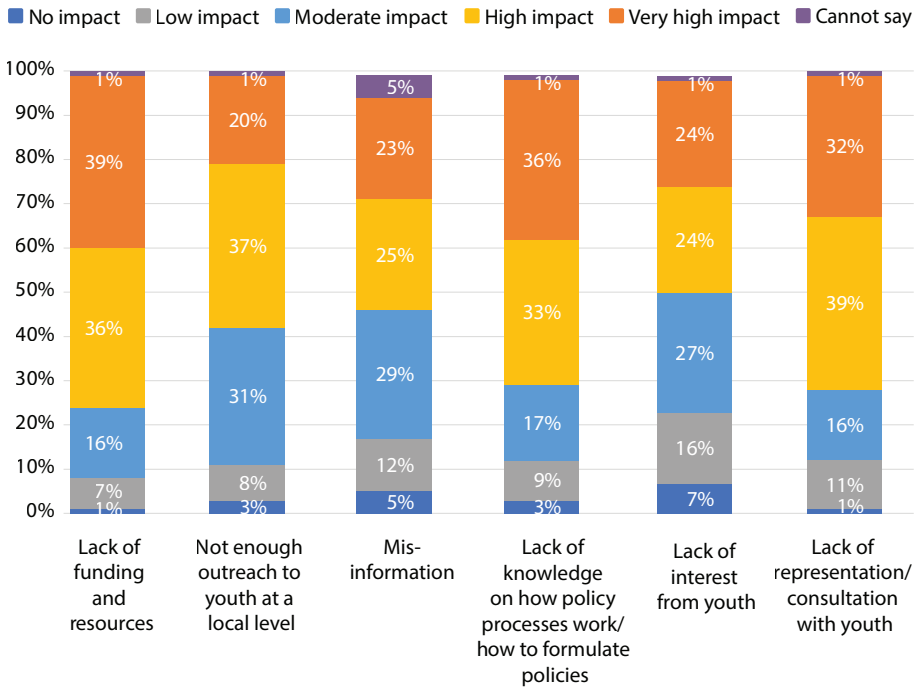


Graph 3. Types of co-operation established by the survey respondents (regional breakdown)

Barriers and limitations

When it comes to youth engagement, it is important to understand the barriers and limitations that young people encounter. These challenges encompass financial constraints, limited political inclusion, shrinking civic spaces and navigating intergenerational conflicts (see Graph 4).

Please rate the impact of the provided answers on the barriers faced by activists/youth organisations/youth workers in engaging towards climate action today, ranging from low to high



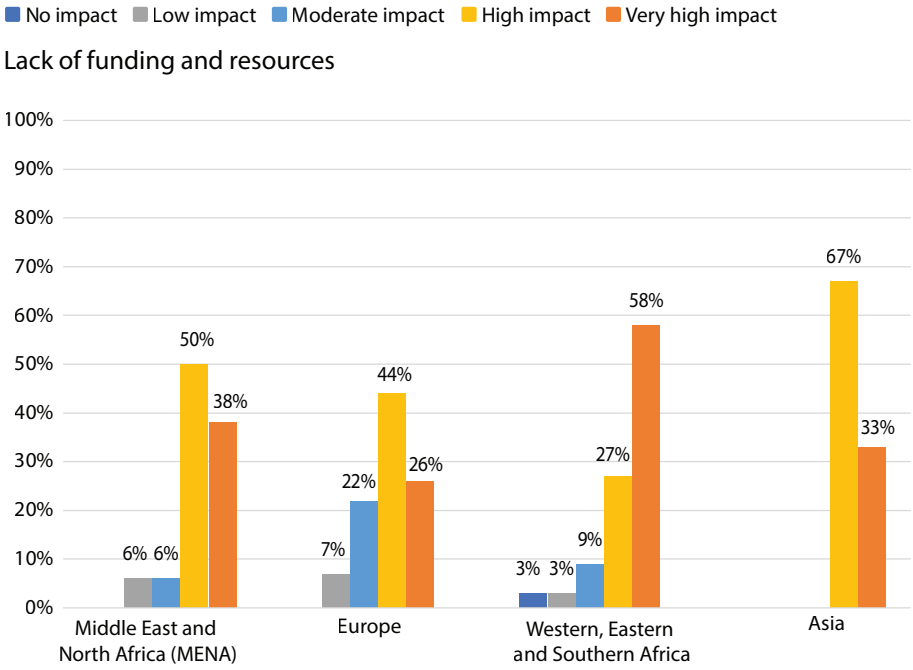
Graph 4. Barriers faced by youth activists, organisation and youth workers[8] (globally)

Funding and other resources

Although some trends are similar, it should be noted that differences in trends have been reported in Europe. For instance, a significant proportion of Europe-based youth reported challenges with financial resources, with 70% identifying it as a barrier of "very high impact" or "high impact". However, on a global scale, Europeans consider it a lesser constraint, viewed as 15-30% less significant compared to other regions.

8. The percentages have been rounded up or down to zero decimal places for readers' convenience (for example, 2.7% displayed as 3%, 38.7% as 39%) here and throughout the study. This may result in a deviation of 1-2% per column.

Please rate the impact of the provided answers on the barriers faced by activists/ youth organisations/youth workers in engaging towards climate action today, ranging from low to high



Graph 5. Lack of funding and resources as a barrier (regional breakdown)

The lack of funding and resources as a significant barrier to youth participation echoes the findings of the Erasmus+ Worldwide consultation (2022) as well as the survey conducted by Crowley and Moxon (2017). Key obstacles identified include a perceived mistrust from donors/funders towards youth-led organisations, coupled with burdensome bureaucracy during both the organisational registration process and when meeting donor prerequisites for funding access. In this context, Deželan and Yurttagüler (2020) have further noted that youth organise increasingly in movements and less institutionalised settings, which additionally restricts their access to funding as most donor programmes support only institutionalised legal entities. There are also concerns regarding intricate reporting requirements and a limited skill set in fundraising and financial management.

To counter these challenges, the solutions proposed by young people with expertise in climate change and youth work, alongside policy makers, researchers and other experts knowledgeable in youth work, in both consultations, underscore the importance of governments allocating sufficient funds for projects aimed at youth and integrating youth development across all government sectors and initiatives. The importance of flexible funding has already been acknowledged by some policy makers. For example, a water expert interviewee from the Union for the Mediterranean and AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation), Doha Zamel,

addressed this by noting that there is a need to develop more innovative funding mechanisms that "should prioritise projects that benefit both youth and women". Meanwhile, Crowley and Moxon (2017: 28) argue that policy makers should go even further than just funding: "although the amount of resource allocated might limit the number of projects, innovating youth participation is about encouraging public bodies and decision makers to embrace and understand its role rather than just resourcing it".

Administrative capacity to sustain engagement in policy work is another barrier to continued participation. In the context of international negotiation processes, this has been referred to as the "negotiation burden" (Muñoz et al. 2009), which encompasses various aspects. Negotiations typically extend over several years, involving numerous official, unofficial and preparatory meetings, substantial negotiation delegations and often branching into various working groups. In addition, significant expertise and knowledge are also essential, which has a significant impact on the overall effectiveness, representation and influence of young people in those negotiation processes. Managing these demands can be particularly challenging for youth organisations. One of our interviewees, Assia from the European Youth Forum, echoes this by highlighting the technicalities of the negotiation process:

> Sometimes things are moving really fast and in a very short time frame that you'll always have to be up to date and ready to jump on any political changes. [But] youth organisations don't have the resources and time to commit to that type of full-time engagements.

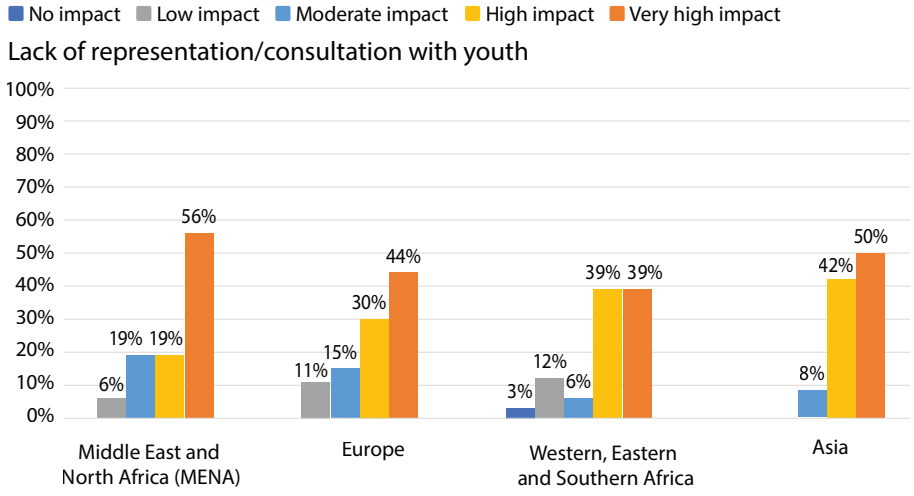
Adequate funding plays a key role in supporting youth engagement in public decision-making processes, thereby ensuring their distinct needs and issues are addressed and adequately funded. Consequently, in an interview, climate activist Pooja Tilvawala, Founder of Youth Climate Collaborative, emphasised the crucial need to establish paid positions for youth involved in climate initiatives.

In addition, the question of access to financing requires reckoning with the technocratic approaches that are implemented in the majority of funding mechanisms, which disperse funds to youth-led organisations. Research conducted by Shallwani and Dossa (2023) has argued that rigid technocratic practices are rooted in neoliberal discourse ("SMART objectives", "value for money") and reduce delicate processes to input-output-outcome interventions, which are not durable. The researchers have demonstrated that this approach misses out, because it disregards Indigenous ways of generating knowledge and prioritises white Eurocentric expertise, agency and lived experiences.

Lack of representation and knowledge gaps

Political inclusion of young people is critically hindered by two major factors: a lack of knowledge about how policy processes operate and a notable absence of youth representation and consultation (see Graph 6). Both barriers hold comparable significance. Although, in general, Europe is among the regions with the most consultation processes, the survey showcases that most practitioners from the youth field still feel that the lack of representation and consultation with youth has a high or very high impact on youth engagement.

Please rate the impact of the provided answers on the barriers faced by activists/ youth organisations/youth workers in engaging towards climate action today, ranging from low to high



Graph 6. The impact of the lack of representation/consultation with youth (regional breakdown)

The perception of being not adequately represented or even excluded from decision-making processes or policy consultations that affect youth aligns with the findings from the survey undertaken by Deželan et al. (2020), where a majority of 55.6% of European youth organisations express similar views.[9] One of the interviewees in this study, former YOUNGO co-ordinator Chiagozie Udeh, further highlights the importance of national-level engagement:

> Sometimes there's a lot of bottlenecks for young people to engage in the process, there's no national youth mechanism … the government at the national level … has to create the necessary mechanisms for this engagement or support the youth organisation to create those mechanisms of engagement.

This sentiment to establish lasting participatory processes was also echoed by some of the policy makers interviewed in our study. For example, Dr Abdelkader El Khissassi, Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, shared that the organisation's focus on development in the Mediterranean region includes facilitating partnerships between youth-led initiatives and public authorities, as well as the private sector: "By creating networks of support, we can ensure the sustainability of their endeavours".

However, the endeavour of young individuals or youth networks to engage with policy makers can often prove challenging. As Chiagozie underscores, although national governments or ministers might interact with youth constituencies on

9. The survey was commissioned by the European Youth Forum and questioned 322 youth sector organisations in Europe.

international platforms (during high-level events, for example), such engagements do not guarantee improved accessibility at the national level, where bureaucratic barriers often persist, hindering youth engagement.

Furthermore, aside from the general lack of engaging young people in the first place, there are additional challenges in involving young people from diverse backgrounds, as their socio-economic status impacts their capacity for political participation and engagement (Deželan and Yurttagüler 2020). Consequently, this disparity can result in a participation gap between more and less privileged youth (Wood 2023). This trend is also evident within the European climate movement, which consists to a large extent of predominantly middle-class youth from a well-educated background (Wahlström et al. 2019), a sentiment that our expert interviews have also expressed:

> This is a pity because there is a need for policy makers to really listen to these sets of young people directly affected by the climate crisis. (Assia Oulkadi, YFJ (interviewee))

Simultaneously, possessing technical knowledge appears to enhance the credibility of young individuals involved in climate mitigation efforts. This viewpoint is echoed by Neeshad Shafi, the Founder of Arab Youth 4 COP and co-founder of Arab Youth Climate Movement Qatar, who observes that "engaging in technical discussions has significantly amplified the impact and credibility of these conversations". Additionally, our interviewee Pooja Tilvawala from Youth Climate Collaborative has highlighted the challenge of staying informed or accessing the latest information, particularly when it is not publicly accessible:

> This presents challenges for youth to provide specific and useful policy recommendations and contributions to the policy process, especially since we lack the resources and/or accreditations to participate in many of these technical convenings and discussions.

These accounts underscore the significance of information accessibility and transparency in realising effective youth participation in the climate domain.

During the group discussion, an expert introduced a nuanced view on youth engagement in climate action, highlighting a significant observation. This expert noted that while many young people may be inclined towards immediate and tangible climate-related activities, seeing their direct impact, they might view policy making as a domain that is remote or even out of reach, possibly "someone else's task". This perspective is in line with research indicating that people with higher levels of political efficacy generally tend to participate more often in civic activities (Kahne and Westheimer 2006; Wood 2023), underscoring the essential role of youth work and educational programmes. These initiatives play a dual role: on the one hand, they empower young people through strengthening their competences and building their sense of political efficacy (Kiess 2022); on the other hand, they bridge the understanding gap and facilitate the younger generation's involvement in the expansive range of climate solutions, from grass-roots activities to intricate policy design. Nonetheless, even when young people gain access to decision makers through consultations, panel discussions and similar avenues, a lingering question persists: do they possess the capacity to challenge the overarching narratives effectively?

Challenging power dynamics: navigating adultism and intergenerational conflict

The Human Rights Council (2020), quoting the Committee on the Rights of the Child, highlighted that climate change is the most significant intergenerational injustice of our time. Elaborating on their research on youth climate activists in Belgium, Kenis (2021) notes that intergenerational conflict, especially in environmental dialogues, surfaces as young individuals blame older generations for climate degradation and their lack of political action (see also Elsen and Ord 2021). The general tension and dissatisfaction with the older generation have also been mirrored in survey responses, indicating that societal attitudes often sideline youth perspectives. This sentiment is embodied in statements such as: "Many elderly people think that youth are difficult to manage or work with, yet they are the ones who fail to understand the youth in many aspects". The divide is further deepened by a perceived "arrogance and lack of trust from the older generation". This phenomenon, known as "adultism", encapsulates the structures and mindset rooted in societal beliefs and norms that consistently uphold adults as superior to young people, thereby reinforcing their privileged position (Corney et al. 2021). Similarly, such adultist features are also present in policy-making bodies, in which youth voices and intelligence are regularly undervalued and discarded (Gorman 2021). Such structures restrict young people's influence by shaping societal perceptions of their capabilities. Gorman (2021) proposes that the practices of sidelining and silencing youth in governance structures might be a reason that motivated youth to express their views through climate protests and civil obedience as forms of non-conventional political participation.

At the same time, some researchers have argued that we should not prioritise age over other identities. Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) caution that, "the power of global civil society is likely to be felt most when it is able to move beyond simplistic labels and divisions of different age groups and generations". Therefore, while we recognise the need to challenge the status quo and allow youth voices to be heard and taken into account, the need to build coalitions across different ages and social groups in general remains.

The Erasmus+ Worldwide (2022) consultation posited several pertinent insights.

Institutionalised participation – Whenever youth participation is sought by local, national or international institutions, this engagement ought to be institutionalised, ensuring it is not merely episodic. It is essential to follow up and hold stakeholders accountable for the outcomes of youth proposals, much in line with frameworks like the Open Government Partnership.

Three-tiered youth engagement – The concept of youth co-operation and its importance should be ingrained across three tiers: local, national and international. Elevating local needs to national and international levels is vital, but the significance of local solutions should not be undermined. The overriding recommendation champions a bottom-up approach.

Avoiding disempowering narratives – It is paramount that common narratives such as "youth are the leaders of tomorrow" or branding the youth as "troublemakers"

be eschewed. Such labels serve to belittle the present capabilities, potential and actions of young individuals. This diminishes their role, often sidelining them in decision-making processes as they are not perceived with the seriousness they warrant.

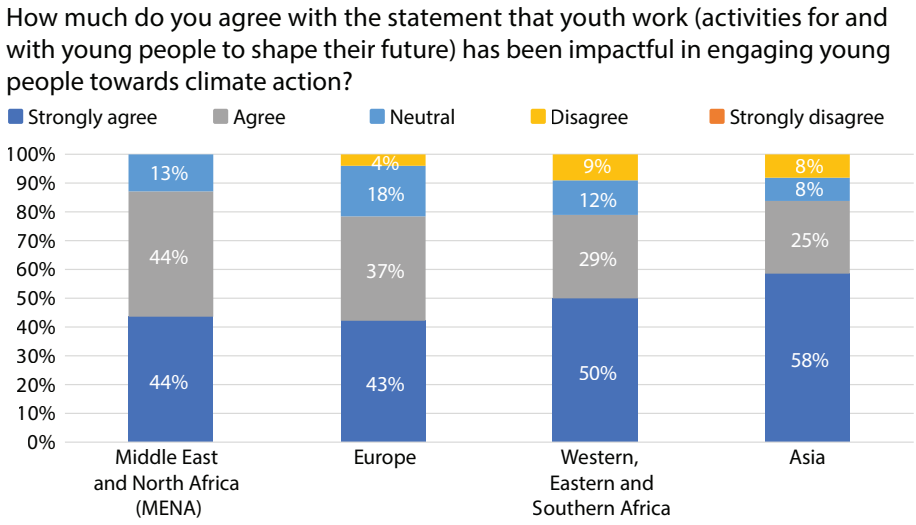
The challenge of power dynamics also has to be addressed. For example, a study conducted on the role of European youth organisations in the European Climate Change Regime Complex (Orsini and Kang 2023: 9) highlights concerns about the effective two-way communication with young people at the European level. We note, however, that while the youth activists highlight important challenges, the fact that they were able to safely express opposing views without fear of retaliation should be recognised as an important marker of democracy.

Shrinking civic space and fear of retaliation

There is a need to establish protective measures for young individuals engaged in climate action, reflecting a concerning trend of shrinking civic spaces, which, among other things, affect youth in particular (Deželan and Yurttagüler 2020). Characteristics of these shrinking spaces include legal limitations, economic restrictions, barriers to participation, and various forms of pressure, such as surveillance or ill-treatment. Additionally, young activists face "age-based discrimination intersecting with other forms of oppression" (Amnesty International 2017: 37), which leads to further discrediting and silencing (Deželan and Yurttagüler 2020). This issue is especially relevant in the context of fragile democracies around the world (Hellmeier et al. 2021), but the challenges exist increasingly in European countries as well (Deželan and Yurttagüler 2020). This was further exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, when civic space shrinkage occurred widely and affected youth organisations in particular – both in terms of limitation of activities and freedom of expression – at times beyond public health concerns (Deželan 2022). While in the short and medium term this can be addressed through changes in programming, on a large scale it underscores the link between climate action and democracy, highlighting the importance of preserving democratic societies.

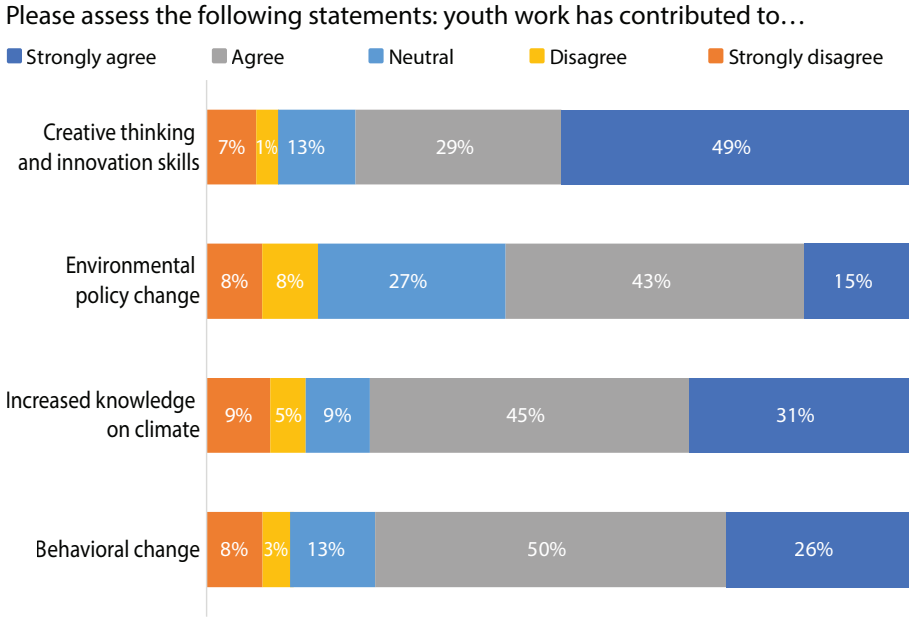
The impact of youth work

To understand the impact of youth work on the development of climate policies, the study used a mixed-method approach, combining insights gained from surveys as well as expert interviews. On average, the majority of survey respondents either agree or strongly concur with the assertion that youth work has significantly influenced young individuals' involvement in climate action (14% (n=11) maintain a neutral stance, 7% (n=5) disagreed). The regional breakdown offers some additional insights, including that respondents based in Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa are the most reserved in assessing the impact of youth work in comparison with other regions, although only marginally, by between 4% and 9%. Overall, a substantial 79% (n=60) of stakeholders either agreed or strongly agreed that it has been impactful in engaging young people towards climate action, which overall is a high result.



Graph 7. Evaluation of the impact of youth work on climate action by survey respondents (regional breakdown)

There is a predominant agreement among respondents that youth work has notably augmented creative thinking and innovation skills, as reflected among the survey respondents and in the focus group discussion. It is important for youth participation that innovative forms are not set up as the goal; instead, innovation is seen as a process through which more effective approaches might be discovered (Crowley and Moxon 2017: 59).



Graph 8. Evaluation of the impact of youth work on different aspects (globally)

Though slightly lesser in terms of agreement, behavioural change and an enhanced understanding of climate change are still significantly recognised impacts. Conversely, modifications in environmental policy garnered a slightly lower, yet significant rating (58%, n=43, either agreed or strongly agreed it had contributed to its development). There are several potential reasons behind the evaluation. First, when it comes to broader dimensions, those beyond an individual's immediate sphere, the impact of youth work may seem less direct or pronounced – a phenomenon that in many contexts is quite typical and aligns with the assessment of Neas et al. (2022) and Kenis (2021). At the same time, even in those youth networks active in various policy-making processes, participants may still question whether their participation has been meaningful and impactful.

While establishing a direct causal link between youth protests and policy outcomes remains challenging, it is arguable that these demonstrations have significantly elevated the urgency of the climate crisis on the political agenda. This observation aligns with existing literature (Han and Ahn 2020; Neas et al. 2022) and underscores the prevailing sentiment of distrust and frustration among youth towards older generations. This sentiment, as highlighted by Chiagozie Udeh, stems also from perceived past inaction and disregard for scientific evidence.

> Young people have been responsible for championing the renewed acceptance and awareness that climate change is an emergency and that we must act, they've been able to raise the level of conversation, they've been able to bring our leaders to the point where they are able to start acting on what the scientists were saying decades ago. Lots of scientists were talking, nobody was listening to them, it took the youth movements to mobilise, to raise awareness, to match, strike, to advocate for this to change. That is a tremendous impact, I don't think anything has been as big in the climate space as that.

In evaluating the primary responses from the participants, several core themes emerge as areas of emphasis. Chief among these are capacity building, funding, increased dialogue/participation and opportunities. Notably, a recurring sentiment appears, indicating a consistent direction among the youth: a desire for more avenues for exchange. However, the nuances in this overarching theme remain: while some advocate enhanced participation and dialogue specifically at the policy level, others gravitate towards a more general exchange to foster a deeper understanding of youth concerns.

The analysis reveals that only a minority of respondents expressed a desire for alternative forms of participation or a radical systemic overhaul.[10] The majority of responses seem to align with existing structures, placing a strong emphasis on enhancing youth engagement from within. This indicates that, for many, the current framework is not seen as inherently flawed but rather as lacking inclusivity of the voices and perspectives of the younger generation. The findings also highlight the diversity within the climate movement, which adopts a spectrum of strategies ranging from moderate to more radical forms of climate activism (Gorman 2021;

10. The relatively small number of respondents endorsing a more radical approach for climate action may not be unexpected, considering the survey's distribution channels. It was shared among youth groups actively involved in preparing for the UN Climate conferences, which is a conventional form of political participation (in contrast to, for example, the World Social Forum).

Schapper 2023). While traditional approaches focus on utilising existing channels and platforms without challenging the system itself, radical tactics question the prevailing system and seek to create alternative societal visions to address the root causes of the climate crisis (Morrison et al 2022). The findings underscore the climate movement's diversity, spanning from moderate to radical activism (Gorman 2021; Schapper 2023).

To an extent, this has been reflected in expert interviews within our study. One interviewee, Daniel Taurino from the European Youth Forum, advocates a shift in approach to addressing the climate issue, emphasising a move beyond a primary focus on decarbonisation and achieving net zero to addressing the root causes of the climate crisis:

> We're not just facing an environmental crisis; we're also grappling with social, economic, and cultural crises. To effectively tackle these challenges, we must shift the framework within which decisions are formulated … we need to step up to a new European Green Deal which puts the necessary resources – both human and economic – to confront the underlying causes of the climate crisis.

The last survey question delved into the intricacies of the connection between decolonisation and climate justice, with a particular emphasis on perceptions within Europe. The answers yield insights into regional differences in awareness, laying bare both the self-perceptions of Europeans and the external perspectives of other world regions. The feedback on this question was varied. An analysis of definitive responses highlights that about 35% believe they are sufficiently aware of the nexus between decolonisation and climate justice. In contrast, approximately 39% confessed a lack of awareness or a superficial understanding of this crucial link. An additional 23% opined that while there might be some awareness, significantly more needs to be done to educate and integrate this connection into broader dialogues and actions. Last, some feedback underscored disparities in awareness and perceptions of decolonisation and climate justice across different global regions. Investigating this difference between European and non-European perspectives may elucidate potential biases, omitted regions or heightened awareness based on regional histories and current sociopolitical climates.

Human rights education and youth work

> Governments need to start making decisions with the seventh generation in mind. (Climate activist Haylee Koroi, as cited in Hura 2019)

Young people have been not only pioneering a human rights-based approach but also applying human rights principles to climate policies and action, namely "Participation – Equality and non-discrimination – Accountability – Transparency", all of which are embedded in youth work practice (Gasparri et al. 2021) and have empowered value-led projects. Adopting a human rights-based approach to climate action is significantly supported by strong scientific evidence as well, which demonstrates that the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous and local communities are invaluable resources for adaptation (IPCC 2022; Schapper 2023). Of course, one challenge remains: this understanding is still built on "Western" principles, which put

human needs above those of the whole ecosystem and which is contrary to many Indigenous traditions and knowledge systems, where all "entities are conceived of as relational and ecosystemic, intimately connected to and responsible for one another" (Robinson 2020). Regardless, some youth advocates have chosen to turn to rights-based argumentation, focused on the legal frameworks to protect nature and their futures, and have achieved their objectives. In fact, as Amnesty International reports, successful climate lawsuits have been initiated across continents, from Latin America to Europe, with the most recent one being heard at the European Court of Human Rights in 2023.

The youth sector has also empowered youth workers and educators with non-formal tools and skills (such as the EU–Council of Europe Partnership's *T-kit on sustainability and youth work* (2018), the "Sustainability checklist: greening the youth sector" (Tumėnaitė 2021), the Council of Europe's COMPASS: Manual on human rights education, SALTO European Training Strategy for youth work, and many others). Experiential and transformational learning, in particular, encourage the "big picture" perspective because it provides opportunities for young people to experience their relationship with a broader world and can strengthen young people's ability to interact with complex systems and understand the interconnectedness of all things (Eberz et al. 2023). Consequently, while precise quantification of youth work's impact is challenging to calculate, one could contend that youth work has played a supportive role in advancing the climate action and justice agenda by nurturing adequate soft skills among young people.

Conclusion and way forward

Young people have unequivocally expressed their determination not to be sidelined in shaping their own future, the future of upcoming generations and that of the planet. Of course, their climate activism is not monolithically understood and varies across different identities and spaces (Elsen and Ord 2021; Martiskainen et al. 2020). Some youth workers and youth-led organisations proactively engage with current structures, advocating more meaningful participation in policy making, reducing barriers to accessing funding and ensuring representation of people from marginalised backgrounds. Others, disillusioned by the lack of authentic and effective democratic processes in their contexts, have shifted their focus and energy to practice-based movements (Schlosberg 2019). We have therefore witnessed young people opting to focus on non-conventional political participation, ranging from signing petitions to participating in large-scale global climate protests and civil disobedience (Gorman 2021), demonstrating that youth political engagement is, in fact, on the rise.

As a key player in the mainstreaming of human rights approaches in Europe and worldwide, youth work and the youth sector have actively contributed to creating an environment where young people feel empowered to use human rights principles to advocate planetary health. It has nurtured cross-continental youth alliances rooted in solidarity by providing funding support and facilitating values-based learning and skill development. The youth sector has also contributed to increasing global awareness and initiatives which have challenged the "extractivist" neoliberal logic

and expanded European perspectives on climate justice, recognising that environmental degradation impacts diverse communities in distinct ways.

In the future, the youth sector is well positioned to play a unique role in fostering a re-evaluation of how the climate crisis is addressed. Significant strides have been made in advocating active youth participation in policy and decision making, and in recognising youth expertise. There is now a unique opportunity to leverage this experience to support the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and diverse "ways of knowing" as well.

Since the sustainability of financing plays a crucial role, reimagining the framework for evaluating youth work and projects within the youth sector is essential for increasing the impact on climate interventions. This requires resisting the temptation to reduce complex challenges to simple "input-output-outcome interventions" and embracing humility, pluralism of philosophies and collaboration as guiding principles (Shallwani and Dossa 2023). It involves departing from the focus on rapid, quantifiable results to a more holistic understanding of social change. Achieving a meaningful – or as some call it, radical – transformation requires rethinking existing structures and focusing on building new, practice-based organisations where values are not just intellectually acknowledged but also deeply felt and actively embodied. In the words of Skott-Myhre (2005: 155):

> If a radical youth work is to be constructed which has the capacity to operate in a non-alienated actual engagement with the lived experience of the youth and adults involved, we must find ways to manage the pain of the work. This is a complex and difficult task, but unless we engage it seriously, it is almost impossible to avoid becoming alienated from the actual encounter between two people in community with one another.

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Chapter 7

Global youth work is good youth work – The role of the youth sector in Ireland in responding to the climate emergency

Eimear Manning and Valerie Duffy

Introduction

Climate change presents the single biggest threat to sustainable development everywhere. Its widespread and unprecedented events impact and disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable. Urgent action to halt climate change and deal with its impacts is integral to successfully achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent, including Ireland. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow. Weather patterns are changing, sea levels are rising, weather events are becoming more extreme and greenhouse gas emissions are now at their highest levels in history. With such a change taking place, it is important that young people and the youth sector actively upskill, increase knowledge and understanding about the issues and develop the skills to take action – today and in the future.

Global youth work empowers young people to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions to tackle issues that are important to them. Furthermore, it gives youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers the tools to create a space where the young people they support can critically explore their own values, beliefs and connections with the wider world, particularly with regard to global issues such as poverty, hunger, inequality and climate justice. Global youth work views global issues through different "lenses", particularly from a personal, local, national and global perspective, enabling young people to gain a holistic view of the primary challenges being faced in the world today (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1).

Some 1.8 billion people, or one quarter of the world's population, are aged 10 to 24. This brings many opportunities and challenges for an increasingly complex world and a challenged planet. Young people across the planet have become instrumental and a leading voice in taking action against climate change and for climate justice. Young people want progress and want a say on how we treat our environment, to protect the future of the planet and ultimately the human race itself.

It is important to recognise that in this climate emergency (which Ireland declared in May 2019 and the European Parliament declared in November 2019), we take into consideration and act on what is happening around us but also what is happening in developing nations – countries in the Global South who find themselves in the most vulnerable positions caught up in systems, conditions and issues not of their making and for which they have little or no power to change.

This chapter will outline the key principles of global youth work. It will explore the relational, ethical and political contribution that youth work makes – learning about and acting on issues related to the climate and biodiversity crises. Furthermore, as this chapter explores the connection between climate and youth work, we will share examples of good global youth work practice to provide insight into the importance of adopting different approaches to ensure both young people and youth work practitioners are informed and have the tools to be actively engaged.

The National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is a national organisation which represents and supports community, voluntary and not-for-profit youth organisations in Ireland. Founded in 1967, NYCI currently has over 50 member youth organisations (National Youth Council of Ireland (n.d.)(a)). These organisations work with almost 400 000 young people and can be found in every community in Ireland. NYCI responds to the challenges facing the young people our members work tirelessly to support. We also use our collective experience to address the practical, financial and strategic challenges facing the wider youth sector.

The Youth Work Community of Practice in Ireland, with whom NYCI engages, includes youth workers and youth leaders, youth work managers, youth work organisations, volunteers, trainers, researchers, educators of youth workers, boards of management, local communities and local authorities, the National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth, young people, youth work partners, higher education institutions, funders and policy makers. All of these are key players in youth learning and youth activism on climate and youth work issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is important to note that throughout this article, references to "youth workers" can also be applied to youth leaders, volunteers and educators of youth workers. Additionally, while this article is tailored primarily for the youth work sector, the authors wish to highlight the potential positive role that third-level education can have on the engagement of global youth work, particularly in supporting youth workers to understand climate issues and to be able to support young people's understanding in turn.

Youth work in Ireland

Youth work was formally recognised by the Irish Government in the Youth Work Act 2001 which defines youth work as:

> A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training.

Youth work is an educational and developmental process, based on young people's active and voluntary participation and commitment. Youth work is for all young people, with particular focus on those aged 10 to 25 from all aspects of Irish life, urban, rural, all nationalities and social classes. Youth work is provided primarily by voluntary organisations, with statutory support from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Education and Training Boards In Ireland, youth work is rooted in a non-formal educational approach. The Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (Bonn 2020: 3) recognises non-formal education within youth work as the following:

> Non-formal education and learning, within the educative, participative, empowering, expressive and inclusive values of youth work, provides young people with a sense of agency. Youth work, as one of the facets of civic education, should also focus on power relations, intersectionality, social justice, emancipation and true engagement of young people. It should be a guide to addressing inequalities, putting young people into focus and giving them opportunities.

Youth work is an ethical practice which is concerned with the promotion of the rights, voices and interests of young people within a human rights and equality frame. It is recognised that "an ethical obligation exists for youth workers to challenge the social structures that cause young people to be marginalised and disadvantaged" (D'arcy 2016: 8). It was estimated in 2012 that there were 1 200 youth workers and over 10 000 volunteers working in the youth work sector in Ireland. However, there is no formal register kept and accurate data are therefore unavailable.

Youth work has the positive intention of transferring power to young people. The relationship with young people is undertaken with a view to "engaging" them as partners. The youth worker adopts the role of "problem poser". Young people are actively involved in identifying, exploring and understanding issues of concern to them. There is a two-way process of mutual dialogue between young people and adults, and action is the result of analysis and reflection (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 3).

The purpose of youth work is:

- to build young people's self-esteem and self-confidence;
- to develop their ability to manage personal and social relationships;
- to offer worthwhile and challenging new experiences;
- to provide learning opportunities to enable young people to gain knowledge and develop new skills;
- to support young people in developing skills that will enhance their educational and training experiences and to assist in expanding the labour market, creating economic opportunities for young people, including increased employment prospects;
- to build young people's capacity to consider risks and consequences and make informed decisions and take responsibility;
- to help young people to develop social awareness, a world view and a sense of social solidarity which widens horizons and invites social commitment;
- to give young people a voice in decision making that affects their lives;

- to enhance young people's role as active citizens;
- to listen to and hear what young people have to say.

(National Youth Council of Ireland (n.d.)(b))

How does it happen?

The process focuses on the active and critical participation of young people. The non-formal education methods and activities engaged in by youth workers and young people are very diverse, including:

- recreational and sporting activities and indoor/outdoor pursuits, uniformed and non-uniformed;
- creative, artistic and cultural or language-based programmes and activities;
- spiritual development programmes and activities;
- programmes designed with specific groups of young people in mind, including young women or men, young people with disabilities, young people who are homeless, young Travellers or young people in other ethnic groups, young asylum seekers, young migrants, young LGBTQI+ people;
- issue-based activities (justice and social awareness, the environment, development education, Sustainable Development Goals, etc.);
- activities and programmes concerned with health, welfare and well-being (health promotion, relationships and sexuality, stress management, youth information);
- intercultural and international awareness activities and exchanges;
- programmes and activities focusing on new information and communication technologies and digital youth work;
- informal learning through association, interaction and conversation with youth workers and other young people.

(National Youth Council of Ireland (n.d.)(b))

Ireland has the second highest participation rate in youth work organisations in the European Union (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2023) with 23% of 16 to 30 year olds having joined a youth organisation at some point in their lives. This is compared to the EU average of 14%. Ireland is also recognised as having one of the strongest youth work networks, quality standards and education pathways to youth work careers in Europe (Council of Europe 2020).

Additionally, Ireland is one of only six European countries of 41 surveyed by the Council of Europe to have degree-level youth work courses in place and is viewed very favourably internationally in terms of the development of the sector, despite low levels of expenditure on youth work (Council of Europe 2020).

Irish youth work organisations and policy frameworks (the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People and National Youth Strategy) have been influential in guiding the emerging consensus across the European Union (Council of the European Union 2013) and the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2017) on the nature, values, principles and purposes of youth work, and continues to provide a statutory basis for youth work that is flexible enough to support the diversity of and changes in youth work.

Evidence from Irish and international research demonstrates the significant contribution youth work makes to national economies (Frontier Economics and UK Youth 2022; YouthLink Scotland 2016). Research carried out for NYCI in 2012 made a conservative estimate that every €1 invested in youth work was worth €2.20 to the Irish economy (National Youth Council of Ireland 2012) due to very positive outcomes for individual young people and society.

In 2023, the National Youth Council of Ireland launched the youth sector's Vision for Youth Work (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2023). Developed together with the NYCI membership and the wider youth sector, it sets out a vision for the future direction of youth work in Ireland over the next 10 years in which:

> All young people living in Ireland have access to high-quality, well-resourced youth work services, which meet their expressed needs, delivered by paid professionals and well-supported volunteers.

The vision is supported by eight key themes or aspects, which are detailed in this document.

Global youth work

One of the key emerging issues affecting young people today, future generations of young people, the youth sector and the world is the unfolding climate emergency. Ensuring that the youth sector is prepared and has the confidence to educate, upskill and act is vital. As this area of work grows in the coming years, a greater focus on the impacts of climate change will feature for the youth sector and for broader society.

Global youth work aims to empower young people to develop the knowledge and skills to tackle climate and global justice issues and explore their own values, beliefs and connections with the wider world (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1). Global youth work combines youth work with global citizenship education. Global citizenship education (previously known as development education) is an educational process which enables people to understand the world around them and to act to transform it. It is characterised by participative, creative approaches and works to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality, globally and locally. Informed by this, global youth work starts with and values young people's own views, encouraging them to learn through participation while promoting equality, responsibility and mutual respect.

Global youth work is more important today than ever. It supports young people to engage in global justice issues as global citizens with the confidence, resilience, capacity and critical thinking skills they need to be involved in society, to reach their potential and to become change makers. It works within the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework and encourages young people to question the logic of the global systems currently in place; to look afresh at our personal, local, national and global relationships with these (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1). Young people are supported to see themselves as agents of change, empowered to be active global citizens, as learning through a global youth work approach supports greater knowledge and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1 and Unit 2).

According to the Development Education Association (2004), the 10 key principles of global youth work are that it:

1. starts from young people's experiences and encourages their personal, social, emotional and political development;
2. works to non-formal education principles and offers opportunities that are educational, participative, empowering and designed to promote equality of opportunity;
3. is based on an agenda that has been negotiated with young people;
4. engages young people in critical analysis of local and global influences on their own lives and communities;
5. encourages an understanding of the world based on the historical process of globalisation;
6. recognises that relationships between, and within, developing and developed countries (Global North and Global South) are characterised by inequalities caused by globalisation;
7. promotes the values of justice and equity in personal, local, national and global relationships;
8. encourages an understanding of and appreciation for diversity, locally and globally;
9. sees the people and organisations of all countries (developing and developed; Global North and Global South) as equal partners for change in a shared and interdependent world;
10. encourages action that builds alliances to bring about change.

In the Irish context, global youth work is rooted in the pedagogic tradition of Paulo Freire (1972), and this is due to the Freirean emphasis on understanding social/economic structures. Freire argued that the role of education is to catalyse critical consciousness and then support those affected by issues to take collective action. Freire called this process of reflection on a situation and then action in the world "praxis". He believed that through praxis we overcome our alienation and disempowerment to become fully human in the world (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1, Unit 2 and Unit 3). Critical reflection is therefore an important element of global youth work, both in terms of the young person naming and analysing the issues they experience as a result of globalisation and global inequality/injustice, but also for the youth work practitioner to reflect on their own unique position in the global world and identify the ways in which they may benefit or be disadvantaged by globalisation, as well as the ways that their actions (particularly in the Global North) may contribute to global inequality and injustice. This kind of critical reflection supports us to learn, improve and respond to emerging issues (Daly et al. 2023).

The PLiNGs perspective – five faces of globalisation

In Ireland's context, the approach of the global youth work journey is also informed by Dr Momodou Sallah's Five Faces of Globalisation (cultural, political, economic, technological and environmental), which explores how young people are influenced at a personal, local, national and global level (the PLiNGs). These PLiNGs form the backdrop for all of our global youth work journeys. As global youth workers, it is

essential that we fully recognise the global context in which young people's lives exist. Bringing structural inequality to the fore in youth work seeks to change the conversation, from changing the focus from private troubles to the public issues we must address in society (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2; Mills and Gitlin 2000). Being able to place the lives of young people in the context of a global society, making the connections between the personal, local, national and global issues is an important process in the development of good, quality youth work. Daily, young people are influenced by these five faces of globalisation. Directly or indirectly, economics, environment, culture, technology and politics influence young people's actions at a personal, local, national and global level (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1).

In the diagram below, Momodou places young people at the centre where good quality global youth work/development education supports ongoing critical consciousness and critical thinking and supports young people to take action to create a more just world for themselves and others.

Figure 1. The PLiNGs, as described by Dr Momodou Sallah, National Youth Council of Ireland

The linked lived experiences and everyday dilemmas faced by people in the Global South and Global North include poor political leadership, homophobia, poverty,

unemployment, ecological damage, racism, hunger, patriarchy, the climate crisis, globalisation, unequal access to markets and inequity. The anti-oppressive nature of global youth work is concerned with an awareness of power differentials, challenging wider injustices in society and working towards empowerment and liberation. This is a practice that requires youth workers and youth practitioners to have an understanding of power and oppression, a commitment to empowerment and the ability to reflect, critically analyse and change their practice (Chouhan 2009: 61; Daly et al. 2023: Unit 3).

Oppression has many faces (Young 2008), including exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence, with Freire (1972) reminding us that consciousness raising is "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality". However, today, we would also take recommendations from Kemmins et al. (2009) and add the word "ecological" to this list. It is necessary to cultivate our thoughts on how ecological injustices affect how we can live well in a world worth living in.

Youth work and climate justice

Global youth work as a practice has the ability to support young people and the youth sector to critically explore how climate justice issues interlink with their everyday lives (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1 and Unit 2). "Change the system, not the climate!" can be seen on numerous protest banners around the world, clutched in the hands of young people who are furious and fearful of the inaction they are witnessing. Young people are spearheading the global movement for action on the climate crisis. With organisations such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion being established with young people at the helm, it is clear that addressing global greenhouse gas emissions is on the agenda of importance, particularly for youth (UNDP 2021). After all, young populations and future generations who have yet to be born will have to suffer the adverse consequences of climate disaster longer than anyone else alive on the planet today.

Furthermore, young people are creating new movements out of their climate crisis actions. The movement for climate justice is relatively new, but of vital importance. Climate justice often takes action on the climate crisis through a human rights lens, analysing different perspectives such as rich/poor; Global North/Global South; older generations/future generations, those most vulnerable and marginalised in societies, etc. (Arcaya and Gribkoff 2022). The climate justice movement is sometimes also used to emphasise the inter-species perspective, but in Ireland, it is more often utilised as a human-centred approach that aims to safeguard the rights of those most vulnerable to climate catastrophe. It also looks at equitable solutions and historical responsibility for the climate crisis – looking to share the burdens of climate change fairly (Duffy et al. 2019).

Former Irish President Mary Robinson is one of the most world-renowned advocates for climate justice. The Mary Robinson Foundation identifies the key principles of climate justice as follows (Mary Robinson Foundation n.d.).

- Respect and protect human rights
- Support the right to development

- Share benefits and burdens equitably
- Ensure that decisions on climate change are participatory, transparent and accountable
- Highlight gender equality and equity
- Harness the transformative power of education for climate stewardship
- Use effective partnerships to secure climate justice

There is an obvious lack of meaningful action on addressing climate change and climate justice issues, particularly at national, regional and international levels. A clear sign of this is the ever-increasing CO_2 concentration (427 ppm as measured in June 2024 by NASA (NASA n.d.), despite the numerous climate regulations and policies in place across the globe. Due to this lack of meaningful action, many young people are disillusioned with the response from governments and large multinational corporations and have taken to the streets in protest against climate inaction. Climate group Fridays for Future reported that some 27 000 people across 150 countries took part in their first climate strike in 2018, but that this number spiked rapidly and just one year later, approximately 3.8 million people participated across 3 800 cities, in what is considered to be the single largest climate protest ever held (Burke 2023).

But while a rise in climate-related protests has been observed, so too has a rise in mental health issues directly tied to the health of the environment, known as eco-anxiety or "solastalgia" (Albrecht et al. 2007; Rice 2020). In fact, Ipsos, a global market and public opinion research service, released a poll which collected responses from over 22 000 young people in European countries and found that they are significantly more worried about the climate crisis (46%) and environmental degradation (44%) than they are about the spread of infectious diseases (36%) (Diab 2021). Young people's worry with regard to the climate becomes even more apparent when we note that this poll was taken by participants during the first global lockdown caused by Covid-19. Despite this, two environmental concerns topped the list for European youth, ahead of their fear of a global pandemic – which they were actively living through at the time of this research taking place.

Constant thoughts of fear can have negative effects on one's mental health. And a new phenomenon of climate anxiety, or eco-anxiety as it is commonly referred to, is distress manifested through the effects of climate change. Eco-anxiety can have severe and varied responses in individuals suffering from it (Clayton Whitmore-Williams et al. 2017). Eco-anxiety has been shown to cause panic attacks, loss of appetite and difficulty sleeping and can negatively impact their work, study and relationships (Dodds 2021; Ursano et al. 2018). Additionally, eco-anxiety can have compounding effects on individuals already suffering from mental health illnesses, as elevated levels of climate anxiety are often correlated with high clinical symptoms of depression and anxiety (Crandon et al. 2022; Schechter et al. 2023). A survey published in the Lancet Planetary Health in 2021 (Hickman et al. 2021), revealed that more than 50% of the 10 000 children and young people surveyed reported feeling "sad", "anxious", "angry", "powerless", "helpless" and "guilty" about climate change. As many as 45% of the respondents indicated that their feelings regarding climate change have a negative impact

on their daily life and functioning. Climate anxiety is an environmental emotion that young people are experiencing alongside a wide scope of other (potentially compounding) emotions, which are measured by Hickman et al. (2021). As a counter to this, youth work, which has strong roots in enabling young people to explore their own activism and well-being, has a crucial role to play in facilitating climate action. Furthermore, taking direct action has been shown to be the most significant antidote to eco-anxiety (Sanson and Bellemo 2021) and global youth work can assist with this by equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to participate meaningfully in the climate action and climate justice movements.

Environmental education in government media and in formal settings such as schools tends to focus on simplified solutions such as recycling, reducing our own environmental footprint and planting wildflowers to save bees and butterflies. While these actions are helpful, they alone cannot be considered "solutions", as they do not address the root causes of the climate crisis, nor do they address the mental health issues that can accompany climate activism. It is possible that by schools, states and the media subduing the weight of climate change issues, this could avoid instilling fear in young people. However, when a young person recognises that solutions must go beyond these small, personal changes, it can create tension. By ignoring the enormous pressures that young people feel, they can lose confidence in their school and government systems, and this also runs the risk of young people becoming disillusioned with formal education and with democracy – thinking their education or options will not matter.

> Across Europe, societies are experiencing a rise of anti-democratic tendencies coupled with shifting and shrinking spaces for civil society and violations of human rights. There is a creeping disappearance of trust in public authorities. Emerging gaps in societal architecture are shaking the stability and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Societies largely polarise as populism and fake news grow. All this is taking place within a climate crisis of which young people are acutely aware, which undoubtedly endangers social cohesion and diminishes the quality of life (presenting, ultimately, an existential threat), and a digital realm that is becoming overwhelmingly present, at times also with negative personal and social consequences, in everyday life. (Bonn 2020)

However, good youth work exerts a positive influence on young people's transition to adulthood, and it can help in promoting their active participation in society. Youth work has a long tradition of supporting young people's understanding of the world around them and promoting such values as justice and equality (Council of Europe 2017). One valuable method of achieving this is through the use of global youth work.

Good practice examples of climate justice and global youth work

Due to the increasing demand of young people in Ireland for climate justice to be incorporated into national policies, NYCI has developed projects that centre on a climate justice and global youth work approach. We have compiled four different approaches and have included them here as examples of good practice with regard to incorporating climate justice and global youth work in your own youth work.

These examples were selected to highlight different approaches to global youth work (a youth-led approach; whole-organisation approach; whole-sectoral approach; and youth worker support).

Youth-led approach: the Future Generations Climate Justice Project

The Future Generations Climate Justice Project (National Youth Council of Ireland (n.d.)(c)) is a consortium-based project where consortium members collaborate on a climate justice theme led and informed by young people who decide on the project aims and objectives. Approximately 15-20 young people take part each year. The project seeks to explore and highlight the systemic and human rights issues related to the climate crisis. The project highlights the unique voices of young people who are often missing from the climate discourse. This includes young people from marginalised, rural and disadvantaged backgrounds, whose reality is often not represented in national and global policies.The Future Generations project addresses this by:

- creating the space for young people to explore the topic of climate justice;
- recognising the different layers of discriminations that exist in the climate crisis debate;
- supporting young people to develop the skills they need to be advocates of climate justice;
- empowering young people to take on a local/regional response to climate justice;
- facilitating a global response to climate justice by including youth voices from the Global South.

The project runs each year from March to December and the young people select a theme to focus on for their annual term as part of the project. Past themes have included how to get young people involved in the climate justice movement (National Youth Council of Ireland 2020); how to encourage organisations to incorporate climate justice principles within their work (National Youth Council of Ireland 2021); how to better support youth workers with knowledge and skills to discuss climate justice issues with young people (2022); and a more specified focus on UN Sustainable Development Goal 14: "Life below water", as a result of a significant introduction of new marine policy in Ireland (2023). We will discuss the outcomes of the 2021 project on encouraging organisations in more detail under "Whole-sectoral approach" below.

Each year has produced different outcomes relevant to the theme, such as educational resources, social media information cards, workshops and information sessions, conferences and more. The young people work directly with NYCI and the youth workers in their partner organisations to complete their outcomes. NYCI, as the lead agency of the project, is consistently in communication with the partners and the young people throughout the project. We offer ongoing support to ensure that the aims and objectives that the young people agreed to are being met in a way that is informative and fun and that builds their capacity for the climate justice action(s) they wish to take.

Whole-organisation approach: NYCI's climate justice policy

NYCI is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. Having recognised the importance of supporting young people in their climate justice learning and actions, we understand that NYCI needs to lead by example.

Figure 2. Key stakeholders to involve when adopting a climate justice approach in youth work (Duffy et al. 2020)

NYCI has developed a climate justice policy, which is a collaborative policy that, in its development, involved NYCI's member organisations, youth workers and volunteers, the NYCI management, board of directors and NYCI staff. The process involved our Youth 2030 team drafting an outline document and meeting with NYCI's Policy and Advocacy Committee (who determine the policy focus of the organisation), which is made up of NYCI member youth organisations and young people. We then shared an updated document for comment with NYCI staff. Combining all comments, and following a second meeting, we received sign-off from the Policy and Advisory Committee, presented to our NYCI board (which is made up of NYCI members) and obtained agreement to fully implement the policy organisation-wide. We are now working on the implementation plan for this policy and, once finalised, we intend sharing the policy wider in Ireland and across Europe to help support further engagement on this important issue, and hopefully to see replications of this policy in other organisations across Ireland and beyond. As mentioned, the policy outlines organisation-wide implementation areas, which include the following.

- NYCI is committed to developing climate justice initiatives, programmes and activities that will enhance the capacity of NYCI's staff, member organisations, our youth work policy, practice and education partners, and young people to promote and support climate actions centred on justice and equity.
- NYCI is committed to advocating that Ireland does its fair share to curtail climate change and climate injustice and support an equitable approach to a climate solution at the international level.
- NYCI is committed to ensuring that young people's opinions and voices be heard on climate change and climate justice and that these issues remain on the political agenda across all of the work of NYCI. In addition, NYCI will support a call for the enactment of a Climate Youth Engagement Strategy to allow meaningful youth participation in relation to the climate agenda. Young people are a vital constituency and need to be supported to influence all policy areas. The youth sector in Ireland is well placed to provide this support.
- NYCI is committed to working collaboratively with its member organisations and other institutions, organisations and partners to uphold the values and principles of social justice and human rights with regard to climate action and to support its members to engage with climate justice issues, supporting current and future generations of young people and particularly supporting first those who are the furthest behind.
- NYCI is committed to reviewing its advocacy strategy, plans and programmes using a climate justice frame. To incorporate planetary health (youth health), just transition (youth employment) and degrowth principles in our work.
- NYCI is committed to identifying, joining and being an active member of key coalitions and networks according to our organisational mission and values, advocating the principles of justice and equity.

Each programme area is compiling a list of initiatives they can take that fall under each of the above implementation areas. This is an ongoing piece of policy and practice work for NYCI but is near completion. When adopted, this policy will be revisited every two years for assessment and updating, if required. Progress on the initiatives within the policy will be discussed at regular monthly staff meetings where appropriate.

Whole-sectoral approach: Climate Justice Charter

In 2021, as part of the Future Generations Climate Justice Project, the young people involved in the project wanted to create a resource that would encourage organisations and educational institutions to better incorporate climate justice into their projects, programmes, practice, collaborations with others, youth policy and research, youth participation and engagement, and professional development (such as staff training).

Through online meetings, round-table discussions and surveys to identify the key principles of climate justice from a youth perspective, the young people from Sphere17 Regional Youth Service in the suburbs of Dublin and YMCA Ireland, based in rural Cork, worked collaboratively to create Ireland's first Climate Justice Charter.

After initially identifying the original seven principles that the young people wanted to include, they then researched the content and context that was important to each overarching principle. This was done through a mixture of researching other climate justice charters across the globe that were available online; having discussions with peers and environmental/social justice experts at conferences and events; and decentring and recentring their own lived experiences through reflection, to best analyse how to present the seven key principles of climate justice for the Climate Justice Charter.

The Climate Justice Charter outlines seven principles for organisations to commit to when considering changes, updates or the creation of new practices within their work.

1. Respect and protect human rights
2. Support the right to speak and be heard
3. Acting equitably, rather than equally
4. Oppose any forms of discrimination
5. Using education for climate stewardship
6. Creating effective partnerships
7. Ensuring local to global connections

NYCI now works as a conduit between the young people's Climate Justice Charter and organisations who are interested in signing up to the charter's principles. NYCI, in collaboration with Gaisce – The President's Award – have created a workshop that is delivered to boards of management explaining how to implement and evaluate the charter within their specific organisation or educational institution.

This charter is a mechanism for whole-sectoral collaboration on a relevant climate-focused issue to young people, and the benefit of this charter has been recognised internationally. The Yidinji Declaration represents the concerns of Australian First Nations and Pacific Island communities and was created taking inspiration from the Future Generations Climate Justice Charter. The Yidinji Declaration was launched at the Pacific Urban Forum in September 2023 and was due to progress to COP 28. This adaptation of one Climate Justice Charter to another showcases that whole-sectoral approach mechanisms can have wider and broader impacts even on an international scale.

Youth worker support: the Youth Work And You module

NYCI, together with its Youth 2030 Consortium partners – Centre for Youth Research and Development (CYRD) at the Department of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University, Concern Worldwide and Trócaire – launched a new interactive online learning module, open to everyone, focusing on global youth work and globalisation in 2023. The module considers the distinctiveness of a youth work approach, and how critical consciousness raising is explicitly engaged when embedding a global youth work approach, and asks how youth workers might better orient themselves in their current work to embed the transformative practice of a global youth work approach. "Module 7: Global Youth Work" is hosted on www.youthworkandyou.org, which is a hub for curated resources for the youth work sector and students known as the Youth Work e-Learning Partnership. This website came about as a result of an Erasmus+ funded KA2 strategic partnership across five countries (Ireland, Finland,

Estonia, Northern Ireland and Australia) during the period 2017-19 (European Commission n.d.). The project is co-ordinated by the Centre for Youth Research and Development in the Department of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University with partners in Humak University of Applied Sciences in Finland, Tallinn University in Estonia, Ulster University in Northern Ireland and Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. It is a great example of how European funding can support education, learning and partnerships across countries.

The e-learning module includes animations, interviews with the youth work sector and global citizenship education stakeholders, tools and resources addressing three key areas:

- understanding globalisation;
- principles and practice;
- a transformative youth work practice model.

The global youth work module is designed to support and enhance youth work practitioners' understanding of global youth work and global issues that influence their life and the lives of the young people with whom they work. These issues include poverty, inequality, hunger, injustice, fair trade and climate justice. The module explores global issues through non-formal education, which is powerful in that it creates a great opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of what is happening in the world – locally and globally – and why it is important to know about these global issues and how they are connected to people's everyday lives (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1).

This module is designed to develop the capacity of those involved in youth work to bring a global youth work dimension to their work within their own specific contexts, and it considers the distinctiveness of a youth work approach. It addresses how critical consciousness raising is explicitly engaged when embedding a global youth work approach and asks how youth workers might better orient themselves in their current work to embed the transformative practice of a global youth work approach, and better support young people in becoming active global citizens (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 1).

Considerations when incorporating global youth work

It takes time learning to unlearn.

Before you can ask young people to explore their own values and attitudes, you must first explore your own. Being open to different perspectives and world views, aware of your own biases and committed to challenging discriminatory behaviours takes time to understand, acknowledge and rectify. You can start this journey by identifying the interests and concerns of the young people in your group, so that you are ensuring your youth work starts with the views and experiences of the young people.

In order to decentralise your current understanding and values of the world around you, it can be helpful to explore justice issues locally first, and then gradually build up your understanding of those issues to a national, regional and then global scale. While exploring these global justice issues, where possible, use voices and perspectives

from marginalised groups for the local and national perspective, and the Global South for the regional and global perspective. Once you have broken apart your own views of the world and reconstructed them from a global youth work context, you can then begin to support young people to explore their own place in the world and encourage them to seek solutions and change for a better world.

Starting the journey

Global youth work is a journey, and all journeys must start somewhere – but this "somewhere" may be different for all young people, all youth workers and all youth organisations (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 3). It is likely that you will come across different responses to the concept of global youth work, which may range from a sense of disinterest to a high level of interest, engagement and empathy. Your challenge here is to accept each person's starting point. Before you pursue a pathway of learning or understanding or awareness, you must be mindful of the risk that you leave someone behind or that you push them further away from a platform of common ground.

We must always remember that a starting point is a beginning to a journey, and positive movement from that starting point is the goal of all educators, activists or change makers. If we pass judgment or dismiss someone because of their starting point we fall into the trap of creating exclusive groups, echo chambers, bubbles or elitist entities which ultimately fail to create sustainable change because they do not bring people with them. Below, the Global Issues Empathy Spectrum outlines some different starting points you may encounter (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2).

Antagonist	Indifferent	Bystander	Sympathiser	Empathiser	Empathy actor
"I don't care"	"It has nothing to do with me and it has no effect on me"	"There is nothing I can do about it"	"It makes me feel sad"	"I can imagine how tough that must be, something needs to be done"	"Something must be done, and I am willing to take action"

This Global Issues Empathy Spectrum is an invitation to you and in turn the young people you work with to consider where you yourself are now, to reflect on how you got there and to explore a commitment to positive movement or maintaining your position if you are at "empathy actor". You or the young people you work with may not arrive at empathy actor in an instant, but every positive movement represents a positive possibility. You should also be ready for the time when at least some of the group will have journeyed to empathy actors. They may want to act using the knowledge or awareness or learning from participating in the group. This is a core part of global youth work. Allow them to explore and think deeply about why they want to act and what they want to achieve (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2).

Climate and global youth work in your context

It is a difficult time to be having global conversations with young people, particularly as a youth work practitioner. With so many prevalent injustices, conflicts and superficial responses to many of these, it can feel like navigating a minefield. However, there are ways in which global youth work, and even the success of the Irish youth work model, can be replicated in other contexts.

A quality global youth work approach creates opportunities where the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills related to social justice and global citizenship education are explored in a holistic and engaging process. This can be achieved by providing opportunities to empower young people to act on social justice and global issues by building self-confidence and developing skills such as critical thinking, and systems and power analysis. It will be even better if we can develop and deliver programmes, activities and events with young people that will give them a voice in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2).

We can see that a quality approach to global youth work begins by building young people's capacity to work from their own reality, to consider oppression and discrimination as having personal, local, national and global interdependence. Working collaboratively within the youth sector, nationally, regionally and internationally, can assist with this by offering opportunities to develop links with young people and others from other countries (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2).

Additionally, it is important to note that there is a growing recognition of the importance of young people and the youth work sector in Europe, particularly with regard to action on the climate crisis.

> The council stresses that young people are important change makers and essential partners in the implementation of the European Consensus on Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change and recognises their creative and innovative potentials and abilities. Investing in, and working with, by and for youth, is of paramount importance to build stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies, where human rights and the rule of law are respected and where no one is left behind. The council highlights the importance of ensuring the meaningful inclusion and active participation of youth at all levels of society, the economy and politics. (Council of the European Union 2020)

As part of the EU Youth Dialogue – Youth in Europe 2017/2018, 11 European Youth Goals were developed that have since been added to the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

1. Connecting the EU with youth
2. Equality of all genders
3. Inclusive societies
4. Information and constructive dialogue
5. Mental health and well-being
6. Moving youth in rural areas forward
7. Quality employment for all
8. Quality learning
9. Space and participation for all

10. Sustainable green Europe
11. Youth organisations and European programmes (European Youth Goals, n.d.).

These European Youth Goals are one way of aligning youth work with climate issues:

> The Council, recalling the 11 EU Youth goals, recognises, in particular, the importance of the youth dimension in the 2030 Agenda and the key role that young people can play in achieving the SDGs and invites the Member States to consider the needs and expectations of young people in their contribution to implementing the 2030 Agenda for all relevant policy sectors and to enable young Europeans to contribute as appropriate to achieving an ever more sustainable Union. (Council of the European Union 2019)

> Achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives. (Youth Goals n.d.)

Familiarising oneself with different local, national, regional and international opportunities for partnership within your youth work practice and the young people you work with is paramount to enable you to build the capacity to adopt a global youth work approach. These partnerships help knowledge sharing and capacity building of youth work practitioners, and also offer different hands-on experiences for young people to grow their understanding of people, cultures, environments and ways of life that differ from their own (Daly et al. 2023: Unit 2).

Conclusion

Global youth work is good youth work. It underpins all the values of youth work, including voluntary participation; empowerment of young people, particularly in youth-led engagement; equality and inclusion; respect for all young people; involvement of young people in decision making; and partnership – yet it also adds more structure and confidence to young people critically assessing global issues and their place within a globalised world. Through global youth work, young people will develop the skills to challenge injustice, inequality and climate change, while maintaining solidarity with those most left behind. The confidence that global youth work raises in individuals has positive impacts on young people and future generations to play an active role as empowered global citizens.

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Chapter 8

Conclusion – Emerging themes for the future of the planet

Lana Pasic and Esther Vallado

The effects of climate change on our ability to sustain our current lifestyles are increasingly evident, as the adverse climate conditions are causing losses that are affecting our access to food, water and sanitation, and therefore our health and well-being. Some 93% of EU citizens consider climate change to be a serious problem (European Union 2023) and 78% say that environmental issues have a direct effect on their daily life and their health (European Union 2024).

Climate change disproportionately affects young people (Watts et al. 2019) in terms of their physical and mental health and well-being and has had a particular impact on minority groups, young people from marginalised backgrounds or remote and rural areas. This has resulted in young people's particular interest in the ecological crisis, motivating them to take action, through climate protests and social movements (such as Fridays for Future), adaptation of personal choices and behaviour (boycotting, veganism, bartering or using sustainable means of travel), direct engagement with policy (Youth Climate Councils) and targeted legal action through lawsuits against states, claiming their right to a healthy environment and intergenerational justice.

What have we learned from this book?

There is great pressure from civil society, particularly from the youth groups and the scientific community, to address the root causes of the climate crisis and find a solution to it. Yet, this Youth Knowledge Book also comes at a time when the challenges of dealing with the climate crisis are still present: the effects of the crisis still largely impact poor and marginalised communities, who have less say in the system. High dependence on fossil fuel energy hampers the move towards climate-friendly solutions; current and older generations' well-being is privileged over intergenerational solidarity and young people's concerns; and climate denialism and right-wing politics are still present and casting doubts about the gravity of the problem.

Within this context, this publication has attempted, while acknowledging the geographical and other limitations, to consider the experiences of young people in the age of the climate crises. The first part of the book aimed to contribute to the youth sector's emerging knowledge of young people's environmental activism and engagement in environmental politics within the conventional political structures, as well as on the margins of the participatory systems, through protest action in support of

climate justice and sustainability. It looked at how young people's identities, values and motivations are shaped by the eco-crisis and aimed to answer the questions about who the young people are that are mobilising. How does climate justice relate to other concerns, such as rurality, economic precarity and racial discrimination? What are the experiences, values and motivations of young people engaged in the movement? How are youth climate activists engaging in both conventional and unconventional participation structures?

The second part of the book explored the youth sector's responses to the eco-crisis at the local, national and international levels, and the role of youth work (and other youth services) in supporting young people in their environmental activism across Europe and beyond, managing the variety of climate emotions and focusing on hope.

The youth sector has traditionally been engaged in environmental and climate issues. Youth work and youth organisations continue their effort to "green" the youth sector, through education and training activities focused on the environment, drawing up practical guidelines for organising sustainable educational and learning mobility activities and supporting young people in becoming effective pro-environmental change agents.

Youth climate activism – How are young people engaging with environmental politics?

Young European climate activists have been exercising their environmental agency in many different ways, from low-profile individual lifestyle decisions (such as choosing low-carbon transport options or becoming vegetarian) to highly prominent collective actions (Alisat and Riemer 2015). Environmental action is therefore closely related to democracy as a form of participation (Jensen and Schnack 1997).

As Jamie Gorman and Tomi Kiilakoski note at the beginning of the book, these groups of young people are often largely unable to vote and yet are engaging in acts of citizenship which are shifting social norms, discourses and practices (Sloam et al. 2022: 684). These types of participation methods through "do-it-ourselves" (DIO) politics have gone beyond the conventional engagement with the political system (Pickard 2022). In the absence of conventional participation methods within which young people feel able to make the change they seek, collective action, or "doing something" is a way of responding to the anxiety that some of them feel about the imminent consequences of the eco-crisis.

Youth participation in the climate movement has been the result of the growing acknowledgements of the consequences of the climate crisis, and the emergence of the Fridays for Future movement, which has provided a platform for young people, through its horizontal structure and open way of operating (Gorman 2021), resulting in a high-profile and large follower base.

It is important to note that while young people have been expanding the boundaries of the space, the options for participation through protest action have been shrinking, due to the growing authoritarianism and increasing criminalisation of youth activities in the area of climate justice. Therefore, the question remains

about how to respect and protect the rights of young people, not only to a safe environment but also to democratic participation in claiming these rights.

Following the greater acknowledgement of the climate crisis at the international and European level, young people have been increasingly engaged in dialogue with European, national and legal institutions, through the COP/COY youth delegates, young European Climate Pact ambassadors, EU Youth Dialogues, Youth Climate Councils, etc. (Banjac 2016; Bessant 2021; Pušnik 2023). It is important to note that little is still known of young people's experiences in such initiatives and the impact of their engagement on policy outcomes.

In recent years, participation has also moved from influencing state politics from the margins, through protests and social movements, towards exploring the avenues for legal recourse, through climate litigation, claiming rights guaranteed through European and national instruments. Climate litigations have become new ways for young people to demand climate justice. Young people are using the principles of human rights to advocate planetary health.

At the end of 2022, young people brought 34 rights-based climate cases to the courts, from the United States, the Netherlands, Colombia, Pakistan and Portugal. Some of the most prominent cases include *Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands*, *Verein Klima Seniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* (Klimaseniorinnen), *Câreme v. France* (Câreme) and *Neubauer et al. v. Germany*, targeting states' failures to respect the Paris Agreement and take sufficient action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis and, by failing to do so, posing a threat to their lives (YEE n.d.).

The *Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands*, in which 900 citizens took the government to court in 2015, was the first climate litigation, claiming that the state was endangering their human rights, including the right to life and the right to private and family life, eventually resulting in the Supreme Court in the Netherlands ruling in 2019 that, based on the human rights obligations, the state has a duty to reduce pollution. The climate litigation was scaled up in September 2020 when six young people and children from Portugal made a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (the "Court") stating that the climate inaction of 33 states under the jurisdiction of the Court was endangering their lives and well-being. These cases are unique as they are led by young people aged 11 to 24 years old, highlighting concerns about the intergenerational equity of current decision making. While the Court dismissed the cases brought by young people in April 2024 as a result of inadmissibility, it ruled in favour of an association which claimed that Switzerland has failed to do enough to cut its national greenhouse gas emissions. The fact that this was the first Court ruling on a climate change-related matter, linking the lack of action on climate to the violation of human rights, is likely to have a global impact.

Policy responses – What is the state of environmental policies?

While 67% of EU citizens consider that their governments are not doing enough to tackle climate change (European Union 2023), the awareness of the impact of the climate crisis, for which young people have been campaigning through social

movements across the globe, has also made its way into the international and European policy arena. At the European level, both the EU and the Council of Europe have strengthened their commitments to environmental protection.

European green agenda

The European Union has made ambitious commitments to be climate neutral by 2050, through the European Green Deal (2019), the European Climate Law (2021) and the proposed Nature Restoration Law (2022) and by placing a focus on sustainable development (European Parliament 2024). These have been reinforced further through the creation in 2023 of the SALTO resource centre on sustainability and the green transition (SALTO Green), which aims to "continually improve the quality of education for sustainable development, increase eco-responsible behaviour and support the creation of new jobs and skills linked to the ecological transition". It includes the development of the more specific GreenComp: the European sustainability competence framework, and initiatives such as the Education for Climate Coalition and the 2022 Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development. In the youth sector, the environmental focus is visible in the EU Youth Strategy, especially with European Youth Goal No. 10: a "Sustainable and Green Europe", as well as in Erasmus+, the EU's flagship programme to support education, youth and sport. Since 2021 this has included the environment and the fight against climate change as one of its horizontal priorities, encouraging organisations to "incorporate green practices in all projects through an environmental[ly] friendly approach … and to come up with alternative greener ways of implementing their activities" (European Training Foundation 2021).

Moreover, "making youth work greener" is one of the priorities listed in the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (December 2020). This document serves as a guideline for youth workers and youth organisations to implement the European Youth Work Agenda, a policy framework drawing on the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work and its Youth Sector Strategy 2030 and the already mentioned EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

Council of Europe – environment and human rights

The Council of Europe's commitment to a healthy environment and human rights-based approach to environmental protection have been reaffirmed through the 2023 Reykjavik declaration, which was adopted in May 2023 at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, making protection of the environment and biodiversity one of the priority areas of the Organisation's work.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has adopted several texts that demand a paradigm shift in policies, to ensure that a healthy environment is recognised as a basic human right, including a resolution on the right to a healthy environment in 2021 and the Council of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)20 on human rights and the protection of the environment in 2022. The European Convention on Human Rights (the "Convention") also contains numerous safeguards that help the

European Court and campaign groups to strengthen environmental protection. The Council of Europe Education Department is presently in the process of developing guidelines for the application of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture to Education for Sustainable Development.

The Council of Europe's Joint Council on Youth established a task force on greening the youth sector in 2021, resulting in the drafting of the Committee of Ministers' recommendation on young people and climate action. Various initiatives were implemented aimed at "greening" its work, including training and education seminars, the consultative meeting "The climate crisis, young people and democracy" in 2021, the World Forum for Democracy 2020-2021, which was devoted to democracy's contribution to environmental protection, and the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest have also implemented a range of initiatives to ensure sustainable and green activities, such as Meatless Mondays in Budapest, the use of non-disposable cups and cutlery, the introduction of water fountains in the centres and providing bicycles to participants.

It is important to note that while environmental concerns are calling for changes in environmental policies, the climate crisis affects all areas of our lives, and therefore the connections between climate and other policy areas need to be considered.

The role of the youth sector in response to the climate crises

Youth work has traditionally been engaged in environmental issues and sustainability, providing space for learning, practice and environmental activism to young people. The environmental elements of the youth work have been twofold – the first has focused on training young people about environmental issues and sustainability, while the second has focused on greening the youth work projects and activities by setting an example (Barta and Ples 2021; Schlosberg 2019).

Regardless of the approach, youth work empowers young people to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and initiatives to tackle issues that are important to them within environmental activism. Besides educational elements, youth work allows young people to engage with complex issues such as climate change in a practical way and provide a space for action and experience.

While environmental activism is close to the youth field, we still need to keep in mind the competences of youth workers needed to support young people within this domain. Youth organisations and others within the youth sector (JINT, German National Agency Youth Partnership, European Youth Foundation, International Young Naturefriends – IYNF, the Greening International Youthwork partnership) have developed numerous guidelines to address both the educational and practical perspectives, including examples such as the sustainable events guidelines, the Sustainability Checklist, the Green Toolbox or the Greening International Youth Mobilities training curriculum. Such documents provide inspiration and example to youth workers and youth leaders, allowing them to engage with the topic and to increase their capacity to "green" youth projects and to support youth environmental projects.

It is important to remember that the nature of environmental issues is transnational, and therefore youth work also has a responsibility to ensure that the environmental

activism it enables and facilitates has global character. It should also take into account that sustainability challenges are hardly ever purely environmental. They are more likely "wicked" by nature, meaning that environmental and sociocultural aspects are deeply intertwined (Oinonen and Paloniemi 2023). Instead of solving separate environmental issues, aiming for sustainability is a more systemic and comprehensive approach that acknowledges the network-like structure of the socio-environmental problems and the corresponding sustainability targets (Le Blanc 2015). For this reason, young people's sustainability agency is manifested in many other ways than simple environmental behaviour (like recycling), and youth work should ensure that it supports them in exploring and acting on wider topics, such as poverty, hunger, inequality and climate justice.

In this book, we have seen examples of how youth work has been helping young people deal with climate emotions and the importance of youth workers gaining organisational and peer support to work with them. We were also presented with sound reasons to conclude that enacting a holistic approach is paramount for the youth sector to be sufficiently empowered to significantly contribute to advancing just climate action. And we learned different ways in which a global youth work approach can be integrated into youth work strategies, through the multifaceted example of the Irish National Youth Council.

Where do we go from here? Emerging issues in youth climate action

The climate crisis has shed light on a number of other related concerns, such as recognising the unequal impact of climate change on different groups of young people, leading to the demands for climate justice and just transition, questions of intergenerational solidarity, links between climate denialism and populism, the rise of eco-anxiety (and other emotions) and, finally, the blurring of the dichotomy between humans and nature.

Recognising the intersections of inequality and climate injustice

While the impact of climate change has global implications for the planet and people, not everyone is affected in the same way. The evidence shows that poor and marginalised communities experience more adverse impacts of climate change. This book has looked at the impact and perspectives of youth in rural and remote areas and their perceptions of relative injustice and feelings of not being heard or considered, but also at the views of Indigenous youth and the specific challenges they face.

Yet, there is a critique that young people engaged with the climate movement and advocating climate justice come from more well-off and elite groups, predominantly post-materialist and expressing cosmopolitan values. While this group has been most prominent in the media in the Global North, the chapters in this book show that young people in the Global South are just as engaged, since they are feeling the impacts of the climate crisis more.

Recognising the inequalities within the eco-crisis and its intersectional character calls for the prioritisation of equity, climate justice and a just transition, ensuring that the most vulnerable regions and people are supported (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2023).

Intergenerational solidarity and climate crisis

Besides the unequal character of the consequences of the climate crisis, the intergenerational differences are often cited as one of the diverging points when it comes to climate action. Young people of today will, within their lifetime, face the consequences of past and current adult behaviour. The extent and gravity of the impacts and risks will depend on young people's identities and geographies.

In order to respond to the eco-crisis, young people are often the ones changing their behaviours and making more sustainable life choices, such as choosing sustainable travel options, altering their consumption practices, turning to veganism or deciding not to have children.

One of the interesting research gaps still to be explored is to what extent young people are influencing their family members', peers' or organisations' pro-sustainability behaviours.

Climate change and populism

One of the emergent themes related to the intergenerational question has been the rise of climate change denialism within the right-wing populist parties (Lockwood 2018; McCright and Dunlap 2011). Climate policies are increasingly politicised and challenged by the political right, creating resistance and confusion. The climate crisis and environmental degradation are increasingly used as means of creating polarisation in society, with claims that the contemporary ways of living and use of fossil fuels are the only way forward in order to ensure economic growth and development (Fisher 2019; McKie 2019).

Climate emotions

Climate change and inadequate governmental responses are associated with climate anxiety and distress in many children and young people globally (Hickman et al. 2021). Young people experience a range of emotions and stress due to the climate crisis: fear, anxiety, anger, shame, sadness, grief, despair, helplessness and hope and optimism – these are called climate emotions (Pihkala 2022). Research shows that young people experience these emotions more than other age groups, most likely because of the impact of the eco-crisis on their future (Hyry 2019; Minor et al. 2019). Many of these emotions threaten their health and well-being.

Chapter 5 of the book explores a range of climate emotions, their impact on young people and four aspects of emotions: action, well-being, ethics and democracy. Yet, there is still a great research gap in understanding the impact of the climate crisis on young people's mental health and well-being, and evidently a need for government

responsiveness and youth work support. While these emotions are often used by adults to pathologise young people, it is important also to think of climate emotions as ways of driving action, demanding change or education and training.

Planetary health and beyond the human/nature dichotomy

Some 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2023). As humans are part of nature and our livelihoods and well-being depend on the health of our planet, we as a species are not immune to the impact of climate change on global and local ecosystems and on the planet's self-regulation systems – in fact the extreme weather events and alterations are resulting in food insecurity, lack of access to drinking water and increasing mortality and morbidity of humans.

While the ecological crisis impacts our physical and psychological health and well-being, we are reminded that human activity is at the core of the climate crisis, and that if the current trends are not stopped and reversed, we will compromise the very systems that make our livelihoods possible (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2023). We have already transgressed six of the nine planetary boundaries that define a safe operating space for humanity (Richardson et al. 2023). Young people, climate experts and environmental organisations have been pleading for a change in the way we (inter)act with our planet for several decades.

The ethical and moral concerns regarding the action on the ecological crisis have often focused on the deterioration of human rights. However, as already mentioned in the introductory chapter, our responsibilities related to environmental conservation need to also go beyond this narrative and include the more-than-human world, as described by David Abram (Bessant and Watt 2024; Gorman et al. 2024; Pisani 2023; Spannring 2021). It is necessary to go beyond the human–nature dichotomy and consider the questions related to planetary justice and human and non-human survival (Bierman 2020).

European Enlightenment thinking shaped a separation of mind and body, of humans from the ecosystem, and sought to arrange global society into colonial and patriarchal hierarchies of domination (Kelly 2018). Such practices and activities have led us to carbon pollution and mass extinction of the Anthropocene. It is important for the youth sector to question the dominant paradigm of human exceptionalism in society.

The inevitability of hope and future generations: from challenge to opportunity

Climate change does not respect borders, and issues such as air pollution, global warming and displacement of climate refugees are not within the mandate of only one state or authority. While it may impact some communities or regions more than others, its consequences require a planetary perspective and international and intergenerational co-operation. Strategies for sustainable development have increasingly started taking into consideration future generations and the impact of current policies on their well-being, with examples in Wales and Finland (IISD 2023).

The youth climate movement is also a global one, and it reminds us that we need to rely on diversity of perspectives and experiences for achieving a justice-focused vision of sustainability. A just green transition will rely on individual and collective action, local and international policies, and more thoughtful connections between our economies and the ecosystems they are ultimately based on.

Can we shift our focus and see the climate crisis as an opportunity instead of as an insurmountable challenge? What if we utilised the knowledge and inspiration from this and other publications and, in general, the lessons we are learning in these turbulent times to build life-supporting socio-economic systems that provide good livelihoods for all beings?

If we take the earth's warning signs seriously and act upon them at all levels, we can go beyond the current ecological crisis into a new era of global sustainable livelihoods.

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The adverse effects of climate change on our daily life, health and well-being are increasingly evident. In recent years, we have witnessed a rapid rise in young people's political action, demanding that we urgently address the root causes of the climate crisis. Young people have been raising their voices through climate protests and social movements, adaptation of their personal choices and behaviour, direct engagement with policy and targeted legal action through lawsuits against states, claiming their right to a healthy environment and intergenerational justice.

This publication explores young people's experiences of the climate crisis and their actions. It comprises eight chapters containing contributions from different authors divided into two parts. The first section explores how young people are engaging in environmental politics, while the second considers how the youth sector could respond to the climate crisis and support young people in their environmental activism across Europe and beyond.

The publication also highlights some of the emerging issues related to the climate crisis, such as recognising the unequal impact of climate change on different groups of young people, questions of intergenerational solidarity, links between climate denialism and populism, the rise of eco-anxiety (and other emotions) and, finally, the blurring of the dichotomy between humans and nature.

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