



YOUTHCORE 2016 DECLARATION

INTRODUCTION

Mankind needs the earth, but the earth does not need mankind.

It is with this knowledge borne in mind that we, the YouthCORE participants of 2016, have formulated our ideas, visions and wishes for the future within this declaration. Although we may be numerous, we share a common dream. So, we are confident that together we can make a difference.

We are all aware of the fact that we cannot continue living the way we have lead our lives so far unless we want our future to be one of environmental destruction and loss of the diversity we like to pride ourselves with.

Our high living quality does not necessarily have to decrease as a result of eco-friendliness – in fact, it will simply stagnate due to the effects of climate change if we do not start intervening soon – but may on the contrary be preserved or even increased if only we accept a few simple changes in our daily lives. In truth, we cannot afford to maintain our current way of living – even though it may be hard to adopt or come up with entirely different policies.

At some point we all have to face the choice between what is right and what is easy. Hence, it is about time we take action.

By this we do not merely want to refer to ourselves, but include every single human being as there is solely one thing we all share – our planet. Accordingly, the only way to successfully combat climate change is together, as a unity.

In the following, we would thus like to introduce our ideas and thoughts that we came up with in the past few days concerning the issues we consider to be the most vital in order to be able to preserve our treasured planet.



1. MOBILITY FOR THE FUTURE

Challenges

We have to reduce CO₂-emissions, especially in the transportation sector to stop climate change. Another major challenge is the emigration from rural regions because of a lack of infrastructure for public transport in these areas. Its slowness and bad connections could also be a reason for this migration.

People's attitude towards the comfort of driving their own car makes it difficult to establish an efficient system of public transportation.

Lobbies of the big companies slow down research in the field of new environmentally-friendly technologies. As a consequence, common people cannot afford to buy e-cars. This conflict of interest makes it hard for green industrial science to develop.

Cheap short-distance flights are a threat to environmentally-friendly mobility. The main reason for this is that there is no taxation on airplane fuel in numerous countries. People prefer taking the plane instead of using the train because of the price, time efficiency and experience of flying.

Even if we want to go by bicycle, it is dangerous and uncomfortable, as infrastructure for riding one's bike in many regions is still missing.

Vision

Everybody has dreams. To turn our dreams into reality, we have to take one step after the other.

The infrastructure of public transport should be sufficient enough to ensure that everyone can use it instead of driving individually. Public transport should also be absolutely free and faster than conventional transport.

It is a necessity to adapt laws and traffic regulations to favour public transport, cyclists and pedestrians. The introduction of the principle of true costs would make public transport more competitive.

Another very important point for us is that vehicles with emissions are totally banned from city centres. A very ambitious vision is to introduce self-steering cars which are only used when demanded.

Like many children who think about flying cars, we do the same, but ours do not have any emission.

Demands

The following section will focus predominately on regional traffic on an everyday basis, nevertheless, it is unacceptable that a flight between two cities of the same country is cheaper than the bus or train as kerosene causes a vast amount of emission which should be taxed.

Bicycles

For the individual regions we want a better infrastructure for bicycles because many people do not use bikes as it is too dangerous to drive next to cars. If we had better infrastructure, we could encourage people to ride bikes more often because they would feel safer.

That is why we demand more bike paths next to roads, or even highways for bikes where bicycles do not have to share the street with cars. We also want public bike stations. People can take a bike from a station with their registered identification card and return it to the same or another station after use. Cycling might be very exhausting, especially when you have to ride long distances or hilly paths. People, especially commuters, do not like to arrive at work sweaty and exhausted. For them, and also for older or less active people, e-bikes could make a big difference. Those e-bikes could also be provided at the mentioned bike stations.



Public transport

We would like better conditions for public transport in order to provide a more attractive way of transport than the car. We demand better connections and a better timetable to be able to travel faster. We also want public transport to become economically affordable for everyone and we request public transport to be environmentally friendly as electric buses and trains cause zero emissions and reduce noise.

Private transport

We know that not everybody is willing to use trains or bicycles. For those it is important to realise that the true costs of individual motorised vehicles (including purchase, insurance, petrol etc.) are way higher than those of most other means of transport. However, in remote areas people are highly dependent on their cars as public transport is practically non-existent there. Those people will have to rely on cars. To reduce emissions here, alternative engines have to be a big topic in the future.

Electric cars: to support the development in electric or maybe even other alternative engines, it might be helpful to subsidise them. On the other hand, emissions should be taxed according to the polluter-pays-principle because these external costs should be reflected in the prices.

Carpooling and car sharing: The average number of people in a car is just slightly above one. In addition, most of the time cars are just parked and not used at all. This is anything but efficient. Carpools and car sharing can make a big change. There are already projects and platforms for car sharing and carpooling, but they are not used too often. An official platform for carpooling and car sharing can raise the interest of people.

Carpooling platforms for commuters is one of our ideas. Commuters represent a large share of the total amount of traffic. Usually it is workers, maybe even from one company, who go to the same destination every day at the exact same time. If those commuters could connect via a platform, they could start sharing cars, reducing traffic and even saving money with it.

Best practice examples

Promoting electric bike delivery

The European Commission's project „PRO-E-BIKE“ aims at promoting e-bicycles and scooters for transporting goods and passengers within a private as well as public context. Target groups are, amongst others, delivery companies, public administration, local authorities and citizens and the project should present a green alternative to fossil fueled vehicles. The project has already been implemented successfully in some cities of Portugal, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Slovenia and Spain. Thus a cost effective, fast and reliable way of transport with zero emissions is provided.

Mobility Master Plan Carinthia

When it comes to mobility Carinthia's regional government has set some ambitious goals to reduce carbon emissions until 2035 within a mobility master plan. As defining concrete aims is the first step prior to any action, the master plan can serve as a role model for other regions. It includes objectives on how to make public transport more attractive, improve the bicycle infrastructure and extend opportunities of car sharing.

Urban transport based on shared bicycle use (Barcelona)

Barcelona's inhabitants can access a network of shared bicycles and e-bikes for their everyday journeys. There are 420 so called "bicing" stations all over the city from which you can take your bike and return it at a point close to your destination. There is even a mobile application to facilitate this type of green mobility. To make a long story short, eco-friendly mobility is as simple as riding a bike.



Plans for a cable car system across Gothenburg (Sweden)

The cable car in Gothenburg is not built yet but will be up running between 2019 and 2021. It is about uniting the city and it is going to be a powerful and sustainable driving force. Every minute a cable car is leaving the station and it can transport up to 2000 people per direction and hour.

A highway for bicycles (Germany)

The idea of the new traffic-free bike highway in Germany is to attract people using the bike for long-distance tracks instead of using the car. With a highway according to that of Germany emissions can be decreased and fast and safe transport over long distances for bike-riders is provided.

Our contribution

We do not only make demands, but we also want to take part in this change. That is why we have decided that we will become role models especially for younger people. We will start with ourselves; we are willing to be more eco-friendly by simply using the bike and public transport more often and become the trigger of a new movement. All the demands we have will help us to motivate others to become part of the movement, because with the situation we have now in most of the regions, people will not be willing to switch from their comfortable cars to environmentally friendly alternative transport.

We also want to create workshops for our generation so that they understand the importance of taking care of our planet. Workshops from “young to young” might be very efficient because youngsters feel more involved and touched talking to people of the same age. With these workshops we want to raise awareness for ways of travel and the consequences that their behavior can have. We decided to have a better engagement of youth in political processes. This declaration is only the first step.



2. REGIONAL ECONOMY

Challenges

A great problem that we are facing nowadays are the emissions caused by long distance transportation. A lack of knowledge causes a higher demand for imported goods. Consumers are choosing foreign products instead of locally produced goods. There is a lack of easily accessible information and transparency. Moreover, we are too dependent on world market and international companies. Another challenge is the scarcity of jobs in rural areas which leads to higher levels of urbanisation that makes it more difficult to buy locally grown food.

Vision

A certain amount of goods we use are produced locally, so that emissions from long distance transportation and dependency on the global market are significantly decreased.

Demands

Financial and non-financial support for companies that produce regionally

Companies, businesses and projects acting on a regional scale in a sustainable way, who are considering a market entry, need to be given the opportunity to take part in the local market by subsidies from public institutions (e.g.: regional government).

In addition, active companies and farms using natural and regional resources should be financially supported in order to allow them to sustain jobs and to produce more efficiently.

Non-financial support has to be provided in every region. Creating distribution structures for products and services offered by businesses similar to those mentioned above is one way of doing so.

Transparency

We think that more transparency concerning the making of a product or its general information would lead to an increased demand for local goods. The fact that local goods are not always the preferred option is attributed to a lack of knowledge. Many people go to supermarkets without recognising the regionally produced goods and without awareness of the huge difference the support of local producers makes.

The mentioned problem can be easily solved by putting more effort into labelling. It is just a small step with a certainly big impact on the consumer who is able to distinguish between regional and global products. To visualise the difference a regional purchase makes as opposed to buying a product with a long transport way, it would help to place some illustration on the packaging as well. This way the consumer is able to see at once how far a product has “travelled”, thus also the amount of greenhouse gases that have been emitted during transportation. In this fashion one has the possibility to compare local and imported goods.

Another way to face this problem can be found in everyone’s pocket: nowadays the majority of people in Europe carry their smartphones with them all the time. It has never been easier to access information. We should use this to our advantage; to spread knowledge concerning local goods. This can be done by placing QR-codes on the product of interest. By scanning these codes you would get background information of the product digitally. That way people can relate to the different steps the product has gone through. In times of urbanisation this is crucial, because majority of people living in the cities have almost no connection to nature. It is very important to make them understand that apples do not grow in grocery stores.



Collaboration between European neighbouring regions

Furthermore, we demand the support of cooperation between neighbouring regions since this allows to exchange knowledge, best practice models and it strengthens the European economy. Regions with similar prerequisites will face similar problems, it makes sense to collaborate. Support can be given by encouraging interregional meetings and events. Beyond that, subsidies for short-distance transportation need to be considered. We want to strengthen regional economy, but trade between the regions is still important. We believe that a sustainable economic development throughout the EU will lead to more convergence rather than divisions in the advantages and opportunities of European free trade. Thus we actively support all ways of regional cooperation, such as macro-regional strategies and European groupings for territorial cooperation. Finally, we want to improve European collaboration, for example give more power to the European Committee of Regions.

Best practice examples

“[frischvomhof.it](#)” is a regional online farmers’ market platform in South Tyrol. Producers get the opportunity to promote their goods while consumers are supplied with detailed information about origin, process and the actual product.

“[agriturismo.it](#)” is an online platform that connects tourists with farmers who offer touristic stays. Organizing conferences, events or festivals about energy-cooperatives, community-supported agriculture and traditional crafting and farming.

The [Bavarian organic label](#) is a seal for locally produced goods. This concept is relatively new and not very common yet. To maintain the status of this certificate very strict rules have been defined such as the origin of the resources and the quality as well as the process’ transparency.

Our contribution

We all have the power to contribute. A lot can be done simply by preparing seasonal dishes that are typical for our region. When we shop we choose regional products over foreign ones whenever possible. This way we support local economy and minimise pollution. Moreover, studying agricultural sciences will ensure us a better understanding of problems we are dealing with.



3. RESOURCE-EFFICIENT AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Challenges

Currently, one of the biggest challenges humanity is facing is a growing demand for goods as opposed to a limited amount of resources. This comes with the inability to recycle many goods and a big amount of packaging which is neither necessary nor easily reusable. In addition to that, waste separation is not easily available in many regions.

Vision

We envision sustainable companies which have a focus on working as resource-efficient and eco-friendly as possible. Furthermore, waste separation ought to be a widespread practice and recyclable products should be far more common on the global market.

Demands

Ecological footprint

As for now, the amount of waste a company produces does not affect the amount of taxes they have to pay. We demand that there will be a label, measured by the E-factor (efficiency factor; amount of waste divided by amount of product), that shows the ecological footprint of the company. The higher the E-factor of the company is, the more waste the company produces, the worse their products will be labelled. When companies have a green label, the government of the region where the company is based will lower the taxes that the company has to pay.

Waste separation

When it comes to waste separation, two main points have to be taken into consideration. First of all, residents need to be motivated to separate their garbage. In order to enable that it is necessary that every resident has an easy access to waste separation. To be able to achieve that, it is important to provide an according amount of specific bins. The second point is that residents need free waste separation stations where they can dispose larger or special material waste. These stations ought to have convenient opening hours which appeal to local citizens.

Packaging and product design

Taking into consideration how much plastic packaging is used and produced just to be thrown away, we would like to encourage the reduction and eventual replacement of plastic packaging by biodegradable paper, cardboard, corn starch wrapping or bioplastics (to mention only a few). However, it is of utmost importance to make it clear that littering is still not to be justified, even if the material thrown away is biodegradable, as it takes a certain amount of time (depending on the conditions; between 1-3 years) and special conditions for biodegradation to take full effect.

In addition, a lot of wrapping is rather useless and should be eradicated entirely. Thus the amount of waste produced could be effectively reduced.

Another way to reduce waste production that comes as a part of the model of circular economy¹ is also product design in general. For instance, many electronic devices that are designed for short-term

¹ Our current economy is what we call linear, meaning that products are not specifically designed for being recycled or partly reused once they cannot be used anymore. The system of circular economy imposes a well-constructed product design that enables partial or (in the best case) complete reusability/recyclability of a product.



use are built in a way that makes it practically impossible to recycle and reuse functioning parts. Our demand is thus to embolden sustainable design in order to be able to recycle the highest possible amount of materials used in production.

Best practice examples

Recycling in Sweden

In Sweden already 99 per cent of all household waste is recycled. This high amount of recycled waste is possible due to a law that obliges communities and townships to set up a recycling station no more than 300 meters away from every residential neighbourhood. The Swedish households separate their waste in paper, plastic, metal, glass, electronic devices, light bulbs and batteries. Outside of the Swedish City residents can deposit their larger waste to recycling centres for free.

“Ohne – der verpackungsfreie Supermarkt” (Munich, Bavaria)

This is a German supermarket that sells food without any wrapping. Customers are asked to bring their own packaging. This provides both the possibility to completely avoid unnecessary waste and also gives the clients a chance to choose the amount of food they want to buy which prevents the dissipation of food. In the last months a lot of supermarkets like this opened in many regions all over Europe.

Our contribution

What we, the future, are going to do, is recycling and separating our waste and encouraging our peers to do the same. Apart from that, we will look out for sustainably produced goods to buy, which are easy to reuse or to recycle.



4. NATURE AND ENERGY

Challenges

If we want to save our environment we need to find solutions for the challenges that are standing in our way. We have to invest in education, development and research, so we can create new possibilities. Instead of importing energy, we should focus on using local resources and eco-friendly technology. Politics and the public administration have to be transparent and honest. In order to achieve that, information has to be available to everyone. People need to become aware of the importance of renewable energy. We cannot improve our environment if we are not willing to change our lifestyles.

Vision

We have been damaging our environment for too long. It is time to start using only renewable sources of energy. Consequently, we will stop the pollution that is currently being caused by our outdated generating systems. By further developing our technology we can increase the efficiency of the energy that is used. Every country and region will be self-sufficient and renewable energy will be affordable for each individual.

Demands

Aiming for change in society, the public sector should be the role model. Public institutions need to run entirely on renewable energy. Governments from different regions with similar natural resources and potentialities should cooperate on national and international level, so that the knowledge achieved by one can be used by others.

To go a step further you need to overview the current situation: What do we have? What do we need? What is possible? This cannot be done without the certainty that the work done in the past will continue in the future. There should be a certain proportion of public budget that should go directly to scientific and technological research, so that there is a yearly minimum funding that would allow long-term research and development plans.

Best practice examples

Green energy in Iceland

Iceland is a country running on 85% renewable energy. They are using local specific resources, such as geothermal- and hydropower to generate energy. The energy price is low compared to the price in other countries. In the future their aim is to use more renewable sources and produce their own (bio) fuel.

Sustainable tourism in Kötschach-Mauthen (Austria)

Kötschach-Mauthen is a pioneer in eco-tourism. There are numerous power plants of renewable energy: 21 small hydropower plants, 3 reservoirs, Carinthia's only wind power plant (located at 1,400m – one of the highest wind power plants in Europe), one biogas plant and several PV- and thermal solar plants. Three biomass district heating systems were installed to connect all public buildings. Today the town hall, the school buildings, residential buildings, public swimming pool, finance institutions and industries are connected to the biomass district heating.



Our contribution

We believe that everyone is responsible for the change of climate and therefore must take part in removing obstacles of the way to a sustainable future. By using renewable energy and protecting nature we can reach our goal. Everyone can contribute by saving energy and adopting an eco-lifestyle. With showing our interest we inspire others to be part of a change. Volunteering, civil participation and sharing data about our energy consumption are small steps to a better future.



5. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Challenges

Although people are generally aware of the dangers of climate change, most of them do not live sustainably. Possible reasons for that attitude are diverse. Firstly, the negative consequences of people's behaviour do not immediately affect their lives. Hence, most of them do not make an effort to change their current habits. Secondly, a lack of money (e. g. organic food is more expensive than non-organic food) and of time (e. g. driving the car is often much faster than riding the bike) lead people to act in a way that is harmful for the environment. Additionally, people have the impression that they cannot change anything as an individual.

Vision

People throughout the whole society have adopted sustainability as a way of live: they are interested in environmental issues and an eco-friendly lifestyle is part of everyday life since everyone knows that individual effort does matter. Moreover, the citizens are included in the process of policy making as they have plenty of possibilities to raise their voices, interact with the politicians and influence their decisions actively – real participation.

Demands

Environmental education as part of the school curriculum

Education forms people's personality and conveys values and knowledge. That is why a Europe-wide environmental education has to be implemented in the schools' curriculum to establish a sustainable way of life. The pupils have to get taught about sustainable development and how to include eco-friendly behaviour into their daily lives in an active way. Practical education methods get children more interested in the topic. In order to achieve this goal, qualification seminars for teachers have to be offered. Here they should learn how to prepare practical and active lessons.

Use of media

Not only children's education has to be improved, but also awareness among the whole population has to be raised. For doing so, diverse media can be used. Via internet platforms, citizens are able to gain knowledge; a lot of people can be reached through social networks. So called "Green commercials", which spread information and encouragement for living sustainably, have to be released on TV, radio and newspapers.

Public involvement

To get more people interested in environmental topics, it is necessary to include them in the policy making process. It is very important that the politicians themselves reach out to the inhabitants by sharing and exchanging ideas and plans with them directly (e. g. discussions in the town hall) or via an internet platform. There, the politicians get in contact with people and consider their propositions. As a consequence, transparency is created.



Best practice examples

In Kötschach-Mauthen, Carinthia, the “Garden of Learning” can be visited by school classes of all age groups. Here, the students and their teachers can experience and thus learn about physical and chemical laws related to renewable energies by means of practical experiments.

The “Escoles verdes” (Green schools) program supports the educational centres in Catalonia that want to innovate, improve and spread sustainable values by their education. The schools have their own garden and recycling system. This program is based on a network in which all the schools are connected and share their ecological ideas, actions and goals.

Dutch regions try to use the potential of their citizens by organizing meetings where they can ask questions, share opinions and give advice in a later stage. It fits into the discussion model, which mainly consists of compromises. Because of the variety of backgrounds of various citizens, a balanced discussion can be formed, and so they can take part in the decision making.

Our contribution

It is us, today’s youth, who will have to deal with the disastrous consequences of climate change in the future if we do not change our behaviour immediately. Not only politicians, but also everybody of us can take action. We, as young people, can create or get involved in school projects in which we tell our school mates about the importance of preserving nature and fighting climate change. Via social media, we are able to reach a lot of other young people on a global scale.

We need you, as ministers, to give us the possibility to tackle the problems of tomorrow and to establish sustainability as a way of life. We need you to help us fixing our planet in order to enable our children to live in a better environment than the present one.

CONCLUSION

Implementing all of the aforementioned ideas is not an easy task. It may in fact appear impossible at first sight. Thus it is of utmost importance to clearly state that it is an achievable goal.

As long as we all work together, we have the power to change the world. International collaboration and research are the fundamental basis for improving the current situation. The acquired knowledge ought to be spread widely, ignoring borders and conflicts between nations.

Ruining our environment comes with a toll we might not be able to pay. For as long as we still combat alongside profit-orientation, greed and selfishness, we will never be able to succeed in sustaining both the planet and ourselves. We have chosen to side with money instead of the environment in the battle we are fighting at the moment. However, this war we lead should not have to take place at all.

Remember that we have the possibility to turn the tide. We still have the chance to team up with nature. We still have time to convert empty words to mighty action.

Let us reconsider together. Let us change together. Let us proceed together – towards a green and sustainable future.

A small change in each of our lives will make a giant difference for our planet.

The participants of YouthCORE 2016





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