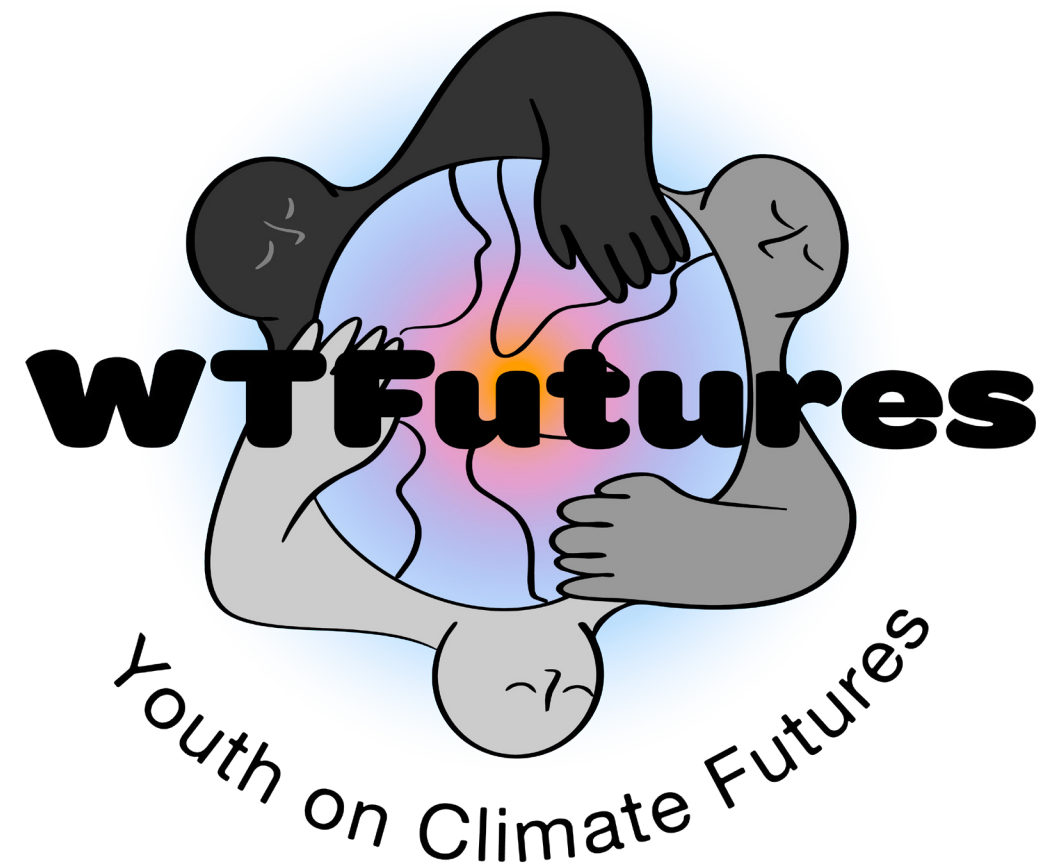




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WTFutures started with one question: how do young people in the world see the future in the context of climate change, and of the different ways of responding to it?

Through open calls for contribution, and with the help of several international networks¹, we identified close to 80 amazing initiatives. We finally reviewed 54 projects from 29 countries. We read and watched their productions. We conducted dozens of interviews as well as three online roundtable sessions open to the public (agoras).

What we heard led us to replace our initial question with three deeper ones:

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

Elevated to the status of future saviors of humanity (while not being listened to in the present), pointed at for their individualistic consumption habits (while being provided with few alternatives), accused of doing too much (as activists) or not enough (as everything else), young people find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Yet, from what we saw, the vast majority of them have not given up. Wherever they are, they think, create, invent, act, preparing for uncharted times.

What they say through these 54 projects is worth listening to. We have distilled it into seven “Key Learnings”.



1. A big thank you to: The European Climate Foundation, Teach The Future, Unicef Innocenti, School of International Futures...

1. CLIMATE NATIVES

“We’ve grown up in the climate crisis. It shapes our education, our jobs, our futures. We can’t afford to be passive—we have to make space to act, even if it’s messy.”

Net Zero and You(th) - Canada

The thousands of children, teenagers and young adults who participated in the 54 projects we surveyed in WTFutures are all different. However, they have one thing in common: they are Climate Natives.

What is a Climate Native? A person who has grown up in a world marked by the prospect, and increasingly the reality, of anthropogenic climate change and its consequences. We date their advent in 1997, the year when all countries but three signed the Kyoto Protocol, recognizing climate change as a vital issue.

Three specific perspectives inform the Climate Natives’ worldviews and images of the future:

1. The gradual (and unequal) degradation of living conditions and opportunities due to climate change.
2. The “polycrisis”, the perspective of a world where human-made and “natural” catastrophes are a normal part of life rather than exceptions.
3. The understanding that the people in charge, whom young people are encouraged to think of as role models, have failed to live up to their responsibility.

What being Climate Natives does *not* mean is that all young people are climate activists, nor that climate change is the only issue they care about. Finding their own place in the world, and saving the world – or at least, making sure it remains inhabitable: the challenge of reconciling these two imperatives may be key to understanding Climate Natives.

2. EMOTIONS RECLAIMED

“Rather than being signs of dysfunction, uncomfortable climate-related feelings often have enormous value; for instance, worry as a warning of potential threats, anger as a rejection of injustice, and grief as a healthy recognition of loss.”

Not About Us Without Us - International

Eco-emotions are a massive phenomenon among Climate Natives² and feature prominently in the initiatives we reviewed. They manifest as a range of emotions raised by climate change and other ecological crises (anger, grief, anxiety, fear, guilt, sadness, powerlessness). Eco-emotions reflect both existential and political concerns. They reveal how young people perceive their own possibility to exist in the world as it is becoming. They also express the overwhelming feeling that those with the power to act on climate change are letting their generations handle its effects.

Dealing with these emotions has concrete consequences on life choices as well as mental health. However, emotions are seldom considered a legitimate concern or driver, but rather as a sign of frailty or immaturity. Recognizing the existence of eco-emotions, accepting them as legitimate responses to environmental crises, discussing them without stigma, and understanding that even emotions considered “negative” can be powerful drivers for action, could anchor climate action deeper in young people’s lived experience.

3. ART AS A CONNECTOR

“The word “craft” took on special significance in this process – creating was like working with clay: hands-on, tactile, and a powerful vehicle for meaning-making.”

JustFutures - Portugal

A majority of the projects surveyed by WTFutures (33 out of 54) engaged their participants in some forms of artistic practice.

There are many ways and reasons to use art in such projects:

- Exploratory: unleash imagination to let uncharted, plural futures emerge.
- Experiential: allow participants to imagine themselves living in various futures.
- Educational: develop the participants’ futures literacy in an engaging and inclusive form.

Whatever their differences, these practices all worked as connectors: between people, between experience and knowledge, between issues (and, in education, disciplines), between past, present and future, and also between generations.

Artistic practices are engaging, but they are also demanding. They should not be seen as an aside, or as a way of illustrating preexisting content, but rather as a means of inclusive, grounded and creative exploration.

2. In 2021, a survey of 10,000 young people (aged 16–25 years) in ten countries reported that 84% of respondents were “worried”, and 59% very or extremely worried about climate change. More than 45% said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning.

4. THE FUTURE AS CAPABILITY

“Future-scaffolding skills[:] skills that enable people to construct visions of the future that support possible ways of acting in the present with one’s eye on the horizon.”

Narratives of Change in Science Education - Norway

The projects surveyed by WTFutures used very diverse ways to engage their participants with the future. Sometimes they produced compelling stories and images of the future, sometimes they did not. This hardly matters. The benefits of working with the future are not limited to the end result.

In most projects, the future is neither pre-written, nor utopian or catastrophic: it is a space, continuously shaped and discussed by its participants, where various configurations of actions, intentions, and experiences can be tested. It is an individual and collective capability to reflect on our assumptions about what will and should be, to accept the diversity of perspectives about what is possible and desirable, to collectively deal with change as well as shape it. It is, in summary, the essence of what a democratic space should be.

For Climate Natives growing up in such an uncertain world, learning to “use the future” helps to deal with uncertainty and complexity; to embrace plurality and dialogue; to develop critical, yet constructive thinking; and ultimately, to enhance self-confidence and agency by becoming able to picture one’s role in shaping the future.

This is why we believe “futures literacy” should be an essential competency, taught and trained from an early age – and hopefully, not reserved to youngsters.

5. RETHINKING LEARNING TODAY FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD

“The top answer [on education] given by young people is to learn or relearn personal values and virtues that allow people to ‘live together’ in harmony. They mention areas such as respect, kindness, solidarity, moral values in general, tolerance, openmindedness, empathy, acceptance, responsibility, friendship, love, and more.”

Youth Talks - International

Whether they happened in or outside schools, whether they made this issue a main focus or not, the topic of education is omnipresent in the projects we surveyed.

How can education prepare young people for tomorrow's world, especially since so much about it remains unknown? According to the young participants, climate change calls for a major change in both what they learn and how they learn. Disciplines need to be connected to one another. New skills need to be taught, such as dealing with complexity and uncertainty, collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution, or dealing with emotions. And these skills can not just be taught in classrooms: education for the coming world should rely more on peer-to-peer learning and collective work, and connect more with real-world experience – although adding a reflexive dimension to them.

Young people are calling for a major overhaul of education systems, but they are doing so because they believe in their importance. They need education more than ever, but they tell us education needs to change.

6. LIFELONG ACTIVISM

“I want to share the experience when I led a few of my friends to make a group and start cleaning the jungle near our community ... I realized how I can be the leader of change.”

Bagmati River Youth Project - Nepal

“Activism” in WTFutures refers to a very broad range of actions whose intent is to contribute to a political, social, environmental goal on a scale beyond that of each participating individual. These actions range from everyday gestures to local community initiatives; from injecting meaning in how one does their job, to social entrepreneurship; from protesting to taking part in formal institutions...

Young people today are all dealing with a mostly unknown future, simultaneously trying to find their own (however unstable) place in this future, and to make it better. In that sense, we believe that, for most Climate Natives, some form of activism will be indistinguishable from life. This kind of activism helps them make sense of the changing world in which they grow up; it

is an important source of knowledge, both practical and theoretical; it is a deeply empowering experience which helps young people build self-confidence, find their community and define their purpose.

Yet, while, for example, entrepreneurship is highly valued as a form of learning as well as of personal and professional development, activism is mostly not. WTFuture's projects tell us that we should recognize the social value of activism on a par with that of other forms of work as well as learning.

7. INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING

“Youth are not just ‘the future’ but active agents of the present, capable of shaping climate policy and reimagining how sustainability, justice, and finance intersect.”

Enter Nusantara - Indonesia

Many projects advocate in favor of a greater involvement of young people in the decisions that will impact their futures. But the way to achieve this in a way that truly makes a difference is still unclear.

Several international institutions, governments, local communities or corporations have created formal channels for youth participation, and some of them feature in WTFutures. While educational for young participants, the results of these experiences in terms of decision-making is generally frustrating.

Frameworks such as “Meaningful Youth Engagement” developed by UNICEF Innocenti and other UN agencies try to address this issue by changing how young participants are selected, supported and considered, turning them from beneficiaries to “equal partners in decision-making”. In this capacity, young participants could participate not only in predefined discussions, but also in the research that leads to them, in setting the agenda, in co-creating decisions from the ground up, or even in reinventing how some of these decision mechanisms work.

A complementary direction should focus on networking and articulating various levels of action. For example, various young (or intergenerational) groups could work on activities that reflect their respective worldviews, attachments and capacities, while having fora where they can discuss where their views diverge, learn from one another, and coordinate horizontally as well as across different levels of action.

NOW WHAT?

WTFutures profoundly changed us. We hope it will do the same to you. However, there remains a lot to learn, discuss, explore and experiment with.

RIGHT NOW

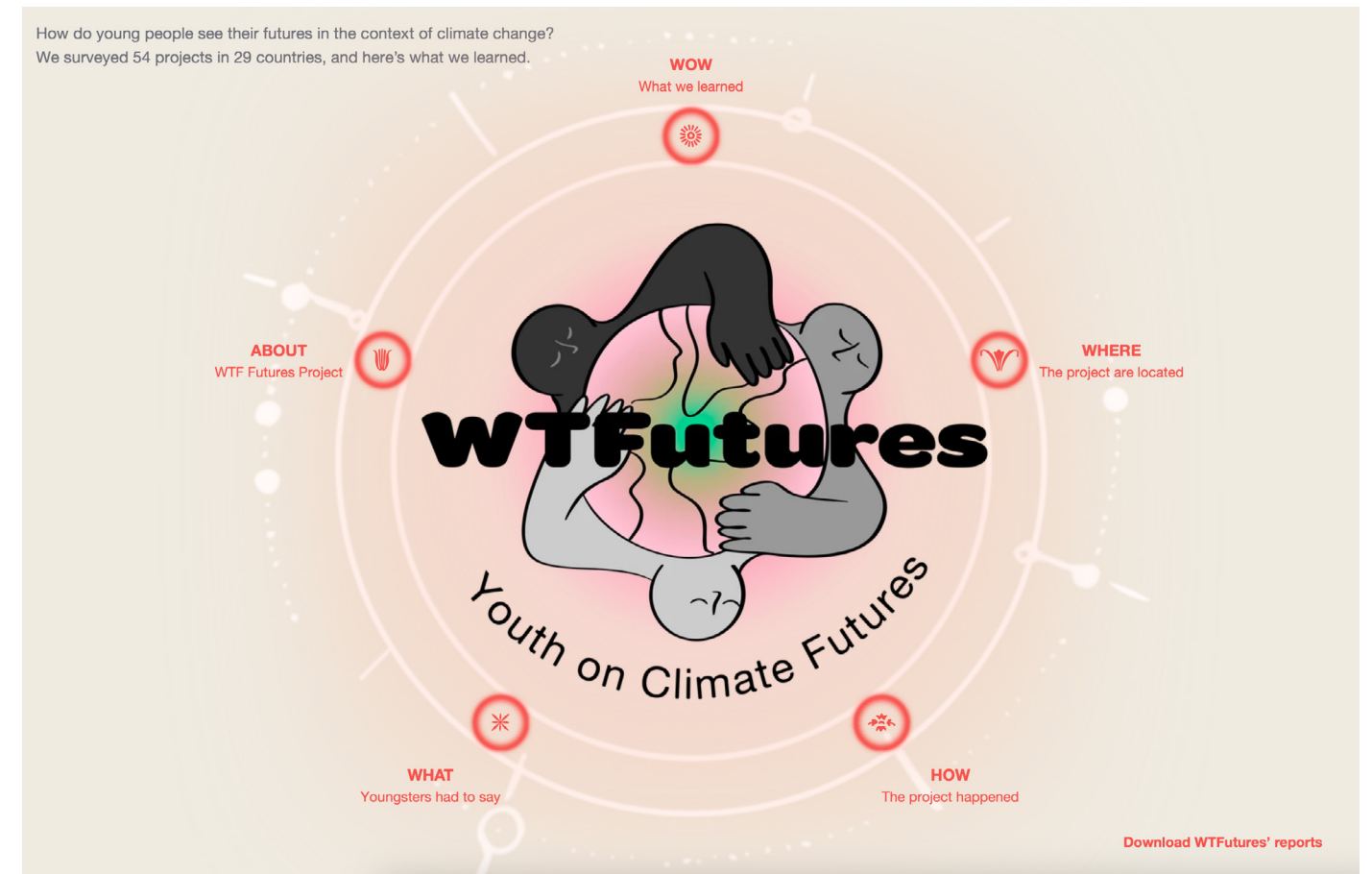
This content is free to use, circulate and copy³. On the WTFutures website, you will find opportunities to reference new projects and to challenge the ideas we have put forth, as well as easy-to-use material should you want to help circulate this work.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO DO NEXT

- Dive deeper in the significance of “Climate Natives”, from the point of view of young people themselves;
- Investigate novel ways of giving real power to young people at all levels;
- Explore and experiment with concrete ways of recognizing the cognitive, professional and social value of activism;
- Bridge the gap between Climate Natives and organizations who are serious about their social and ecological impact...

If you are interested in one of these directions, or if you think there are other directions worth following, let us know!

All of our research, from the description of the 54 projects to the final learnings, is available on a website designed specifically for this purpose: www.wtfutures.xyz.



The WTFutures website (www.wtfutures.xyz)

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The WTFutures Universe

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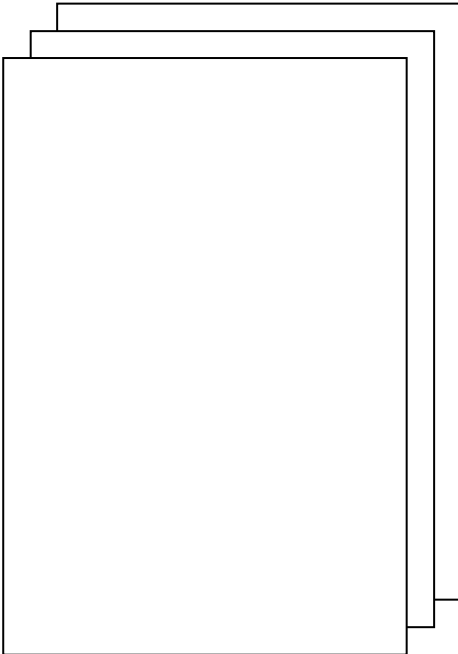


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
7 pages

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

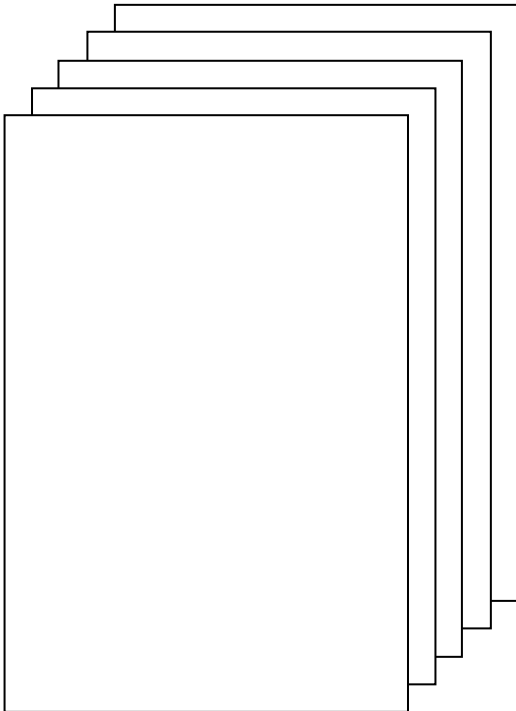
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KEY LEARNINGS
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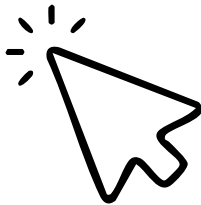
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3



DETAILED DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS
OF THE PROJECTS

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



WEBSITE
WWW.WTFUTURES.XYZ

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- Additional content



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<https://wtfutures.xyz/>

CONTACT wtf@wtfutures.xyz

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TEAM Chloé Luchs-Tassé, Rose Rondelez, Daniel Kaplan.

GRAPHIC DESIGN Juliette Lépineau

WEB DESIGN Bureau Double, Elias Rhouzlane

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