

# REPORT: REFLECTION

Anna-Sophie Kloppe

Topic of Conversation: Concerns and Hopes for the Future

Amount of people attended: 10

Where: zoom

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One of the most challenging aspects of organizing a discussion space for questions regarding concerns and hopes for the future is finding a diverse group of people that depict an array of concerns that are indicative of multiple living realities. Given the COVID-19 pandemic the event took place on zoom. There were 10 participants, aged 14-22. In this reflection, I will first be recounting the concerns raised, then the hopes, whether they feel heard and lastly possible solutions.

To my surprise, most of the concerns addressed could fall under the blanket term ideology and were often analyzed through the COVID-19 pandemic lens. These issues ranged from concerns about religious wars, economic structures, hegemony and the failures of international institutions. Climate change, politicization of the body, retirement plan and the media. I will be going through the topics in order. However, I would like to stress that whenever there was an issue raised that was not originally part of the other respondents' answers, everyone unequivocally agreed with each point brought up. It was also endearing to see that there was no relativization of importance being done. All topics were discussed in the same breadth and furthermore all issues were seen as interlinked.

The first issue thematized was religious wars. Every participant expressed that they were worried about increasing religious hostilities and that we as a society do not have the tools to mitigate these escalations. Moreover, participants voiced that they sometimes feel helpless confronting racist/xenophobic/homophobic views in their own families and that this is just a testimony, that creating an atmosphere is a tedious and challenging task. Participants also stressed that feeling

transcends the private and that they feel powerless addressing these issues on an even bigger scale. Pure disbelief was voiced when anything was raised in regards to necropolitics.

The second point that falls under ideology is perhaps not surprisingly neoliberalism. Participants were aware that this was a concern that re-surfed and exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Participants felt that boycotting was the tool of advocacy that empowered them to actually be recognized by the political sphere without being sole subjects. If young people cannot vote until they are 18, it is not in politicians' interest to do election campaigns targeted at young people. Sadly however, young people are often seen as commodities so young people are often left with feeling that in a capitalist society, fighting back through capitalist means will often have a bigger impact than protesting on the street or writing to their representatives. Mere perplexity when discussing COVID's effects on hospital finance was one of many examples addressed. There was consensus amongst the participants that there needs to be a dogmatic shift perhaps to a "community welfare economy".

Upon this, participants raised the concerns about how money and hegemony are increasingly interlinked. That most communities, of whatever stature, seem to be communities that always exhibit a strong correlation between wealth and power. Criticism towards organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were raised in how they impose unfair structures on countries that they are actually supposed to support. Furthermore, countries and individuals who have a lot of capital seem to be invincible. There was a strong concern about China exercising their powers beyond their borders. This ensued an internal debate on why a certain participant was triggered by this when the discussion had just highlighted that also Western institutions are engaging in such behaviour. Upon which, the point was raised that at least there seems to be a bit of accountability. Instead of condemning China for its concentration camps and genocide, the EU which heralds itself as an economic community but one of values proudly devises and presents trade deals, with a country that is against the very core of which the EU was founded on. The UN was also criticized for inefficient and just amounted to an overall disappointment and paralyzed feeling. If organizations that rose out of the ashes from human terror in the hopes of fostering peace cannot deliver, how are individuals supposed to do that? In multiple scenarios was the UN not just idle held back by international law but in some cases actively enabling acts of violence to be exercised.

On that note, nuclear proliferation was an issue raised. For those that were already aware of it, it was a major concern and to those that listened to the conversation quickly agreed. Yet again the primary feeling expressed was helplessness that is a topic so beyond our agencies that other than writing to representatives, there is no way to change it.

Unfortunately, these trust issues also translate into other domains, one of which is climate change. Even though every attendant mentioned that they have participated in some kind of climate change activism, believed it often to be futile because only very little change has happened. Moreover, they mentioned that amongst those things that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown is that the onus on climate change activism is not really mostly on individuals but rather it is necessary that we dismantle systemic problems, find solutions for faults of neoliberalism.

Another issue that was mentioned in conjunction with democratic backsliding is the lack of plurality and diversity of descriptive characteristics. One attendant brought up their transgender reassignment journey and all the challenges he faced. There was increased conversation of multiple experiences where the body was politicized. Whether this was due to sexual orientation, or refugee experience. Attends were quick to point out that the media and its own lack of plurality in some cases, exacerbates issues. Many expressed that the commodification of news is also why there seems to be a decline in journalistic integrity.

Moreover technology as well as was seen as a great asset but also has the potential to be destructive. This was the one topic where there were varying takes on the possible pro and contra's of artificial intelligence. However, everyone agreed that it must be used with responsibility and only then can it be used for good. Furthermore, it was stressed, that science has demarcated itself and is no longer concerned with the political and subsequently neither its ramifications.

One of the biggest takeaways from this conversation is that there seems to be a hollowing out of a common operative value. Whether this is in the climate debate, in the usage of technology and

specifically artificial intelligence, normative debates are not having had nor are clear operation systems that we all are a part of. There comes a time however, and with the climate crisis we have already passed this point, where normative debates are not conducive anymore to solving the problem. We are past the point to decide what is best we do and start actually implementing strategies. They are also not acceptable in regards to human rights that should be unequivocally granted.

This brings me to my last point that the discourse between young people and stakeholders is next to non-existent. It was sad to see that not only did the participants see hardly anything hopeful in their future, they even stated that they are paying the price for the generations before them and perhaps on some level - rightly so? The spheres of political influence do not overlap. Young people organize themselves through the youth councils and their affiliated youth associations and in other parts of civil society. It is true however, that traditional paths of politics such as becoming a party member, being part of unions and moreover entering politics local and national alike is not a road much ventured. Some mentioned that they feel they are ignored, some feel not heard, overlooked and all with their own ramifications that then engender varying degrees of mistrust. I believe however, based on this conversation that it is not reflective of young people not having ample arguments, not being informed enough about a topic worthy of opinion but what is unsettling is precisely that - that they have arguments. It may be jarring seeing a mirror held up that forces other generations present and before to admit wrong doings, to be pointed towards this from a generation younger. But more importantly to some, if one issue threatens to change your long held beliefs, the fear becomes that it has the power to slowly undue your entire world view. And on that note, bring the arguments!