Università di Napoli L'Orientale
Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali
3

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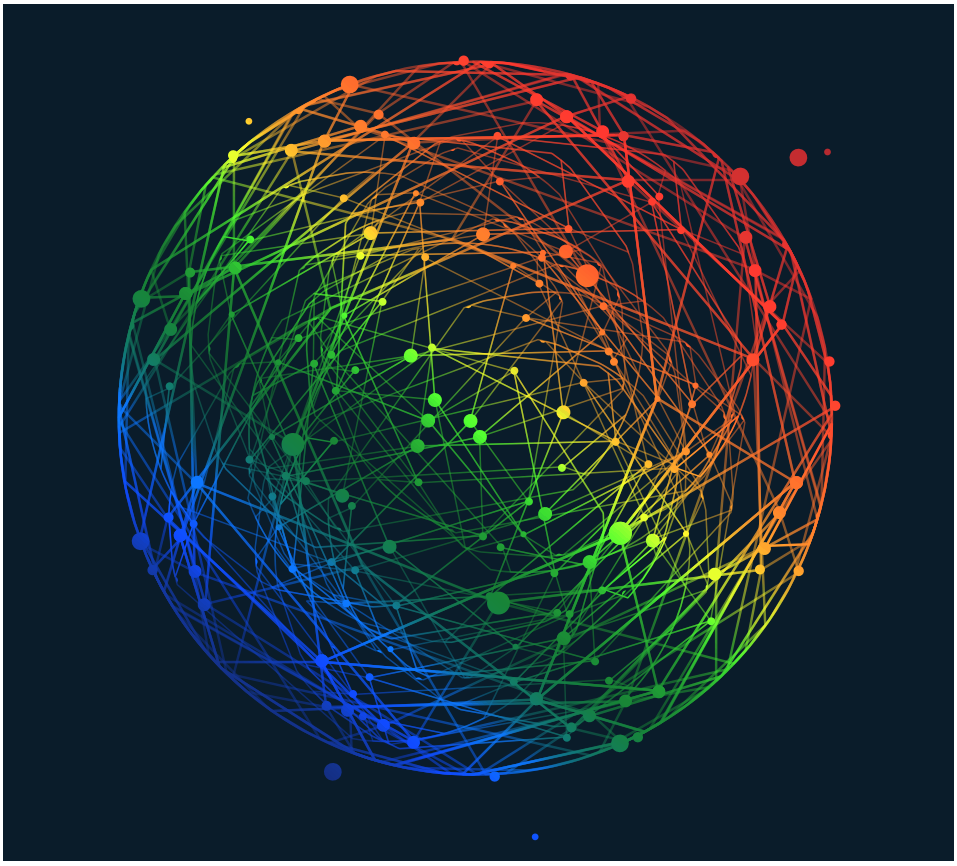
Ripensare metodi e saperi nella crisi del presente

a cura di
Lorenzo Cicatiello, Eleonora Guadagno e Delio Salottolo



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Indice

Eleonora Guadagno e Delio Salottolo

Assembling Disciplines, Reassembling Concepts: A University Workshop on 'Ecological Crisis and Environmental Risk'

Abstract

Cultural aspects and education are essential in shaping adaptived fostering a local climate culture, encouraging responsible local planning and daily practices to effectively mitigate the effects of ongoing climate changes and reduce vulnerability. This is evident in UNESCO plans, the Next Generation EU programme, and Italy's national NRRP. This study aims to understand the level of awareness regarding socio-environmental risks related to climate change (scale, frequency, and exposure to associated phenomena) and the perception of the spread of fake news among a specific group of university students. In order to analyse these aspects, a qualitative questionnaire was administered to the participants of a 20-hour multidisciplinary workshop, part of the bachelor's degree course in Linguistic and Cultural Mediation at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." The workshop, titled "Ecological Crisis, Sustainability, and Environmental Risk Perception: Discourse Analysis, Literary Imagination, and Ethical Impasse," took place from March to May 2024 and was part of the activities of the Interuniversity Center Dis4Change Studies on Climate Change and Environmental Discourse.

1. Introduction

Climate change, as now established by the international scientific community, is causing profound changes with various consequences across the globe. These changes are linked to rising temperatures, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events that threaten ecosystems and the livelihoods of millions of people. At the same time, the perception of such risks appears to be influenced by cultural, social, economic, and personal factors, which affect individual and collective behaviour and could potentially undermine the effectiveness of adaptation measures and the resilience of local communities (Poortinga et al. 2019). Cultural aspects and education—as evident in UNESCO plans, the Next Generation EU programme, and Italy's national NRRP—play a crucial role in shaping adaptive behaviours and fostering a local climate culture. This culture promotes responsible local planning and

good practices in daily life to effectively mitigate the effects of ongoing weather-climate changes and reduce vulnerability (Cutter et al. 2008; Gierlach, Belsher e Beutler, 2010; Ribot, 2011; Casareale, Gioia e Colocci, 2023). If the impact of culture and education is decisive in addressing the greatest challenge of contemporary times, it is necessary to emphasise the need for extensive discussion around the concepts of "risk" and "vulnerability" due to their significant interpretive complexity. This complexity arises both in terms of their general and shared definitions and their impact on individual perception. Living in a "risk society" (Beck, 2000), as well as in the "Anthropocene" (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Chakrabarty, 2021), leads to a paradox: modern globalised society seems to act from a representation of the future as "calculable risk" rather than "unpredictable danger."[1] At the same time, it tends to foster catastrophic imagery, which may hinder motivations for change (Latour, 2015; Moore, 2024).

Reflecting on the concepts of "risk" and "vulnerability" has educational and formative relevance because these concepts involve questioning based on a certain representation of the future, influenced by perceptions and actions in the present (Salottolo, 2023). Discussing these concepts in educational settings, even from a "common sense" perspective, is crucial for analysing their implications.

One of the most relevant findings of this investigation is that what we can define as "environmental vulnerability," characteristic of the Anthropocene and risk society, is immediately perceived as intertwined with various forms of "social vulnerability." These two forms of "vulnerability" actually represent two expressions of the same "vulnerability." The complexity and paradox of defining

[1] Let us take the distinction between "risk" and "danger" from Niklas Luhmann, who points out that the term "danger" usually means something independent of the human will and its capacity for mastery, in which the future is not immediately rationalizable because it is characterized by a dose of unpredictability, while the term "risk" means something thought of as the consequence of a decision made in a moment of uncertainty, in which the future is immediately rationalizable because it is characterized by a certain predictability (Luhmann, 1991).

"risk" and "vulnerability" lie both in the scientific community and in common sense, as the era of the ecological crisis highlights a decisive shift from "epistemological uncertainty" to "ontological indeterminacy." The various forms of risk and types of vulnerability, which are always both global and local, are increasingly perceived not as a temporary limitation of scientific knowledge with confidence in future calculability, but as the more or less conscious representation of a reality characterised by contingency, with which we must learn to adapt. The era of ecological crisis necessitates a rethinking of the categories that underpin our perception of the world, raising several critical questions.

In our survey, we addressed not only environmental vulnerability but also its intersections with social vulnerability, focusing on aspects related to lifestyle and the weight accorded to future prospects. We inquired about the perception of technology's impact, both as a past accelerant of the ecological crisis and as a potential aid in addressing this challenge today, including questions about artificial intelligence. Additionally, we explored the role of communication and post-truth, with particular attention to fake news and its impact on problem representation, linking these issues to the role of education (university and beyond) in fostering individual and collective awareness and action.

The objective of this paper is to ascertain the level of awareness regarding socio-environmental risks related to climate change (scale, frequency, exposure to associated phenomena, and potential solutions) and to gauge perceptions about communication forms and modes of university education among a specific group of university students.

2. Sample, method, and scale of analysis

The literature which has examined the relationship between university students' perceptions of socio-environmental risks and climate change is currently vast, and although this mass of studies

does not allow for global comparison, significant data emerge at both the Italian and international scales.[2] Typically, these researches indicate a sufficient awareness of the importance of weather and climate alterations among college and university students. However, this awareness is not homogeneous, as it varies according to the geographic area in which the questionnaire was administered, as well as factors such as age, gender, and ethnic background. These variables significantly influence perception and proactivity towards the consequences of climate change and socio-environmental risks (Wolf & Moser, 2011).

Simultaneously, studies analysing the university population regarding fake news on climate change have been consolidated. These studies demonstrate that specialised courses can have a positive impact on countering these manipulative narratives.[3] Finally, in line with studies concerning the use of mental maps to analyse the perception of certain phenomena (e.g., Downs and Stea, 1973; Xiang and Formica, 2007; Pezzoni, 2020; Guadagno, 2021; Scaglione and Gallia, 2021), it has been demonstrated how useful these can be in providing an individualised perspective on the phenomenon and avoiding generalisations that risk oversimplifying perspectives and dimensions of vulnerability (Uzzell, 2000; Garcìa-Mira and Real, 2005; Zorn, Schäfer, and Tzschabran, 2023).

To evaluate all these aspects, a qualitative questionnaire of 58 questions[4] was administered to the 25 participants of a multidisciplinary workshop proposed as part of the three-year degree course in Linguistic and Cultural Mediation at the University of Naples "L'Orientale,"

[2] Please consider, among others: Moswete, Manwa & Purkitt, 2017; Prasad e Mkumbachi, 2021; Genovese, 2022; Bonati & Tononi, 2020; De Pascale, 2023.

[3] On the topic see: Lagarde, Hudgins, 2018; Fatma Güneri e Taddei, 2023; and also the 2021 program, by CESIE-European Centre of Studies and Initiatives, titled "SLACC – Stop Lies About Climate Change".

[4] Open and closed questions in Italian (single, multiple option or Likert scale).

entitled "Ecological Crisis, Sustainability and Environmental Risk Perception Between Discourse Analysis, Literary Imaginary and Ethical Impasse," which took place at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" from March to May 2024.[5] Moreover, the workshop has been included in the activities of the Dis4Change Studies on Climate Change and Environmental Discourse Inter-University Center.[6]

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[5] The activities are organized in 10 meetings of 2 hours each. The schedule is as follows. March 13 - Antonella Napolitano: "The analysis of climate change discourse in the media"; March 20 - Vincenzo Bavaro: "Climate Crisis and Anti-specism: a conversation on Consider the Lobster and Eating Animals" March 27 - Maria Cristina Aiezza: "Discourse analysis of digital climate activism in English" April 3 - Rossella Ciocca: "Ecocriticism: The Role of Speculative Fiction in the Environmental Humanities" April 10 - Alessandra De Chiara: 'Environmental Discourse in Corporate Communication' April 17 - Francesco Nacchia: 'Specialized Discourse and the Environment' April 24 - Marina Niceforo: 'Critical Aspects and Power Relations in the Analysis of Environmental Discourse' May 8 - Deborah Scolart: 'Environment, Law, Protection: Sustainability from an Islamic Perspective' May 15 - Katherine E. Russo: "Vulnerability and climate justice in social media: the Australian case" May 22 - Eleonora Guadagno and Delio Salottolo: "Perception of environmental risk: analysis, problematizations, perspectives."

[6] The Centre, under the presidency of Prof. Katherine E. Russo from the University of Naples "L'Orientale," and in collaboration with various centres, institutes, and both public and private entities on national and international levels, aims to establish itself as a prominent research hub and meeting place for scholars specialising in critical studies on climate change and environmental discourse. While respecting the expertise of the governing bodies of the member universities, the Centre seeks to create a dynamic environment for exploring and advancing insights into linguistic, cultural, and literary aspects of climate change and the environment. It engages in dialogue with related fields within the humanities and social sciences, employing approaches that investigate how climate change and environmental issues are communicated, narrated, and socially constructed across different genres, registers, and text types. At the same time, the Centre intends to provide a platform for discussing risk communication related to climate change and the environment, aiming to identify its linguistic, discursive, narrative, and multimodal dimensions. It starts from the fundamental assumption that the representation and expression of climate and environmental phenomena in various texts and genres—such as scientific, media, socio-media, literary, filmic, institutional, and political communications—both reflect and influence societal values, habits, and attitudes.

The concluding meeting of the workshop, authored by contributors to this geographic-philosophical essay, focused on the topic of "Perception of Environmental Risk: Analysis, Problematizations, Perspectives." At the end of the presentations, a questionnaire was administered, receiving a fair amount of participation (17 responses out of 25 participants). Initially, the questionnaire gathered biographical information (age, gender, year of course, place of residence, country of birth, and type of degree obtained), explored the motivations that prompted individuals to participate in the workshop, and examined the classes attended (refer to footnote 5).

The first section of the questionnaire focused on personal perceptions of climate change, encompassing a range of questions aimed at understanding participants' levels of concern, perceived impacts on their daily lives, and views on the reversibility of climate change. Respondents were prompted to identify the most pressing risks associated with climate change and to reflect on how these risks influence their everyday life. This section sought to gauge not only the emotional and cognitive responses to climate change but also the perceived immediacy and relevance of its impacts. The subsequent section delved into personal experiences related to climate change, probing whether participants had directly encountered climate-related phenomena. It also examined who they believe is responsible for both the occurrence of climate change and the implementation of mitigation strategies. This segment further explored generational perspectives on climate risks and the actions individuals are taking to address these challenges. Another significant area of the questionnaire addressed the issue of climate change misinformation. Participants were asked to share their perceptions of fake news related to climate change and the steps they have taken to combat such misinformation. The role of education and training in countering false information and enhancing awareness about climate change was also a focal point of this section.

Finally, the questionnaire assessed the effectiveness of the workshop in increasing awareness about climate risks. Participants were asked if they desired more initiatives similar to the workshop and if they felt that ecological issues should be more prominently integrated into academic curricula. The survey concluded with an open-ended opportunity for participants to provide additional comments or create a mind map that reflected their experiences during the workshop. The analysis of the questionnaire data is presented by considering the proportion of respondents out of the total (specified by individual values), the scores assigned to individual items on a Likert scale (ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much), and verbatim excerpts from the open-ended responses.

3. Results

Among the 17 participants (aged between 19 and 25 years, with only one older), all were Italians. At the same time, 15 identified as women. Fourteen participants were residents of the Metropolitan City of Naples. All participants chose to engage with the topic as they considered themselves "interested in the topic/wanted to learn more about the topics." According to the average scores given to the individual items on a Likert scale, participants indicated that their knowledge concerning the topic before the workshop was sufficient (3/5) and appeared to have increased by the end of the course (4.24/5). In terms of concerns regarding the ongoing climate crisis, there was an average high level of concern (4.59/5) and a strong belief that it would significantly impact their lives (4.59/5). The resulting word cloud (Figure 1), reflecting the reasons for concern, indicates that worries are primarily directed at issues related to the future, rising temperatures, and pollution due to the current crisis, as well as the problems of increasing prices and a general decline in living standards

Fig. 1. *"Word cloud" about main declared future preoccupations among the sample.* Source: elaboration on questionnaires.

In alignment with the preceding analysis, participants generally perceive the risks associated with climate change as more significant than other risks, such as wars, pandemics, and famine (3.59/5), although they acknowledge a connection between climate change and these issues (3.88/5). Climate change is widely believed to be largely irreversible (2.53/5) and associated with specific risks, ranked by perceived severity as follows: extreme weather conditions, loss of biodiversity and rising temperatures, reduction of resources for communities, melting glaciers, sea level rise, scarcity of water and basic food items, economic crisis, and disease.

Among these, participants perceive the impacts of rising temperatures and extreme weather conditions as already affecting their lives. There is also a notable concern regarding reduced biodiversity and general resource depletion. In contrast, impacts related to food, water, and medical issues are considered less relevant. Despite this, the possibility of a climate catastrophe that could radically alter human lives is deemed plausible (3.71/5), and respondents generally feel quite vulnerable in the face of the climate crisis (3.94/5). However, they do not perceive this vulnerability as directly related to their individual circumstances.

Respondents on average perceive some of the issues related to the climate crisis as stemming from the human species' self-perceived superiority over other animal species (4.38/5). This sense of superiority is seen as leading to "excessive production of meat (which we don't really need) and thus large CO2 emissions" or "an overabundance of meat production, but not only that, we are talking about animals being caught and killed for fur production or for bags, belts, etc." According to some participants, "perhaps this supposed superiority is the root cause of all historical evil." The mentality of exploiting and subjugating anything that leads to personal satisfaction – often even if such satisfaction is fleeting or superficial – ultimately results in "these consequences overbearing to present the bill." Speciesism is therefore manifested through actions such as "ruining the natural habitat of other species to seek advantage or an attempt to improve our own existence, sometimes negatively affecting the lives of other living things even for much less important purposes" or "through the exploitation of the food industry, thus intensive livestock farms. But in my perception, any activity that imposes control, external will, or physical or psychological violence on animals, such as indiscriminate hunting, zoos, aquariums, circuses, horses in the city for tourist carriages, poaching, or animal experiments, betrays the perception of animals as mere tools at the disposal of human vices and pleasures." Despite these views, only 2 out of 17 participants identified as vegetarians, "mainly because of the environmental impact that meat consumption has on the environment."

Indeed, referring to the optional mind maps provided at the end of the questionnaire, among others more specific, interesting are three representations (principally mental maps) which illustrate how "everything is connected" (Figure 2) and how human-induced hazards ultimately jeopardise the very existence and living conditions of the human species.

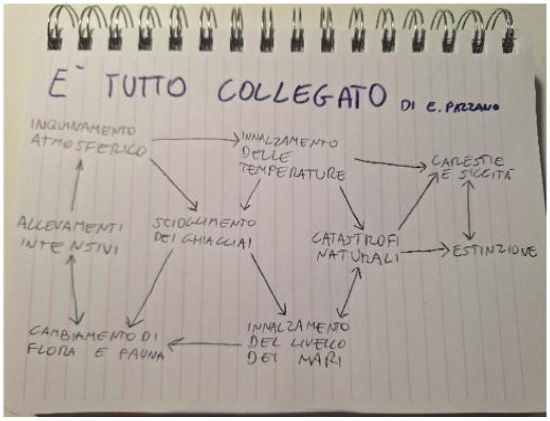

Fig. 2. *"Everything is connected"*. Source: E. Pazzano.

It seems also interesting the idea according to which the dominant narrative frames the perception of the people in consideration of environmental related-issues: that's why an interdisciplinary approach is needed (Figure 3).

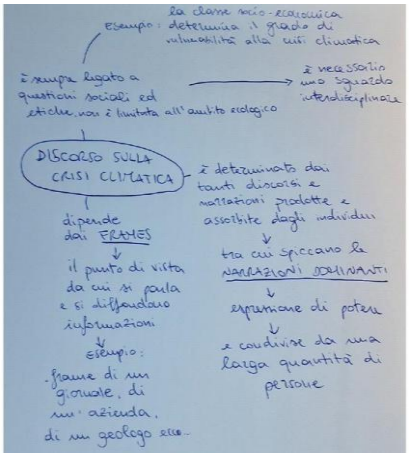

Fig. 3. *"Discourse on climate crisis"*. Source: S. De Marco.

According to the respondents, several factors are to be blamed for the climate crisis. However, there is no doubt that the "capitalist mode of production" (10 out of 17), and, to a lesser extent, the "governments" and "oil industries" are accorded special prominence; on the other hand, the actors, who should put in place concerted mitigation actions, should be the institutional ones (especially local governments and institutions).

Regarding technology, participants generally believe that technological innovation has the potential to address the climate crisis effectively (3.98/5), particularly in the global North, where access to such technologies is more feasible. Conversely, technological innovation is also seen as having contributed to accelerating the climate crisis (3.53/5). Nonetheless, there is a prevailing view that artificial intelligence (AI) can only moderately contribute to raising awareness about the climate crisis (3/5) and to developing new tools to tackle it (3/5).

In terms of young people's sensitivity to climate issues, it is notable that 10 out of 17 respondents have engaged in "Friday for Future" initiatives. These respondents consider their generation to be sufficiently aware of climate change risks (3/5) and perceive it as more sensitive than previous generations (4/5). They agree that considering the well-being of future generations is crucial for fostering changes that can prevent both current and future disasters, with the importance of this perspective being rated highly (4.29/5).

Moreover, although some open-ended responses exhibit some form of criticality: "my generation is concerned exclusively about finding solutions to risks but not about putting them into practice," among the reasons for the greater awareness of this generation of young people compared to past generations, some are of the opinion that this is related to the fact that the consequences are already "present" and that this generation is, in general, in a "worse" condition than previous generations, despite the greater circulation of information.

The discourse on information requires careful consideration. According to respondents, political institutions provide inadequate

information on climate risks (2/5), and traditional media also fall short in this regard (2.35/5). In contrast, new media are perceived to offer a somewhat adequate representation of the issue (3.12/5). Nevertheless, nearly all respondents acknowledge the circulation of fake news about climate change, although they do not believe that the university audience is particularly exposed to it (2.12/5).

Despite the perceived relative adequacy of new media, they are held more accountable for the spread of fake news compared to traditional media. Respondents highlight platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and certain television programmes or debates as major contributors to misinformation. In contrast, newspapers, news broadcasts, and Twitter are not seen as significant sources of fake news. The misinformation often concerns the existence of climate change, the attribution of responsibility, and the proposed solutions. The most common claims are that "climate change does not exist" or that there is "exaggeration of concern or downplaying of both solutions and issues." To address these issues, participants report efforts to "document themselves more and more" by "searching for reliable sites" or by "emphasising the 'unnatural' speed and frequency of these so-called 'normal' events."

Fifteen out of seventeen participants believe that initiatives like the proposed workshop can help reduce the spread of fake news, and all seventeen agree that such initiatives are beneficial for raising awareness about the risks associated with climate change. Furthermore, there is a unanimous desire for more such initiatives, with all respondents also supporting the inclusion of ecological issues across various disciplines in their course of study (4.24/5) and within the University's educational offerings (4.18/5). Participants emphasise that these issues are "topical" and "affect each of us," and express a need to "raise awareness" and "increase awareness" of climate-related matters as these turn out to be "topical issues and ones that affect each of us"; "because I believe that it is good for kids of my generation to deal with such an important and sensitive topical issue, and especially to deal with it in a

specific and focused way: step by step we can make our planet a better place"; "I believe that purely sectoral education is useless: you need to have an awareness of the reality in which you apply that sectoral knowledge, it is still a historical phenomenon, as you study history to know why things are the way they are today, you need a basic knowledge in your background also of notions of ecology, law, civics, philosophy, literature, etc. . . to build a critical sense and make informed choices, not dictated by convention and convenience."

Participants are generally optimistic about the possibility of reimagining political and economic approaches to address the climate crisis equitably (4.18/5). However, there are lingering doubts regarding the feasibility of implementing such changes effectively (3.47/5). Nevertheless, participants do show commitment to mitigating the global crisis through personal and domestic actions. They exhibit a reasonable level of trust in practices such as the circular economy, recycling, and sustainable mobility. Additionally, there is a clear inclination towards purchasing sustainable and locally-sourced products, coupled with efforts to reduce waste: "using water as little as possible, buying as little clothing as possible, not buying on fast fashion sites and preferring sites instead that promote second-hand clothing such as Vinted, informing myself and trying to inform people close to me as much as possible, reducing plastic use to almost zero, always respecting the environment, not throwing trash on the street, trying to reduce the use of household appliances when possible, such as the dryer." "be mindful of the small choices we make every day, from reducing plastic use to choosing a more sustainable diet"; "shop smart to avoid food waste, use sustainable transportation, and reduce water waste."

4. Discussion and conclusion

Two key elements emerge from these conclusions that warrant discussion. To begin with, the responses showcase a dual focus in concerns

about the ecological crisis: an ethical-political dimension, characterised by a nuanced awareness of the origins and complexities of the issue, and an educational-training dimension, thereby highlighting the perceived importance of integrating these issues into university curricula and other educational settings. This duality challenges the prevailing notion that education, particularly at the university level, should remain narrowly focused on professionalisation and specialisation.

There is a clear sense of epochal urgency, underscoring the need for a political decision-making process that is less constrained by economic imperatives and more attuned to ecological thinking. Participants express the belief that "everything is connected," advocating for a holistic approach to addressing contemporary problems rather than treating them in isolation.

From an ethical-political perspective, the primary concern is the necessity to bridge the gap between the dimensions of vulnerability—both individual and collective—and the prevailing dominance of economic interests and political shortcomings. There is an urgent need to align awareness of ecological vulnerability and catastrophic risks with a critique of economic and political failures, in order to foster a more integrated and responsive approach to the climate crisis: "We are the first generation to be worse off than the previous one (even economically which allows us not to console ourselves with gain and ignore everything else) and the last to be able to do something to reverse this course." It is notable that although there is a very high perception of vulnerability, this is coupled with the understanding that it is not an "independent" issue. While the risks related to the ecological crisis are acknowledged as extremely significant, they are also seen as intertwined with other global issues such as wars, pandemics, and famines. In this view, vulnerability is not seen as something that can be tackled "individually" but rather requires a "collective" and "community" effort. Despite the strong belief in the high likelihood of a climate catastrophe that could fundamentally alter lifestyles, there is also a prevailing sense of hope that the future is not predetermined. This

situation introduces the more explicitly political dimension of thought. A significant majority of respondents (10 out of 17) attribute the primary responsibility for the ecological crisis to the capitalist mode of production. This aligns with prominent analyses of the neoliberal phase of capitalism (Foucault, 2004; Laval and Dardot, 2010; Jaeggi, 2016; Fraser, 2019; Fraser, 2023; Han, 2016), which view this "system" not merely as a method of organising material relations but as a pervasive "form-of-life" affecting all aspects of individual and collective existence. The critique predominantly focuses on excessive consumption of goods and resources, with numerous "open" responses highlighting concerns over fast fashion and its social-environmental impacts.

In conjunction with the critique of the economic dimension as a "form-of-life" is the issue of the "absence" of effective political action: if capitalism is seen as the chief perpetrator of the ecological crisis, then politics is viewed as the major failing in addressing it. Respondents point to local governments and institutions as those responsible for implementing actions and solutions. This perception of political inadequacy reflects a broader issue of the crisis in democracy and trust in representative politics (Fraser, 2023; Brown, 2023). The general concern about the lack of proactive policies for prevention and mitigation underscores a significant feeling of abandonment by political systems, especially among the younger generation. This sense of political disengagement highlights the crucial role of education: a thriving democratic society depends on an educated and informed citizenry that feels empowered to influence political decision-making.

Another significant connection between the economic and political dimensions is a discernible "post-colonial" awareness. While the ecological crisis undeniably impacts the entire planet, nearly all respondents (16 out of 17) recognise that the Global South is disproportionately vulnerable due to its limited access to technological or other potential solutions. This perception of global inequality appears stark and is not prominently featured in mainstream information sources, highlighting

that younger generations access information through alternative channels, despite the inherent contradictions of the Web. Respondents' attitudes reflect a tension between a catastrophic view, influenced by economic dominance and political inaction, and the belief that there remains an opportunity to fundamentally alter global lifestyles. While all respondents agree that imaginative thinking is crucial for "creating" new forms of communal living that challenge current practices, their confidence in the feasibility of achieving such transformation is somewhat lower, though still above a baseline level of optimism.

The ecological crisis thus does not solely elicit acceptance; younger generations feel a profound responsibility to both themselves and future generations. There is a unanimous belief (17 out of 17) that envisioning future living conditions can catalyse present-day change. The intersection of environmental justice, intergenerational justice, and social justice is clearly recognised: the ecological crisis appears to necessitate simultaneous concern for both the present uncounted (through what we term "post-colonial awareness") and those yet to come (Ghosh, 2017; Ghosh, 2022; Menga, 2021).

From an ethical-political perspective, two additional dynamics merit discussion. Firstly, given the age demographic of the sample, one might anticipate a greater reliance on technological solutions, including artificial intelligence (AI). While there is some trust in these solutions, it does not appear dominant: participants view AI as having a marginal impact on both raising awareness about environmental risks and developing new tools and solutions. Despite ongoing debates about AI's potential significance in addressing the ecological crisis (Floridi, 2022), and moving from the students' responses, we consider that these discussions are inadequately represented in the media, which often emphasises the more immediately appealing aspects of AI. This perception might be influenced by the respondents' affiliation with a "humanities" faculty; however, this is not solely the case, considering the new generations' familiarity with technology,

being the first to grow up in the infosphere (Floridi, 2017; Floridi, 2020). The general sentiment suggests that while technology is important, it is most effective when politically activated and controlled with specific objectives in mind. From an ethical-political standpoint, it appears that the respondent audience is acutely aware of the distinction between means and ends and recognises the manner in which means impact the formulation and understanding of ends.

The second dynamic concerns speciesism and animal ethics, which emerged as a significant theme in the seminar. It is noteworthy that the "open" responses reveal a nuanced understanding of the ecological impact of intensive livestock farming and excessive meat consumption, alongside an insight into how speciesism has historically functioned as a model of exploitation for selfish gratification. Participants discuss a "mentality of exploitation and enslavement of anything that can lead to personal satisfaction (often even temporary or ephemeral) without considering the consequences." Two observations are pertinent here: first, there is a mature approach to the "animal question," addressing not just a general sympathy for nonhuman animals but also the complex symbolic and economic dimensions of animal exploitation (Singer, 2015). Second, the notion that progressive reduction in consumption can be beneficial if a complete dietary change is not feasible aligns with a form of democratic animalism (Pollo, 2016; Pollo, 2021).

From the analysis so far, it appears that the ethical-political dimension is intricately linked to the communication-training dimension, particularly through a pronounced demand for spaces dedicated to discussion and debate on these issues. The significance of such formative spaces—environments fostering collective development and critical engagement—is viewed as crucial, especially in light of the prevalent sense of profound individual isolation. As one respondent articulates, initiatives like the seminar in question are deemed essential for addressing these concerns, "especially because I am not aware of other contexts in which one can physically meet to discuss this issue."

As previously observed, only 6 out of 17 respondents initially deemed their knowledge of ecological issues insufficient prior to the seminar, whereas merely 4 out of 17 rated their knowledge as high. However, following the seminar, 16 out of 17 participants reported having an adequate understanding of the ecological crisis. Beyond individual self-assessment, a key takeaway for educators and trainers is the recognition that universities and similar educational institutions are viewed as the primary environments for cultivating civic consciousness and enhancing awareness of our surroundings. These institutions are valued since they are contexts where it is possible to meet "physically." This, in turn, is seen to be crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of these issues.

The problem of education is viewed in connection with the issue of information and from a political perspective. Only 5 out of 17 respondents believe that political institutions adequately inform about the risks of the ecological crisis: this reflects a broader distrust of politics, beyond the concerns already noted. "Traditional" media (newspapers, TV, and radio) are only slightly better regarded, with 7 out of 17 considering this type of communication correct. However, new media are seen as more capable of providing accurate information, though respondents are well aware of the issues related to post-truth and fake news. In fact, the top three sources where respondents are most likely to encounter fake news are Facebook, TV programs, and TikTok. This seeming contradiction highlights a sophisticated understanding derived from direct and empirical experiences: while new media can offer more accurate and in-depth information, they are also the "places" where one is most likely to encounter deception. This insight reinforces the demand for more training and "physical" meeting spaces to overcome social loneliness: 15 out of 17 respondents consider initiatives such as the seminar crucial for avoiding fake news.

It is noteworthy that while universities and schools are increasingly moving towards greater specialisation and professionalisation from a didactic and training perspective, and toward greater corporatisation from an organisational standpoint, there is a concurrent demand for these institutions to

reemerge as venues and contexts for discussion and the development of critical knowledge: "I believe that purely sectoral training is useless," and "just as one studies history to know why things are the way they are today, there is a need for a basic knowledge in one's background also of notions of ecology, law, civics, philosophy, literature, etc., in order to build a critical sense and make conscious choices, not dictated by convention and convenience."

These are questions that the Italian educational system should consider, given that 17 out of 17 participants express a desire for more initiatives like this seminar, expect these issues to be integrated into their fields of study, even in a cross-curricular manner, and demand that ecological concerns be included in the University's educational offerings. They believe that training and discussion on these topics can significantly impact awareness of the ecological crisis and the possibility of "imagining" and "realising" solutions.

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