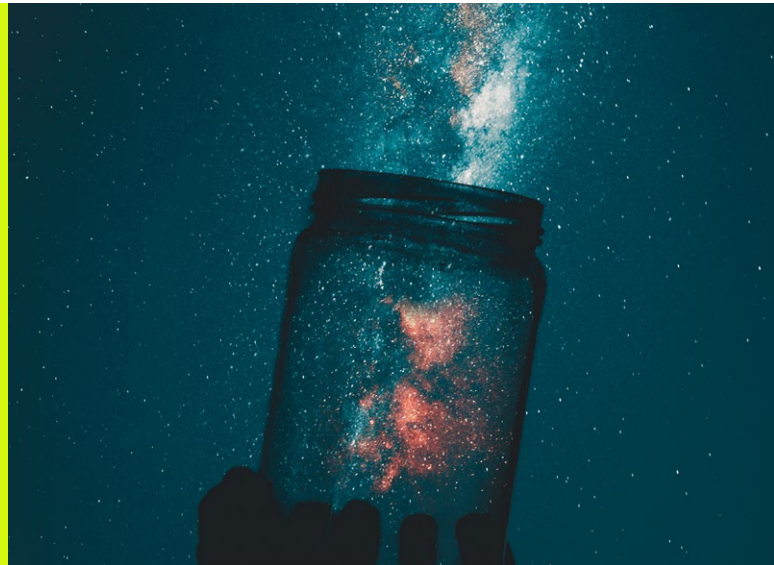


NEW NARRATIVES AND FUTURE VISIONING

The climate crisis is suffering a collective crisis of the imagination. We need new, positive narratives – images of a future worth having – to spark climate action.



For decades, scientists and climate advocates have been operating under the assumption that sufficient information would lead to climate action. But during the same decades that the science became more robust, emissions have continued to rise. Information is not enough. Knowledge isn't enough. Our inaction is not the result of a knowledge deficit, but rather a deficit of imagination.



— To be actionable, knowledge must be accessible, useable and above all inspiring. It needs to contain meaning. That is where we have failed. The climate movement has completely failed at inspiring a vision of a future that we want and that we will fight for. We are suffering from a chronic and disturbing crisis of the imagination.

— To date, the narrative around climate change has been largely negative, focusing on the dire consequences of inaction rather than the opportunities for positive change. This has led to a collective sense of frustration and impotence. People today, especially young people, often feel consumed by anxiety and powerless to effect change in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

— But this lack of imagination has not been created in a vacuum. It is the product of our short-termism, consumerism, and shareholder primacy; and it has been cultivated and fed by vested interests.

— Focus has been stolen from climate action through deliberate, planned efforts in the form of disinformation campaigns or false narratives about climate science.

— Today, we are seeing a tension between what's possible and what is impossible – we know a transition to a just and prosperous future is possible with the technology and means we already have, but it is impossible for us to imagine what those other futures could be like.

— So we need a new narrative about climate change. A new set of images and stories that will unleash our positive emotions about the transition. That show us what it would be like, inspire action and create a sense of purpose. This narrative must create an emotional activation that will help us to overcome our polarisation and anger.

— Emotional activation can start by deeply incorporating culture and creative industries into the climate

movement. They have a crucial role to play as shapers of public opinion and influencers of behaviour.

— Real cutting-edge innovation in this space will come when artists collaborate with scientists, psychologists, neuroscientists, to truly change the way we see our future and the role we play in shaping it.

— This opening up of our collective imagination, starts with creating trust. Everyone – from people consuming information through traditional media, following an influencer, or even listening to their religious leader – changes when they trust the source of new information.

— If we are to succeed at overcoming our crisis of the imagination through new narratives, we have to bring everyone along for the ride by establishing relationships of trust. This is just as much about equity and justice as it is about vision.

INDIGENOUS WISDOM

Our fixation with a linear, near-term future and quick wins is blocking our capacity to imagine the future differently. Many indigenous cultures practise long-term and atemporal thinking. Because they have a deep connection to the land and understand the interdependence of living beings, they plan and make decisions based on long-term impacts of those decisions.

And, because time is seen as cyclical, events are a part of the larger pattern of life and death, growth and decay. This allows for a more holistic approach to problem-solving that looks beyond the immediate future. There is a commonality among all indigenous peoples: a full understanding of what their ecosystems bring to their lives. Can Western cultures learn from indigenous thinking and open our imaginations to a different future?

EXPANDING OUR MORAL IMAGINATION

A tipping point is reached when our moral imagination expands. We can draw a parallel to the suffrage movement. The prevailing morality of the time that women were not entitled to the same rights as men was challenged and people opened their moral imagination to allow for equal rights. That caused a tipping point that set off collective action not only of women but of allies. Laws and social norms changed.

Tackling the climate crisis requires a new moral imagination that values sustainability, equity, and justice, and recognises our responsibility towards the planet. Once our moral imagination shifts, we can begin the collaborative effort to create a new vision for the future. Social learning uses stories that change the way people see themselves and relationships with one another.

EIT Climate-KIC is Europe's leading climate innovation agency and community, supporting places and industries bridge the gap between climate commitments and current reality.

This is one of ten insights derived from a series of conversations hosted by EIT Climate-KIC. Thinkers and practitioners from multiple disciplines discussed emerging trends, challenges, possibilities and implications for climate actions.

“If our brains are going to be rewired, we need a positive incentive to act, not an apocalypse to avoid.”

“The climate movement should be 90 per cent emotion and 10 per cent technology?”

“Where are the movies, the computer games, the comic books feeding our collective imagination of a different kind of future? There is no White Mirror...”

“The narrative is not global, but local. How can we cascade up? There are many local examples of positive futures; they need to be aggregated at a national level.”



CULTURAL COURAGE FOR CHANGE

To achieve the change we want, we have to re-imagine humanity. How might convening organisations hold space for these conversations? There are many important actors already working in this space. The culture and creative industries are beginning to understand their role, but work is siloed. The best way to change views and behaviour is Hollywood or harnessing the metaverse to engage with change in an imaginative way. Can organisations bring actors together and foster uncommon alliances to drive a re-imagining.

PROPAGANDISE FOR GOOD

The world is awash with disinformation. We are not playing by the same rules and we are losing the propaganda game. What if we entered into the story war on the same, massive scale? How could we support dialogue and discussion, building capacities and resilience needed to have the difficult conversations in a way that is relatable for large groups of people. How might organisations synthesise multiple stories and draw out the anecdotes that carry sense and meaning?