

Change how to change?

Including university Master's students' struggles, dreams, and actions into regenerative academic education

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Cultural Anthropology:
Sustainable Citizenship MSc

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> Cover photo of the Young Innovators' outdoor fire during the kick-off weekend taken by Katja van Dien, one of the coaches (24/10/2022)

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Why is there a question mark in the title?

I do not wish to imply that I have all-encompassing answers to all.

I do wish to provoke your questions that might set you on a path to discover your answers.

Preface to open the door

‘This is it’, said Thieu while looking around with a calm, almost invisible smile, and a deep long sigh. I followed his look just to follow his smile and sigh too. ‘This is it’, I agreed quietly and felt that my emotions - enthusiasm, excitement, and care – are emerging.

We were standing in a small garden. The fire in the middle smoked tall and blew some ashes around. About thirty people were sitting all over the place in small groups on chairs, chatting and laughing. They were sharing ideas and the potluck dinner we had just started serving ten minutes ago. Dense bushes and trees circled this small green area around, the sound of the birds and bugs was a constant melody there. Somehow, they magically successfully protected the space from the noise, rush, and routine of the city. The central station, the busy shopping mall and the crowded downtown in Utrecht was only around five minutes by bike. And still, once we turned in and cycled to the end of a small and hidden street, we found ourselves in this quiet, calm, and peaceful space. It felt that time has stopped in this garden. Time stopped and we were fully in the moment to share joy, care, and honesty.

It was a sunny Friday afternoon, and the Young Innovators were having their Final Festival. They invited friends and family to share their one-year journey in the Honours Program of Utrecht University. During the past three hours, we crafted a food mosaic together, where the colorful dried oranges, mushrooms or pumpkins were all dumpster-dived by Alex, while listening to his prerecorded meditations. We read Friede’s and Isabelle’s poems about the realization of being enough despite the constant pressure of the rushed world. We listened to the story of Merlijn about King Arthur, magic and finding true passion, or Tak’s story about the world from a non-human perspective. We attended Jess and Elena’s discussion about migration by watching recorded video-interviews with refugees. We saw Rosa’s, Carmen’s and Lauren’s, or my paintings expressing personal struggles and joy over the year and exploring the themes emotional literacy or well-being.

These Master’s students revealed diverse topics through diverse ways of expressions. However, all paintings, poems, crafts, and stories shared two things: the internal and vital passion, and the deep and now openly shown vulnerability of the Young Innovators. The beauty and the pain.

We also had a potluck dinner. The Young Innovators cooked food to make it hard to choose from the delicious and mostly dumpster-dived meals, like the warm cauliflower-chestnut soup, the colorful salads with carrots, zucchini, or aubergine, or the huge pot of home-made hummus. A bit from everything was a good strategy.

After filling up our plates, we were standing in the garden with Thieu, one of the coaches of the Program, seeing the well-known and new faces talking, laughing.

‘People, nature, food... and the conversations. This is it.’, repeated Thieu.

‘Exchanging ideas. That’s the best’ I replied while watching this loud and cheerful group of people diving deeper into discussions. The sound of the birds and bugs was still there.

‘What changed?’ asked Thieu with a sudden urgent curiosity. ‘What happened here, what did we do...? What changed?’

‘Did something change?’ I asked back as the devil’s accountant. During my journey as one of the Young Innovators and as a practicing anthropology student, I embraced my always open ears and critical questions: every sentence is important, and I aim to dive deeper and understand what one means by that.

‘Well, this is different than a year ago. Different than when we started. Look around. People are having conversations, stepping in and showing themselves. So, what has changed?’

‘This is what I am trying to understand.’ The keywords and chapters of my thesis flashed in my mind. Practices, social space, authenticity, communities, regenerative change...

I did not say any of these. I was curious what Thieu would say.

‘I don’t know’ he was laughing and wagging his head like someone who is actually peaceful not knowing the answer for a hard riddle. Then he quickly turned to me and said: ‘You know, someone’s parents came to me before. They wanted to say thank you for what we did. The father... He said he first thought that these things, talking about emotions and feelings are more for the mother only. But throughout the year, they realized... you know, that revealing feelings, talking about struggles openly, it helped them, changed their family. Changed their daughter. They were so grateful. Something has changed for sure.’

I nodded and smiled. I understood. I have been part of the journey too. And even though we discussed many times with the participants how challenging it is to explain this journey to someone who has not experienced it, I decided to do my best in this thesis and make sense about what, how and why had has changed. And who has changed? They are the starting point. Those proactive and caring Master’s students who co-created the story of regenerative change.

Check-in to settle in

Dear Reader,

Probably you have many questions. Who are the Young Innovators? What and why do they want to change? What happened during that one-year journey? And how do cauliflower and chestnut go together in a soup? I can answer that, with pleasure.

We also had many questions at the beginning of The Young Innovators Program (YIP). All Master’s students who joined were full of questions about complex, contemporary societal challenges, like climate change, migration, or social inequality. They were deeply willing to contribute to what they had seen as justice, fairness, and equality, to intervene and create a project that creates a better world. They were ready to make a change.

However, YIP changed their perspective about making change and how they reconstruct themselves as changemakers. I call this way *regenerative change* – just how we called it in YIP. In this ethnography, as a YIP participant and a practicing anthropologist, I unpack the *practices* that helped this reconstruction, to assess how academic institutes can support university students to navigate contemporary social challenges.

However, before that, let’s start with a check-in.

What is that and why is it happening? You get to know more soon, however, instead of explaining something, *experiencing* has a greater effect. This is one among the many things YIP helped us realize. So, let’s check-in.

First, sit comfortably. Maybe you have not noticed how you sit, maybe your shoulders are close to your ears as bending your back, or your legs are numb. Move a bit, find yourself a comfortable position. Sit straight and move your neck and head a bit to right and left. No worries, if you are reading in a public space, we will not do a full body work-out – some gentle movements can already have a huge effect. Sit straight, feel your head, neck, and shoulders. Feel how you are sitting on the chair, sofa or maybe on the ground. Feel your buttocks and legs touching the ground. Feel your whole body settling into this space.

Now take a deep breath. If you want, you can close your eyes, these lines are waiting here. Take a deep breath, count until four and then, breathe out, count until four again. Do two or three rounds. Feel how your chest is moving, filling up with air and then, slowly, breathe out. Feel your body through your breathing.

Now sense how you feel. Maybe you have thousands of thoughts in your mind as a storm. Maybe your to-do list is constantly popping up in your head. Maybe you experienced something nice and fun, and you are still energized. Or maybe you cannot stop wondering what these lines are doing at the beginning of a Master’s thesis.

Anything is welcomed, just notice it. There are no wrong thoughts or feelings. Maybe you feel tension somewhere in your body. Maybe you can locate your energized feeling, maybe your stomach, chest, or head. Now, sit with these feelings and thoughts. Notice and acknowledge them. They are your thoughts and feelings, there is no reason why you should push them away.

Take two or three deep breaths again. Now think about the lines you are about to read. Think about why you started reading. Maybe you are my supervisor or the second assessor who is reading this thesis to evaluate my work. Maybe a friend, classmate or family member who accompanied me during this journey. Maybe someone who met this thesis accidentally and interested to dive deeper. Or maybe a YIP member who is already smiling by seeing that I start my Master’s thesis with a check-in – something we did so many times together.

Think about your intention what you would like to get out from these lines. Maybe you have a specific question or theme that interests you. Maybe you are interested in the whole picture. The point is, articulate to yourself.

And now, see what you need for that. Maybe a walk to clear your storm of thoughts. Maybe a cup of coffee or tea to calm yourself down. Maybe a conversation with someone, sharing your excitement to slow down. Or maybe, you are ready to dive deeper in the thesis and reading these lines with a surprised face, thinking what this tone is and what I am doing at the beginning of my academic Master’s thesis.

Anything is welcomed. Do what you feel you need to do and return when you are ready. I suggest you settling in by sensing your body and taking some deep breaths again. Two or three, into the nose, out through the mouth.

And then, we are ready to step into the world of regenerative change.

What was this?

A check-in.

A fundamental element of YIP, one of those practices that created a social space in which regenerative change could emerge and students could reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers.

A check-in stands to land to the meeting or activity you begin to do. Through noticing and acknowledging your feelings and thoughts in the moment, you can realize and articulate your needs to be fully present. Maybe other thoughts block your focus. Maybe you feel anxious. Maybe you did something fun and feel all over the space. All these are possible and very likely in our daily life, or at least it was for the YIP members. A check-in helped us settle into our activity to be conscious about the following moments and therefore deepen the learning process.

Check-ins were not the only fundamental elements. YIP had several practices which facilitated not only self-reflection but group interactions and the creation of direct initiatives. I present these as starting points of regenerative change, which I discuss further below. I argue that the practices helped university Master’s students, who aimed to contribute to social change, reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers. Therefore, this ethnography is centered around the practices to answer the leading question: how Western academic institutes can support university Master’s students to navigate contemporary social challenges.

By engaging in the practices, YIP created a social space in which students could reveal their *authentic side*, *collaborate*, and *create* their own initiatives. These are the three pillars of regenerative change, which I present here after spending one year as a YIP member and as a practicing anthropologist with the students.

Starting with a check-in does not only invite you, dear reader to experience the practices, but illustrate how simple yet powerful they can be. Stop, notice how you are and share what you need. Simple yet so little practices in the public domain.

So, it was time to make a change by small yet tangible steps and start this thesis with a check-in – and directly addressing you, dear reader. This might feel strange in a Master’s thesis – however, it is supportive to present this ethnography’s main message. It is about practices that help reconnect to the self and to others by revealing vulnerability and discussing frustrations. As with the check-in, I invite you to *experience* these. There are dedicated times to stop, reflect, and get involved by bringing your own thoughts and feelings. I regard them as entangled with my empirical data; therefore, they appear continuously in the text.

However, YIP’s core pillar to sense and do what feels good for you. So please, do not feel obliged to do any of the presented practices. It is an option to experience the journey of regenerative change. Take as much as you feel you need to.

After settling in, you are about to dive deeper into the Young Innovator’s world, full of questions and enthusiasm, fears and dreams, frustrations and joy. I am grateful for all YIP member and coaches for the co-created quests, for my supervisor’s patient guidance, and all friends and family who accompanied me during this journey.

We shall start exploring regenerative change.

Abstract

Academic institutes advocate tackling contemporary social challenges by their Third mission. However, a friction with their educational approach can appear: pursuits towards global justice and social equality are entangled and could reinforce those neoliberal values they critique by becoming commodities (Pais and Costa 2020). University students, who aim to contribute to collective social change, can feel frustrations around the pressured focus on individual achievement, productivity, and competition.

I base these frustrations on my ethnographic fieldwork among university Master’s students who are members of the Young Innovators Honours Program (YIP) at Utrecht University, in the Netherlands. YIP shifted to a regenerative way of making change by its practices (Wahl 2016). They answer the leading question of this ethnography: how Western academic institutes can support university Master’s students to navigate contemporary social challenges and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers. The practices, I argue, turned individualism, said to be a source of frustration, into possibility, by the three main pillars of regenerative change: reveal *authenticity*, support *collaboration*, and encourage *reflective crafting*.

Ethnographic fieldwork can help understand this process as it reveals students’ lived experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Being a participant and a researcher, I rely on participant observation, autoethnography, and the creation of a podcast series to assess students’ perspective. I suggest that academic institutes’ contribution to social change should start with changing their educational practices to support students’ development holistically. Regenerative changemaking practices created a social space in which students learned to navigate their frustrations and reconstructed themselves as regenerative changemakers.

Keywords: regenerative change; social change; changemakers; university students; academic institute; higher education; podcast; autoethnography; authenticity; collaboration; reflective crafting; individualism; collectivism

Introduction

What is regenerative change and how does it connect to academic institutes? In this chapter, I first present the related theoretical debate, then my case study, the Young Innovators Program. After, I turn to questions around research, unpacking my positionality and methodology. I focus on the ethics of doing research in the Netherlands with university Master’s students to highlight the new and changing dynamics around ethnographic fieldwork and the field of anthropology.

Towards a regenerative path: where to start social change in academia?

Australian bushfires, COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, the Ukrainian war. Climate change. Migration. Rising social inequality. One can have the feeling that during the past few years, there is a growing number of complex, global crises that include and affect all human and non-human beings on Earth (Teasdale et al. 2021). Or at least, this was a general and shared feeling among the YIP Master’s students.

One way of seeing the issues like inequality, environmentalism, racism, or patriarchy promotes the connectedness of these questions, regarding them as related symptoms of a broken global society (Esteves 2020; Teasdale et al. 2021). This way sees solidarity, diversity, and equality as pillars of “critical democracy” that turns the brokenness into global justice (Pais and Costa 2020). Therefore, “social change” appears as a solution for the challenges of mankind, that are rooted in the colonial, capitalist, neoliberal history.

This way was discussed many times at YIP. Students were concerned about inequalities among humans, unrecognition of the non-human, blindness or anger towards “the others”. And while Esteves (2020) discusses the advocated connectedness as a main characteristics of the new Left, I do not wish to label YIP or the participants to any political orientation this simply. After my fieldwork, I am aware of the complex and multitude of worldviews of the students, therefore, I present the argument not to classify them but to discuss how I understand “social change”. It describes participants’ pursuit towards what they had seen as global justice, fairness, and equality (Teasdale et al. 2021), as the “sense of belonging to a larger community” appeared many times (Pais and Costa 2020, 7). It is a path that requires individual, institutional, and structural transformation by a fundamentally different culture how humans relate to themselves and to others (Wahl 2016).

This described social change is promoted by various universities, among Utrecht University as well, in which YIP operates. Entering the campus of UU, one can see the welcome sign

saying: “Together, towards a healthy, sustainable society”¹. This pursuit is known as universities’ Third mission, after the first one, education, and the second one, research (Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits 2015a). The aim is to connect universities’ “ivory tower” with local and global communities to support tackling various social challenges (Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits 2015b; Vorley and Nelles 2008). While scholars call to assess the Third mission critically (Dempsey 2010; Rubens et al. 2017), highlighting the many times problematic connection between the communities and the academic institutes, there is little focus on how the Third mission affects education and research (Vorley and Nelles 2008).

Since my ethnographic fieldwork was centered around university Master’s students, I highlight the need to bridge *education* and the *Third mission* by pointing out the friction between the conveyed message and the realized educational practices (Vorley and Nelles 2008). Building on the analyzes of Pais and Costa (2020), I discuss how the pursuit towards global justice, solidarity and communitarianism in education can reinforce the entrepreneurial, individualistic, utilitarian-oriented neoliberal values it critiques by becoming a commodity itself. This seemingly contradictory yet entangled nature could undermine those nonmonetary, socio-emotional values that students look for during their education to navigate themselves within the current global challenges (Orozco 2021; Santamaría 2019). As the perspective of the students is underrepresented in academic education by methodologically weak studies, by not including in-depth or long-term analyses (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017), I argue that ethnographic fieldwork is capable to unpack the lived experiences of university students and to present how they navigate and reconstruct themselves around the topic of social change.

To unpack my statements, I first present the roots and challenges of the Third mission, then turn to assess its connection to education. After, I discuss the means of regenerative change and changemakers in connection to the practices used by YIP.

Universities’ Third mission

Historically, European mediaeval universities primarily centered around preserving and transferring knowledge by education. As the “first academic revolution” arrived in the nineteenth century, research became the second core mission, focusing on measuring and contextualizing the world. However, the late twentieth century brought new changes to universities by a new wave of revolution, that has been focusing on the contribution to social and economic progress (Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits 2015a).

¹ Utrecht University Science Park Campus (USP) – welcome signs

The Third mission therefore came alive by emphasizing leaving academic institutions’ isolated “ivory tower” and finding answer to “real-world” needs by connecting with external communities and stakeholders (Dempsey 2010; Rubens et al. 2017). Besides the moral responsibility, this engagement bases on shifting to “entrepreneurial” universities, as neoliberal policies leave less space for governmental support (Vorley and Nelles 2008). The competitive environment and the marketization of the institutes lead to the urge to ensure financial funding (Dempsey 2010; Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits 2015a), by engaging with the public in various ways, such as doing research or organizing trainings and activities focusing on and involving local communities (Rubens et al. 2017).

Scholars call for critical assessment about how this “engaged scholarship” affects *research* (Dempsey 2010). Rubens et alii (2017) warn based on the analyzed literature to question what might seem as a “win-win situation” that supports both communities and universities on the surface. First, the pressure around research topics that attract and address the needs of external stakeholders could turn into “academic capitalism” and threaten the “intellectual integrity” (Rubens et al. 2017). Second, while ideally the connection is based on mutual respect and back and forth engagement, following the so-called “two-way” approach (Weerts and Sandmann 2008), as research shows, communities’ advocated empowerment often results in conflicting interests and could reinforce already existing power relations and ambiguity (Dempsey 2010). Based on her ethnography at the University of North Carolina (UNC), Dempsey (2010, 384) presents how universities tend to follow an intervening approach: “campus-based participants must be willing to resist the urge to provide instruction and advice and instead demonstrate an ability to listen and learn from community-based participants.”

All these critics are valid and important. However, there is little focus on how Third mission’s affects *education*.

Bridging the Third mission and education

Scholars argue for bridging universities’ missions comprehensively (Vorley and Nelles 2008). Therefore, I discuss the friction of the Third mission and education and argue for tailoring them by incorporating university students’ perspectives – similarly, as Dempsey (2010) highlighted the need to listen and learn from the communities.

However, as Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017, 4) argue, there is a “methodological weakness” around the assessment of students’ perspective. They emphasize the lack of deep analyses and the presence of simplified causes-effects studies in question of student engagement

in higher education. Therefore, I highlight ethnographic studies to unpack the lived experienced of students, regarding teaching and learning practices and their connection to the Third mission. Therefore, I rely on my conducted ethnographic fieldwork among university Master’s students to expose students’ frustrations and their need for changed educational practices that are aligned with the message of the university.

My argumentation regards university students as proactive citizens who seek for opportunities to contribute to social change. What Hayden (2017, 249) describes as “world citizens” in cosmopolitan education coincides with the experience of the Young Innovators: there is a “shared [sense] of humanity” that fuel the desire to contribute to society. Academic education was generally seen by the participant as a bedrock of this aimed contribution. There are critical voices around the seemingly global, yet mostly Western-centered focus around creating a more “just world” (Teasdale et al. 2021, 20), stating that predominantly English-speaking countries and people with socially privileged background participate in the discussion (Pais and Costa 2020). While I acknowledge the privilege of university students in Western higher education, I assess this question in the third chapter, and for now, overall state that Western academic institutes and thus university students aim to contribute to the above-described global social change.

However, this message conveyed by the Third mission can be confronted with some of the lived experiences of students in regard of teaching and learning practices. This seemingly contradictory fragmentation lies in the entanglement of the “critical democratic” and the “entrepreneurial” education (Pais and Costa 2020). In principle, universities aim to support students to foster critical thinking, research ability and entrepreneurial skills (Donath 2015). Therefore, economic connections are often highlighted over social and political engagement (Vorley and Nelles 2008). With more “entrepreneurial” educational practices, the focus tends to shifts to prepare students to the labor market (Horvath 2015). Therefore education risks to become utilitarian-oriented, reducing nonmonetary values – that are otherwise regarded as “essential in sustaining a healthy democratic society” (Santamaría 2019, 1) Highlighting employability can result in performative, efficiency-oriented, rigid, and linear educational practices (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017; Secundo et al. 2010).

Thus, on the one hand, education focuses on individual achievements and self-investment to maximize one’s productivity (Esteves 2020; Pais and Costa 2020). On the other hand, there is the promoted Third mission that targets ethical values like collectivism, solidarity, and equality to enhance “critical democracy”. Some scholars argue that there should be an increased

highlight on the latter to tackle the negative consequences of the former – which is seen as an obstacle to the desired social change (Camicia and Franklin 2011). However, Pais and Costa (2020) argues that while in principle the enhance of “critical democracy” aims to oppose the market-oriented, individualistic view, this critique becomes a commodity and reinforces the same the neoliberal, entrepreneur thinking. I unpack this more in depth in the first chapter, however for now, it shows the friction between the Third mission’s message – communitarian, ethical values – and the potentially individual-focused educational practices.

This friction calls for critical assessment. First, it could result in an intervening approach, as it was seen by the unequal relationship between higher education institutes and communities outside the “ivory tower” (Hoxie, Berkebile, and Todd 2012; Meyer, Louder, and Nicolas 2021). Moreover, it reproduces those neoliberal values it aims to oppose, and pressure students towards maximized efficiency and productivity in a procedural and linear framework (Vorley and Nelles 2008).

However, both the connected literature and my fieldwork experience reveal different needs from students. There is an increasing need to go beyond instrumental logic which only “regards people and other living beings as mere pieces of a system, in which their productive capacity and/or consumption and availability for value extraction must be maximized” (Esteves 2020, 233). Students seek for socio-emotional support and ways that include a holistic view to grow as a person, beyond the academic and market-oriented focus (Orozco 2021). Vorley and Nelles (2008, 6) describe this as “the inclusion of non-scientific and more creative/culturally orientated forms of third stream activities.” By holistic growth, I mean students’ need to incorporate emotional, bodily and intellectual experiences (Mauksch 2018) to be able to navigate within the contemporary social challenges, that requires experimental, creative, and cooperative skills and attitude (Wahl 2016; Sennett 2012).

The utilitarian- and productivity-focused educational practices tend to neglect these socio-emotional needs, which could result in frustrations among students. Based on my fieldwork, I grouped these into three salient frustrations around (1) the urgency to perform one’s best, (2) the need for communities, and (3) the pressure of individual responsibility. These interconnected themes give the structure of this thesis, presenting each in one chapter.

Overall, these highlight the need to critically question “the very heart of university functions” (Vorley and Nelles 2008, 6) and bridge the Third mission and the educational practices holistically, meaning not regarding them as separate elements but connected part of a comprehensive strategy. I argue that the first step by Western universities to contribute to the

desired social change could be to assess the academic institute itself and align the Third mission’s message and the educational practices by incorporating students’ perspective.

How is it possible?

It lies in implementing those *practices* that were fundamental elements of YIP and were called *regenerative practices*. I define them in the following sub-chapter, while throughout the thesis I present how using them created a social and physical space in which students could navigate and reconstruct themselves in regard of contemporary social change.

Regenerative change and its practices

YIP turned away from the previously-described contradictory yet entangled intervening and utilitarian-oriented approach of making change and shifted to the so-called *regenerative changemaking* (Wahl 2016). It describes a long-term systemic transformation instead of isolated short-term interventions. In parallel as Pais and Costa (2020) suggest, instead of quick-fixes and more activism, taking a step back can be the key for contemporary social challenges. Regenerative change aims to first understand the living systems by integrating multiple aspects. For example, Gibbons (2020a; 2020b, 20) describes “regenerative” as the “new sustainable” that unites practice and science “with essential but often neglected components of sustainability—ecological, social, cultural, spiritual, and geophysical—as well as their temporal and spatial dynamics.” At YIP, regenerative systematic change was described by six points: interconnections, circularity, emergence, wholeness, synthesis, and relationship.² Therefore, instead of a linear way that focuses on isolated elements, regenerative change aims to build on the actors’ dynamic interplay to co-create in a reflexive manner (Gibbons 2020a; Wahl 2016).

In this thesis, I base regenerative changemaking on three pillars – *authenticity*, *collaboration*, *reflective crafting* – that are connected to the three frustrations of the students. In each chapter, I discuss one pillar and a frustration, based on the connected regenerative practices. The three themes are not exclusively sequential steps but rather focuses within the same journey. Authenticity stands to describe revealing one’s “true self” (Handler 1986) as changemaking starts from questions that matters to oneself, while this provides opportunity to critically assess the YIP practices as still individual-centered. Collaboration was built on sharing this authentic side with each other and creating a community based on these interactions (Sennett 2012). Reflective crafting was encouraged as students created their own tangible initiatives in a process-focused way (Hayden 2017).

² Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

By reconstructing the way of making change, meaning how to think about and act for social change, students could reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers (Wahl 2016). I understand regenerative changemakers here as those individuals who aim to learn to navigate themselves within the contemporary social challenges by “growing as a person” in a holistic way, including emotional, embodied and intellectual experiences (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017; Mauksch 2018; Orozco 2021, 2) Moreover, who aim to cooperate, co-create and experiment with others in a reflexive, process-oriented way by sharing these experiences (Meyer, Louder, and Nicolas 2021; Hayden 2017; Sennett 2012). I do not wish to label, mark and classify people by a recipe of “changemaker attributes” (Rivers, Armellini, and Nie 2015) or decide whether “everyone is a changemaker” (Teasdale et al. 2021). I regard people – within this thesis the participating university Master’s students – who aim to contribute to social change as changemakers. My question is, what kind of changemakers are seen as necessary and flourishing in regard of social change?

I argue for regenerative changemaking and reconstructing oneself as regenerative changemaker. Therefore, the focus of this ethnography are those practices that facilitated this journey.³

This is where the frustrations, regenerative change, and the fragmentation of the Third mission and academic education meet. Universities promote regenerative change on paper by their Third mission, but many times, this is inconsistent with the entrepreneurial approach of academic education. This seemingly contradictory yet entangled relationship can cause frustrations for university students, which can be healed by engaging in regenerative practices. Therefore, universities who aim to contribute to social change, first could change their educational approach and practices. By creating consistency between their message and way of teaching, students can be supported to learn to navigate uncertainty by authenticity, create meaningful connections, and dare to experiment in real life.

The Young Innovators Program invited the participants to experience this new and regenerative change. And now in this thesis, I do my best to provide a detailed and profound guidance to the reader to experience this changed way of making change.

³ While I focus on the “YIP practices”, I do not intend to neglect the presence of the people neither mean to suggest that this is the only program operating with these practices. What I mean by “YIP” is the atmosphere that was co-created by the coaches and students by engaging in the practices. Therefore, their presence and interaction are assessed by the practices.

The Young Innovators: how did we start?

It all started when during our kick-off weekend, we went into a forest to sit alone for five hours to connect to nature and to ourselves marking the start of our quest.

I am talking about the Young Innovators Program at Utrecht University, which is an “extracurricular honours program designed for curious and socially involved students.”⁴ It is open for Master’s students from all the faculties and offers 15 EC upon the Master’s degree. And besides that, a social space to flourish yourself and co-create your journey with your peers and the coaches, I would say, after engaging in YIP.

This interdisciplinary honours program, which started more than ten years ago, welcomed 37 students during the 2021/2022 academic year. It was a diverse group in terms of education (for example public health, international relations, applied ethics, or sustainable development) and nationality (for example Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Japan, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, or the United States of America). Regarding their age, they were between their early twenties and thirties.

Moreover, as ethnographic studies often highlight, these students are more complex than to describe by these factual indicators. They have fears and dreams, concerns and passions, frustrations and deep desires to engage in the world’s complex questions around themselves.

They feel responsible to carry a great amount of global societal, environmental, or economic problem on their shoulder. They spend long hours studying for their Master’s studies of the various fields. They are involved in numerous study organizations, activists’ groups, and extra-curricular projects. They discuss questions and concerns about injustice, climate change or gender inequality in their spare time. They seek for options to promote circularity and avoid overconsumption by their daily actions, such as clothes swaps or dumpster diving. And while they are willing to contribute to the social change that guides the global society into that direction which students believe the world should march towards; they can be frustrated.

As Gerard, one of the coordinators of YIP said: “YIP attracts the proactive yet sensitive people.”⁵ I immediately stored this in my mental box for sentences that grasp simply yet profoundly the different aspects I was looking at during my fieldwork. This sentence describes the Young Innovators very well. During our one year, we discussed the various systems we live in, roots of the seen global challenges, possible contribution to what is said to be fairness, justice, and equality. There was a strong willingness to support and innovate in a proactive way.

⁴ [Description of YIP – Utrecht University website - 2022](#)

⁵ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/03 – 26/04/2022

However, this proactiveness can result in frustrations as students experience academic education to highlight fulfilling pre-set requirements, maximized productivity, and self-investment. Frustrations of not doing enough or not being enough. Frustrations around constant busyness which does not let students to slow down and realize their own drives and motivations. Frustrations around the pressure to always provide their best, produce and achieve more in relation to academic development, university courses, social activist movements, or their everyday actions.

This is when the Young Innovators Program came.

This one-year Program offers workshops and meetings between October and May to unpack “topics such as innovation processes, teamwork, group dynamics, and leadership.”⁶ There are three phases, that aim to start from personal questions (Phase of “I”), nourish them by the community (Phase of “We”) and then step out to the world by creating social initiatives (Phase of “the World”) (details in Appendix 1). Five coaches, Eva, Nouk, Katja, Gerard and Thieu, supported this journey. They organized YIP practically, held workshops and coaching sessions where they facilitated students’ personal journey in smaller groups. However, as they highlighted co-creation to encourage students to step in and design their own journey, the relationship was collaborative and facilitative, rather than hierarchical. For example, we had so-called open-input sessions where students could bring and create their own workshops. Within this thesis, I focus on the experience of the students – however, this regenerative journey would not have been possible without the constant attentive support of the coaches. One could write a whole separate ethnography about their presence, collaboration, and personal stories. While this thesis is not dedicated to this, I would like to thank them for guiding us by bravely revealing their true and honest thoughts, feelings, and questions.

YIP was more than weekly workshops and discussions. By its practices, it created a social space to dedicate time for students to slow down and realize their *spark*⁷, as we called it, meaning moments and topics that *moved* them. It was a key to one’s *authentic side* by revealing all frustrations, pressure, and passion. By showing this to each other, we experienced a community feeling based on *co-creations*. By the received encouragement, students started *reflectively crafting* to create direct change in their environment, instead of being parallelized by complex global challenges. Getting students excited and make them realize that they are capable of influencing their environment are the main goals, as Thieu said it once.

⁶ [Description of YIP – Utrecht University website - 2022](#)

⁷ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/02 – 21/01/2022

Therefore, YIP operated with individual-centered, process-focused teaching and learning practices. While this educational approach was new to most of the students and the overwhelming freedom caused some uncertainty and confusion, at the end, they were in favor of this approach. This process-focused way illustrates tackling contemporary social challenges: there is no one clear solution or blue-print known by an authority that sets the requirements. Contemporary social changes need to be experimented, reflectively evaluated, collectively created. The YIP practices took the burden of solving all global crises at once off the students' shoulder, and instead encouraged them to find what is meaningful for them, create, and connect.

While YIP and the practices raise dynamic questions around the individual and the collective, the global and the local, taking responsibility, listen, and cooperate, it helped students to reconstruct themselves in a regenerative way.

Overall, the Young Innovators, Master's students at an Honours Program at Utrecht University started with a huge willingness to intervene and change the world's societal, environmental, health, economic, or political problems. To produce a product and manage a project efficiency. However, soon they found themselves in a community, where starting a meeting in pairs with our backs to each other to sense your partner by moving or crying openly when we discuss stories of transgression was common part of the story. By engaging in these practices, we realized and revealed our pain and by sharing it with each other, we transformed to find our passion and beauty.

We experienced regenerative change.

How to research “Western academia at home”?

Studying Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University while being a YIP member directed my ethnographic fieldwork to focus on the Young Innovators and step in as a participant-researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). I am a member since October 2021; therefore, I had been participating in YIP for four months before the official fieldwork-period of my Master’s program. I regard this as an orientation phase, which sparked my interest and founded my connections and accessibility (O’Reilly 2012).

My choice was marked by the fact that students from our Master’s program were asked to do research “at home” – meaning one’s country of origin or residence – due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I aimed to do research in the Netherlands since it felt party home (I was an Erasmus student at UU during 2019/2020 fall semester) while I was still abroad. Since, as I thought when started the Master’s program, anthropologists must be abroad to do research.

However, my perspectives took a 180 degree turn after this one year.

The new generation of anthropologists. Anthropology as a field aims to understand yet constantly question meanings by the interplay of their manifestation and contextualization. Ingold describes its objective as “to seek a generous, comparative but nevertheless critical understanding of human being and knowing in the one world we all inhabit” (2008, 69). Ethnographic fieldwork differs from anthropology (Ingold 2008; 2017) as it means the use of qualitative research methods to describe and unpack lived experiences of a sub-culture and its people. Due to the history of ethnographic research, the focus on studying non-Western cultures was leading, and also misleading: ethnography, as a family of methods can help understand various groups by being grounded in first-hand empirical data and connected to related theoretical framework (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019; Madden 2017).

Recent discussions call for assessing ethnographic research and anthropology critically and reflexively (Gould and Allison 2020; Weiss and McGranahan 2021; West 2018). If anthropologists aim to reflect on social groups and sub-cultures, their way of doing that also should be reflected (Rooney 2018). Growing number of critiques address how “whiteness” still dominates the field and reproduces the same power structures which are many times opposed to (Shankar 2018). “Why study something that everyone already understands?” poses the question Shankar (2018) thoughtfully when describes how studying the Western cultures is still underrepresented within ethnographic researches.

Researching Western academia. Therefore, what first seemed like an obstacle – doing research in a place I already knew – became an opportunity to experience aiming to be part of a new generation of anthropologists. Instead of first making “the strange familiar” to make “the familiar strange” (Spiro 1990), during my fieldwork, I had the possibility to immediately see critically and reflexively the everyday of the already known Western academic institute while being one of its European student. The contemporary higher education promised dynamic questions to systematically unpack and the constant pursuit to comprehend the many different perspectives within the existing power structures.

By engaging in these questions while getting to know the Young Innovators, their questions and frustrations more and sensing the narrative and dynamics of YIP, my focus began to crystallize. Exploring the literature and engaging in the practices, having discussions around the dreams and fears to contribute to social change, the role of higher education, or the relation of the individual and the collective, my **research question** became clear.

Research question

How can academic institutes support university Master’s students to navigate contemporary social challenges and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers?

Or even before one can ask: should academic institutes support students in this? I argue yes due to the above-described interplay of the Third mission and education: when the conveyed message promises contribution to social change, then academic institutes should support students in that. To answer this question, throughout the thesis I present those regenerative practices which I observed and was engaged in during my ethnographic fieldwork.

Therefore, my ethnography is centered around the *practices*, rather than presenting individuals stories of the Young Innovators. I reflect more on this approach constantly in the chapters while unpack decisions around presenting my empirical data. Now, I reflect on some special ethical and methodological questions that emerged due to the research context.

University students as the participants – ethical questions. I discuss my positionality as a university students and a YIP member and highlight ethical questions around collaboration with the participating Master’s students.

Starting the fieldwork, I was noting when I “stepped in more as a researcher or a participant”⁸. However, I realized that it is not possible to separate for certain situations. I constantly shifted back and forth by “zooming in” for my personal questions or the relationship with participants who became my friends, and “zooming out” to regard and contextualize reactions and discussions in a broader framework. As I was first a member not a researcher during YIP, I was open to fully experience the proposed journey as a participating Master’s student. Since one’s positionality affects the methodology (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017), I reflect on this question in the sub-section below.

Here I focus on the cooperation with the participants and the related ethical questions. Being university Master’s students, they were all aware of the overall procedure of an academic Master’s thesis. Moreover, as YIP often highlighted ethnography-like mindset and methods – such as reflexivity, critical curiousness, active listening – I could relate the means of ethnographic fieldwork for them. Many times, I received questions about the details around my methods or progress. It was a conscious decision to share these honestly and ask for feedback, which created a collaborative atmosphere (Rappaport 2008).

In addition to this general involvement, I created a podcast series with some YIP students – which I assess methodologically in the following sub-chapter – by which co-creation truly became a fundamental basis of the relationship with the participants (Cook 2020). In this sense, I distance my conducted ethnography from that “problematic assumption that the other is only a passive receptacle of data, an input for the anthropologist’s process of knowledge production” (Rooney 2018, para. 14). I regard my fieldwork as a collaboration where all students, therefore including myself, were transformed by engaging in the co-creations at YIP. As Ingold describes, “to study anthropology is to study *with* people, not to make studies *of* them.” (2017, 21).

A silent ethical question, that illustrates students’ overview and involvement in the fieldwork, is the use of pseudonyms. I use the real surnames of the students and coaches with their consents. While anthropologists generally use pseudonyms, claiming to protect the participants, a recent collection of articles calls for assessing this question reflexively. Weiss and McGranahan (2021) collected numerous pieces to unpack the question why we use pseudonym, since “For many scholars the unironic answer is: “I don’t know. We’ve just always done it this way.” How is it that we explore the habitus of others, but are unable to recognize our own?”. Proposing this question illustrates the need for reflectivity around anthropology and ethnographic research themselves (Gould and Allison 2020).

⁸ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

Weiss and McGranahan (2021) neither oppose nor recommend the use of pseudonyms. Instead, they ask not taking them for granted and be reflexive. Who requests their use? How do they affect transparency? What do they say about democratizing and decolonizing knowledge or giving credit for the interlocutors?

After reflecting on these questions and involving my participants to decide, the real names appear in this thesis. For those who participated in the podcast, the choice was based on the idea that pseudonyms are irrelevant and confusing once one’s voice is recorded and shared. Those participants who appear at different points within this thesis also agreed for using their real names – since sharing one’s authentic and real side was a fundamental element of YIP. Therefore, by individual consent, I am grateful for their bravery stepping out and showing themselves truly on these pages as well.

Innovative methods. The previously described collaborative decision-making and the focus around social change called for expanding the boundaries of traditional ethnographic research methods. Therefore, I relied on *participant observation* as a basis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). I systematically noted the practices, reactions, and quotes at YIP from the time when I “officially” started my fieldwork at the end of January 2022 (see Appendix 2). Besides these, I logged observational notes about happenings, for example, related expression and reactions in our collective WhatsApp group chat, including the digital space when needed (Pink and Lanzeni 2018). I also took extensive and reflectional notes after a workshop or interview, where I elaborated on my emotional reactions and changing perspective, since, as I mentioned earlier, I included my participation as one of the YIP members.

Therefore, *autoethnography* also played a fundamental role to use the researcher’s personal reactions and experiences to contextualize them in regard of broader societal context (Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2016; Reed-Danahay 1997). Originally, I planned to use my paintings – in which I already started engaging with inspired by YIP before the fieldwork – to analyze my involvement. However, throughout analyzing and coding my notes, I realized that the core element of my autoethnography became the method which I aimed to use as an innovative ethnographic method: the creation of a *podcast series*.

I did individual interviews with 18 participants to collect “stories of change” (Appendix 3) and then identified key factors of social change, around each we centered a podcast conversation (Appendix 4). However, besides using it as (1) an ethnographic method (Cook 2020; Fantini and Buist 2021; Kinkaid, Emard, and Senanayake 2020; Lundström and

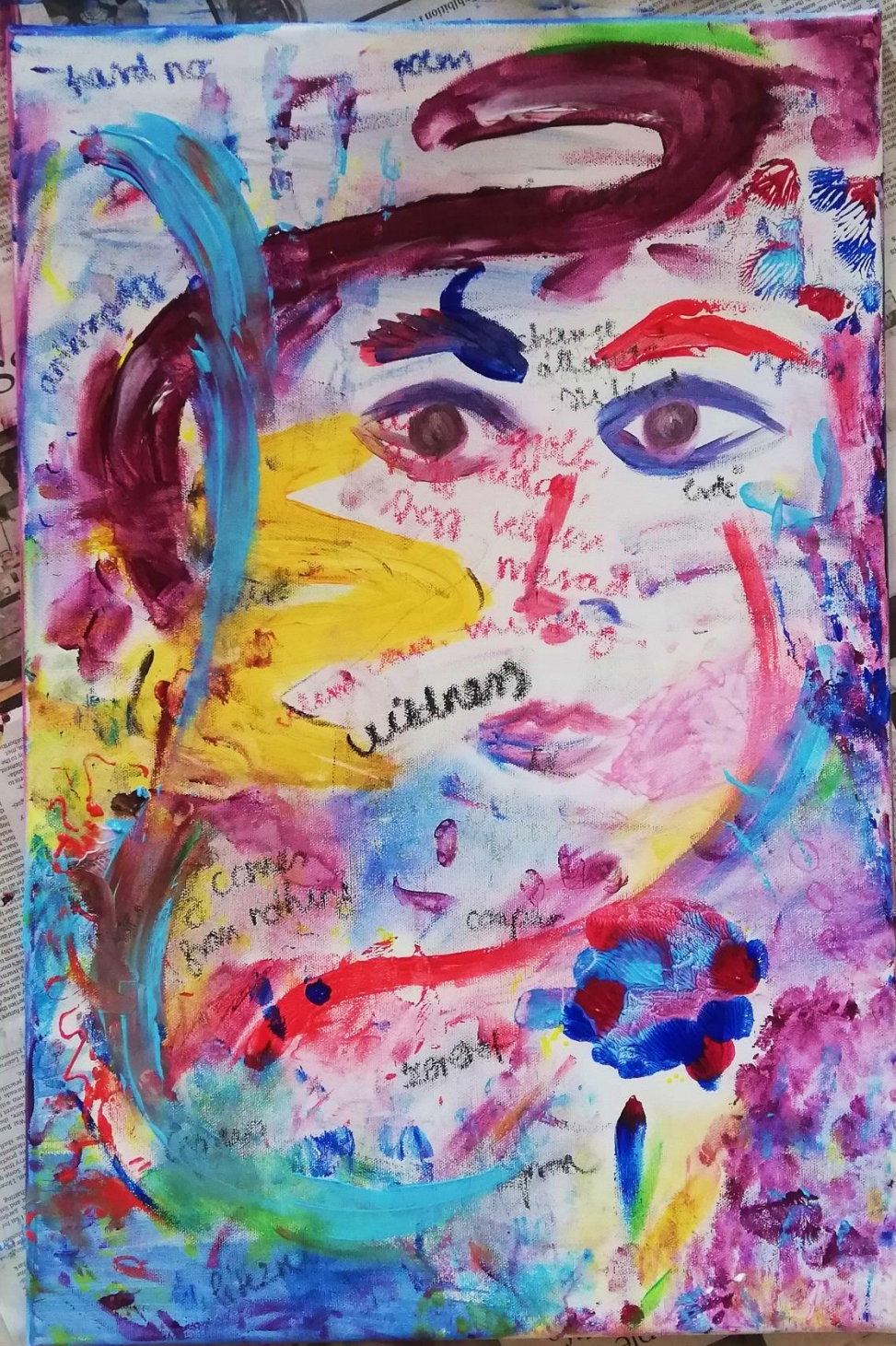
Lundström 2021) by recording and analyzing participants’ perspectives on social change, I unpack the podcast as (2) a subject to analyze my “reflective crafting” at YIP (Gette, Gould, and Salovaara 2020), and as (3) a core pillar of my autoethnography (Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2016) by critically reflecting on my changing perspectives and experience of “direct change”. I present the “podcast-journey” in depth in the third chapter.

Presenting regenerative change. Presenting the Young Innovators’ journey calls for an innovative thesis format. YIP encouraged students to experience with innovative, non-traditional ways of expressions to craft and co-create their quests’ milestones. Therefore, I include *poems, paintings, meditations, photography, and other ways of collaborative crafting*, created by the students, to assess them as objects that illustrate their lived experiences. The sometimes-online meetings (Appendix 2) and the soon presented busyness of the students, combined with YIP’s attentive atmosphere, created an always-changing yet intimate group dynamic. Often, we joked how we share our deepest feelings and thoughts but know little about our “daily life”. Therefore, I cannot contextualize these pieces conscientiously in depth, however, present them as students’ milestones, which they aimed to share. I regard the artworks as footprints in reconstructing oneself as regenerative changemaker and discuss them as the regenerative practices’ connected components.

The innovative ways of expression and the podcast episodes move this thesis beyond the textual format. In addition to the invitation to keep your mind and heart open, dear reader, to experience multiple ways of knowledge sharing, it is also good to have *headphones* around you if you are reading in a public space. Or get ready to invite your surroundings too, since, as you can read about it later, experiencing something together can be even more powerful.

My intention is not only to tell, neither only to show this journey, but rather invite the reader to *experience* regenerative change by reading, listening, seeing, thinking, and feeling.

Chapter 1: Cry – and reveal why to change?



Cover photo of a painting of the author, inspired by the Young Innovators Program
taken by Borbála Jäger (26/05/2022)

Chapter 1: Cry – and reveal why to change?

“This was perfect, everything was... just perfect! Or wait no, it wasn’t perfect. It was *gorgeous*. I don’t wanna be perfect anymore. I wanna be real.”⁹

*Rosa, one of the YIP students
at the end of our public YIP Festival and Art Exhibition*

The university Master’s students at YIP started with a huge willingness to intervene and change the world’s societal, environmental, health, economic, or political problems. They expected that during this Honours Program, they would manage one particular project which is based on one particular external global challenge, so they can innovate and produce one particular product, which allows them to contribute to a “better future” and a “more just world” (Wessels et al. 2021, 85). They expected these, just as most academic programs and extra-curricular activities they had been part of offered and promoted this way (Vorley and Nelles 2008).

However, soon they realized that this one particular project they would manage is their own personal life. Instead of discussing external global challenges, they started with the inner questions, fears, and dreams. Instead of creating a project based on pre-set expectations and requirements, they started crafting their own quest as a process, constantly renavigated by self-reflection and discussions.

“I have never experienced that much acceptance and openness, especially within university context”¹⁰, said a participant during our final reflectional meeting. We were sitting in a spacious room, outside a big green garden where birds were chirping, inside us, the around thirty people who shared the one-year journey and who now were looking at each other smiling and crying. We were sitting in one big circle on the floor, sweaters and scarfs made the space cozy, many of us removed their shoes. Notebooks were around but no laptops – except the one with the projector that made a slideshow from pictures taken throughout the year.

In the middle of the circle on the floor, four big candles were burning, and all over those, around thirty small little lamps were waiting to be lighted by us. The participants went one-by-one – most of us crawled – to the middle to get one little lamp and light it by the big candles. Then they sat back and shared their thoughts and feelings, reflecting on the year, expressing

⁹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/08 – 27/05/2022

¹⁰ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/09 – 28/05/2022

gratitude, excitement, care, or confusion – anything was welcomed, which was “real”¹¹. All this was after we were self-reflecting on the one-year journey by journaling quietly, inspired by the questions of Katja and Thieu, two of the coaches.

This setting was usual to us. Sitting in a circle on the floor in socks. Lighting candles as a form of gratitude. Reflecting honestly and openly about our deep feelings and questions, bringing up pain and joy to realize and show our authentic side to each other. All of these were core part of YIP and therefore our social and physical space.

Host yourself – navigating when “everything is possible, and everything is uncertain”

YIP started with the “I”, or to longer express, started with learning how to *host yourself*, as we called it. It means that students learned to realize their needs and navigate their feelings and thoughts in a particular moment or situation – fundamentally as it was described with the check-in. By that, they revealed authenticity, which I understand here as one “true self” (Handler 1986) and assess further below. Within this thesis, this learning process gives the opportunity both to (1) highlight how the YIP practices benefited students to understand *their own* drives by *self*-reflecting on *inner* questions and find *their scope* for social change by starting the quest which *they want to* do, instead of what they are told to have to do. However, it also provides opportunity to (2) step back and critically discuss when making social change is centered around the individual. Individualism was expressed as one of the core roots of most contemporary societal challenges by the participants many times. Then how did the regenerative practices apply this individual focus as a way forward?

“Everything is possible, and everything is uncertain”¹² said Thieu once during a meeting. This saying encompasses both YIP’s educational approach and students’ feelings around the world and themselves. If everything was possible, then the proactive Master’s students aimed to achieve everything. However, this generated frustrations and uncertainty by the constant pressure to maximize one’s capacity (Esteves 2020). It became usual in YIP to discuss questions around “how to be enough as a human being”, how to put “well-being as a priority” and “talk about mental struggles” or “what are we afraid of not fitting into a one-size-fits-all system”¹³. Students sought for socio-emotional support besides intellectual education (Orozco 2021).

¹¹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/09 – 28/05/2022

¹² Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/09 – 28/05/2022

¹³ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/02 – 25/01/2022

Uncertainty and its educational challenges were recognized by anthropologists as well. Harp-Rushing (2017, 1) aims to unpack contemporary uncertainties as possibilities that give room to “imagine and materialize alternative and more egalitarian institutions of learning and flourishing.” Again, uncertainty is seen as a possibility. Lindholm (2002) however connects the lack of boundaries to a “disoriented and anxious state”. The question is, how students react and navigate within the realm of possibilities intertwined with uncertainty?

Pais and Costa (2020, 2) analyze the pursuit towards social change entangled with neoliberal values which it critiques. “Active, responsible citizenship” describes students’ desire to contribute to social justice, global equality, and the recognition of the more-than-human. The so-called “entrepreneur citizen[ship]” describes the pressured focus on self-investment and individual achievements. Pais and Costa (2020, 2) analyze “global citizenship education (GCE)”, which is aligned to the contemporary Western academic institutions’ promoted messages: the authors state that the education that on paper emerged to favor “social justice, solidarity, diversity and communitarian engagement”, actually strengthens and reproduces the same utilitarian-oriented approach basing on neoliberal values, which it aimed to critique.

How is this possible? While the “critical democracy” agenda sees the current state of the global world as unjust and aims to transform it, its higher purposes become commodities. Pais and Costa (2020, 14, 15) critically unpack how those who oppose the neoliberal agenda can also take advantage of it, by creating an “academic industry” in the forms of educational programs, fundings, conferences or journals. However, as they state, while for teachers and researchers, this still “allows to perceive [themselves] as ethical people, struggling for common goals through solidary efforts”, students receive more of the utilitarian-oriented focus and less of the higher purposes by the pressured spotlight on employability, accountability, and optimized productivity. This, in conjunction with the pressed urgency to act, results in a constant busyness, hustle and *frustration to always perform one’s best* – even when the goals are as noble as to question the current systems and create a “more just world” (Wessels et al. 2021, 85).

Therefore, the possible contribution to the social changes students have seen as necessary, comes with constant hustle, maximized productivity and over-highlight on employability (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017). These struggles were often discussed at YIP. Once, we unpacked “wanted” and “unwanted” systems (that brings joy or make us upset) by using an iceberg model with a four-step way that divides systems into (1) symptoms (2) structures (3) values and beliefs (4) paradigms of thoughts. However, it was challenging at first to categorize

exactly which brought-up point belonged to which group. Students mostly shared their concerns around topics like “burn-out”, “achievement over personal-wellbeing”, “the survival of the fittest”, and “self-centered worldview” in connection to the academic education. For example, how the Dutch grading systems makes the “feeling of enough” unreachable by making the best score – 10 – unreachable. Or how the UU Well-being Week “organize yoga sessions to feel well”, but there is “no room to develop other ways” during their studies, and therefore, “well-being is not seen as truly important”¹⁴. Students raised questions like “What do I need to do to feel enough?” or “How much do you want to push yourself to achieve things in the world?” while there is the desire to know “How to go from an idea to real to make change possible?”¹⁵ All these illustrates students’ frustrations around the pressure to always perform their best. And while broader society and contemporary challenges (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) can exacerbate these frustrations, here I focus on academic institutes to align the desired contribution to global education’s higher purposes and its teaching practices.

The question therefore is how academic institutes can support students to navigate and reconstruct themselves in the entanglement of the aimed and possible contribution and the pressured productivity and self-investment, that generate uncertainty? Moreover, how did the YIP practices support them, offering a new way instead of the merged “entrepreneur-critical democracy” agenda?

Practices that help find “the favorite version of yourself”

Instead of the hustle, urgency and maximized productivity, YIP focused on something else. It was still individual-centered (which point is unpacked in next sub-session), however, instead of pressuring to perform one’s best, it offered to “find your favorite self”¹⁶ as Isa, one YIP member aptly put it once.

How did YIP help in this shift to authenticity? I present how the regenerative practices created a social and physical space that gave the students dedicated time and room to *slow down* and therefore, find “space for the self” (Mauksch 2018). By that, they could realize the frustrations and uncertainty generated by the felt constant pressure. Therefore, they could first articulate their need to change how they navigated before – so to *feel enough*¹⁷ –, and second,

¹⁴ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/02 – 25/01/2022

¹⁵ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

¹⁶ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

¹⁷ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

take actions on that path. I discuss three main practices that helped in this – check-ins, journaling, meditation – and show how it helped students find *their own way and pace* of expressions.

(Now, the content of these practices is highlighted, how they helped the individual to reveal their frustration (even for themselves) – I unpack the interactions when students *shared* these frustrations and vulnerability in the second chapter.)

Check-ins. The first practices to slow down and realize one’s *spark* are the “check-ins” and “check-outs”, fundamental elements of each YIP meetings – either with three or thirty people, online or in person, before a verbal dialogue or embodied activity. As you could experience, dear reader, check-ins serve the participants to land to the activity they are about to do and ground the conclusions after that. It is a primary practice of hosting oneself, since they explicitly aim to realize feelings, thoughts, and needs. Check-ins were usually starters for us, but they also gave the routine to do regular check-ins during an activity or event. “How do I feel now? What do I need?” – these are the grounding questions you can ask from yourself or collectively with others. Therefore, one can leave behind or enhance certain thoughts to establish their conscious participation during an activity. I am doing check-ins repeatedly while writing this thesis. I just made a longer break before: I realized my need for a quiet fifteen minutes to stare out from my head and do nothing. I allowed myself to slow down, and now it goes way better, I feel. But you are my judge, dear reader, how understandable and profound the way I am telling you the story. However, the writing process is way more enjoyable for me now.

Since during a meeting, check-ins and check-outs mark the beginning and the end, they can seem like two separate practices. However, they build on the same foundations: share how you are, what grabbed your attention before or during the activity. Therefore, check-outs also serve as check-ins to step into the daily life again, leaving the meeting physically behind. I refer to this practice as “check-in”, not excluding check-outs, but holistically seeing them as “checking-in with yourself”.

We experienced several check-ins at YIP. Besides some occasions with more concrete questions, we usually shared our general feelings and their effects in groups of three or four. However, sometimes we included embodied experience, for example telling our day only with movements or experimenting with silent check-ins by looking at each other’s eyes in pairs for two minutes. Sometimes, we brought an object that symbolized our check-in. Once, beyond its atmosphere of slowness, the conversation’s content was also about the pressure of performing, being productive and juggling between all duties and responsibilities.

Lisa called it “January existential crises”. She said, starting a new year has a positive and a negative pressuring power. “The whole year is in front of you.” she said. Nana, Jytta and me agreed: we all felt the push to be extremely productive and manage everything – especially during the exam period. We shared the deep desire to slow down and breathe sometimes – this is why these common check-ins were very nice. Even now meeting online – we were after the winter holiday, many of us were still abroad or due to the lockdown stayed at home –, even in the Zoom breakout rooms, it was nice to stop and share how we feel. Lisa’s object that expressed her check-in was a song – how cool that we can be flexible, and it does not matter if a song is not strictly an “object”! – a song from Jacob Banks called “Slow up”. We did not have time to listen to it together (always shortage in time, haha), but she said it captures her need to slow down, find peace in the efficiency-chasing world around her. As I said, we all agreed.¹⁸

It was not only Lisa, Nana, Jytta and me who were struggling with this question. The “concept of being enough” became sort of a motto in YIP. It captured students’ need to be able to say no for certain activities that would overpressure and go beyond their capacity. Check-ins helped sense what one needs and how it is possible to fulfill that – therefore, it was a fundamental bedrock of slowing down, prioritizing, thus, feeling enough as your favorite version of yourself.

Journaling. The second common practice was journaling “alone-together” when students were writing (or drawing) their answers in their own notebooks for guiding questions asked by the coaches. Here, the physical space also played a role. Usually, we met in rooms in the university buildings. However, we always quickly formed circles with the tables and chairs, people were free to sit on both or cozy on the floor on sweaters, scarfs. We were invited to make ourselves comfortable, lie down, sit, remove shoes, whatever we needed – again, constant practicing of hosting yourself, sensing your needs and fulfill them.

The visibility – putting our feelings and thoughts on paper – helped realize and ground them, and made it possible to search them back later, constantly re-reflecting on the changes during one’s quest (Mauksch 2018). We addressed questions like “What kinds of topics/groups of

¹⁸ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

people call me to explore?”, “What could support me in exploring it?”¹⁹, or “What would I like to learn?”, “What would I need from my peers, host and myself for this?” and “What is the smallest, most elegant step I can take for that practically?”²⁰

Journaling aimed sensing and understanding one’s authentic motives, background, and concerns. The main point was to acknowledge and not to judge them. “Don’t think with your brain, think with your belly”²¹ said Gerard, one of our coaches to encourage students strengthening their intuition, that helps being honest with oneself. Before anyone expects their belly to miraculously speak and tell the answers, let me remind you again to the importance of check-ins to note your feelings, thoughts, and needs. Therefore, asking yourself self-reflectively and realizing moments that made you feel joy, pain, anger, in a word, moments that *moved* you mean “following your belly”. Otherwise, if you wait too long for that miraculous speak, the only sound you will hear is the rumble of your belly.

Meditation and expressions. Another practice that fundamentally built on slowing down and revealing one’s authenticity is meditation, followed by several forms of expressions, most commonly visual expressions, such as drawing or painting. Once two students, Merlijn and Mar created a workshop centered around meditation, painting and our favorite self. YIP offered dedicated, so-called “open input” sessions to students to bring their own workshops (Appendix 1). The dynamics around co-creation is discussed in the second chapter. Now the highlight is on the content of this workshop: “You will visualize the most good-mood-version of yourself in the most beautiful place you can imagine. Second part will be anchoring these feelings by painting the place, your feelings, yourself... however you want.”²² – wrote Mar and Merlijn on the online attendance sheet where students could sign up their workshop idea.

During the two hours workshop, we first prepared the space: we turned off the lights and made some “candles” by putting water bottles on our phones’ flashes. Everyone made themselves cozy – again, remove shoes, grab scarfs around –, and then, Merlijn started telling us the meditation. It invited students to focus on themselves, on inner questions and desires. Afterwards, while being in a community together, everyone was painting alone, focusing on their own world – we only whispered if asking for a specific color from someone while listening to a relaxing piano music and keeping the lights off. I did not take any pictures about the paintings, the process, or the space. Since this was a deeply personal experience and we did not

¹⁹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/02 – 25/01/2022

²⁰ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/02 – 12/04/2022

²¹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/03 – 02/01/2022

²² YIP Open Input session sign up sheet – 15/03/2022

share enough with the others that I could express their experience in a sufficient way, what I could write down is how *I* felt. While autoethnography plays a highlighted role in this thesis, I unpack my changing perspectives and feelings in the third chapter. Here, instead of sharing how *I* felt, I thought to invite you, dear reader, to *experience* this meditation-painting session.

Thanks to Merlijn, you can listen to the meditation which she recorded for this thesis. I am grateful for her constant help and support. Therefore now, dear reader, get yourself comfortable – if you have a chance, remove your shoes, or lay down if you want. Overall, sense how is the best for you. And then, listen to the meditation by clicking on [this link](#).

After engaging in the meditation, please, feel free to follow its instructions at the end and if you have a chance draw, paint, or sketch – grasp the picture that the meditation aimed to visualize for you.

This thesis will be here waiting for you to continue, take as much time as you need.

Welcome back, dear reader, I hope you had a great time. If you want, *sharing* your experience with others is also fundamental part of YIP. However, we dive deeper into that question in the next chapter. Now, let’s turn our attention back to the “effects” of those practices that helped students realize their spark and their “favorite self”.

The practices helped students to host themselves and therefore, gave the opportunity to craft their quest in *their own way and time*. Even though there were assignments when we were asked to reflect on questions, assess ourselves during interactions, and discuss our thoughts with one and other; the main point was always to find *our way* that works for us. One could paint, draw, sing, dance, write a story, take pictures – anything was welcomed. Moreover, we could do it in *our time*, meaning that even with proposed deadlines, one could always discuss a different tempo and pace – at the end of the day, we did these assignments for ourselves.

“The assignment serves you and not you the assignment.”²³, how it was summarized by a participant during our first kick-off weekend. This was the shift that helped the participants instead of following pre-set requirements, finding their own way to craft their quest. Therefore, calling them assignments feels a bit odd. They are more like steps in one’s journey to reveal feelings, realize needs, and learn to host oneself. To illustrate this, I present some of the footprints of two Young Innovators’ journey. Isa and Friede both turned to poetry to articulate and express their feelings and thoughts emerging during this year.

²³ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

While I aim to contextualize their lines, I cannot do it fully conscientiously. We were deeply attentive to each other with the participants at YIP. However, due to the many times online meetings and the described individual focus, the group-composition could easily change. It was a common joke that we know each-others’ deepest fears and passions yet know so little about the “usual life”. I discuss this further in the second chapter. Now, I introduce Friede and Isa briefly, and I invite the reader to primarily regard these lines as two university students’ footprints who honestly revealed their thoughts and feelings.

When Friede shared these poems during our Final Festival Art Exhibition²⁴ - which I present in the following chapter – she attached an opening description²⁵:

The Exposure Exposition

The following pieces are based on my thoughts and feelings experienced during the last year. Some are self-reflective and heavy, some indicate process, others the opposite.

They show full honesty and a side of me I do no longer want to hide but integrate. At this point they were screaming to be released.

I would like to say that none of this was intended to be out there at some point. I write because I have to. It helps me clearing my mind and staying sane. It is my coping.

I decided to share.

As Friede described to me after I read her poems, writing always helped her. Once at a meeting we were invited to choose to meditate or journal²⁶ – twelve students stayed to meditate while Friede went alone to journal in another room. (This also shows students’ freedom at YIP to choose based on their needs.) She shared how the last year helped her to realize her needs and not to neglect herself – which she did before while juggling with all duties and expectations. She decided to bravely step out, also within this thesis, which I am grateful for.

²⁴ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/08 – 27/05/2022

²⁵ Opening description of Friede’s poems written by her

²⁶ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/08 – 08/03/2022

Once a little girl
young & naïve
confident and curious

Now
still young but
not so naïve anymore
Learning to be again
confident and curious

I am slowly starting
to feel like myself again

- after all these years

I found a pretty yellow leaf
with dark spots all over it
So individual and special
not like any one another
and even more beautiful

But then I saw
a crack - it was broken
I had the urge to throw it away
I should look for another one,
one that is not broken, so still pretty

Realizing
That's how I treated myself all these years

Not worthy
Since broken

- how hard I have been on myself

It is just wandering around
dark violet that switches into a shiny black
What is its point of being that beautiful?

Existing like that
without a certain aim in sight and in mind
seems scary and full of purposelessness
What would it be like
to

just be
on earth
living
being
Maybe that is the whole point?

Maybe humans are the ones that should be pitied by the bug

Since for that bug
being is already enough
Where else humans
are constantly on the hunt for accomplishments
unable to fill up the feeling of
Being
Enough

They grew into consciousness
Which, philosophically
But also, evolutionary
May destroy them

They outgrew the state of just being

Friede’s poems express the overwhelming pressure to perform while aiming to “be enough” – as the Bug or the broken yellow leaf.

Similarly, Isa’s first poem is also titled *Enough* to explore the contemporary systems she lives in. She has been writing before YIP; however, here she could share her pieces, for example reading this poem to us at our first Phase Exhibition. Isa came to the Netherlands from Columbia almost five years ago to study her Bachelor. However, questions emerged when she started her Sustainable Business and Innovation Master’s: she was juggling between work, studies, and personal connections – while desiring to feel enough in the constant hustle. As she expressed, reflections at YIP helped her to make a hard decision: she quitted her Master’s program and started focusing on her work, also related to sustainability. Her second poem expresses this decision as a letter to her father. Isa was bravely “redefining success”²⁷, as she put it, to explore her favorite self instead of a best version told by others. Thank you, Isa for sharing your personal story on these pages as well.

²⁷ „Dear Father, I am quitting my current education” poem of Isa

1

This poem goes to all of those trapped in the system

To all the students, teachers, hosts, engineers, mathematicians, scientists, philosophers, artists

This poem goes to all the managers, governments, teenagers, adults, single parents, consultants, project managers, lawyers

and lets not forget, this poem goes to the lifelong learners, to those who fight against the systemic flaws, to the rebels, to the activists, the feminists, the entrepreneurs

This poem goes to me, and you

How do we learn to say enough

in a world where boredom is not allowed
In a world where rest is a sin punished through shaming

In a world where productivity is measured by

exhaustion, pain, anxiety

How can we thrive in a world without personal boundaries

My energy is my temple and I have given it away

I feel like eternal waves in the middle of the sea

trying to find their way

How can we thrive in a world where sleep deprivation, exploitation, and self-destruction are our daily routines

Abusing our limits

I feel suffocating in between thoughts, tasks, responsibilities

I cannot breathe

I cannot think

I cannot be

2

When is it enough?

My mind is getting wrinkles and scars instead of blossoming

my gut is in a battle it is

loosing

My eye bags give me away

They have written the word

Tiredness

In between the black veins flowing across my face

I have been taught what success should mean

I have been taught what failure means

When these words should not even be part of my spirit

My decisions have been conditioned with a system

I choose to escape

We choose to escape

with grace

power

force

We regenerate

We blossom

into a system of growth, awareness, peace with ourselves

and each other

I say it is enough

I choose to sleep in for hours

and watch Netflix series until midnight

I choose to read my favorite book

Listen to eternal tunes

Cook my favorite dish

and live a life where I nurture myself

and thus

my surroundings

I am healing within

to heal

without

How dazzling it feels

to embark on a new journey

To break unbreakable systems

and fight towards

change

May the journey

begin.

ENOUGH

DEAR FATHER, I AM QUITTING MY CURRENT EDUCATION

This letter comes with frustration, denial, and a sense of excitement. I must tell you I did not think it would come to this. The systemic society has engraved in me so deeply; I tried to fight against my decision for many months.

Well, society, and past relationships with people telling me I should follow this path, not that one, people telling me I should not be floating when I'm 23, that I should have a clear goal, people telling me, there's a path to reach success consisting in a bachelors, masters, executive position, wealth, family before 30, stability before 35.

And I just have to say, that's fucking bullshit. Everything I've been told about the system you and I are trapped in is bullshit. Floating in your 20s is okay. Not knowing what to do next is okay. Quitting your master's program is okay. Well, I am still not okay with it actually. I feel like a failure, I feel scared due to my life uncertainty, and I feel scared of being inferior in the work system. I feel scared to not be valued as enough.

This is the system. This is what it does to us. We are absolute slaves. I am a slave of it, you are a slave of it. It does not have to be bad all the time, dad. I am sure you have fought so hard to reach success. And listen, I consider you successful, and I am so proud of you. The system can lead to good things. To endless knowledge, hard workers, problem solvers, driven humans. The issue comes when you have the choice to get out due to your unhappiness and dissatisfaction, and choose to stay.

And damn father, I finally get how hard it is. How much of a failure this choice can make me feel. But fuck no. I am not a failure. I am not worth less because I do not have a masters by 23. I am not worth less because I do not have a partner and family by 30.

I am redefining success for the first time in my life, and I truly hope to have you onboard.

These poems content-wise align with the mentioned frustrations, pressure, and hustle that many Young Innovators struggled with. Moreover, they illustrate how personalized forms were encouraged to articulate thoughts and feelings as part of learning how to host ourselves.

These practices helped the students to ground themselves. As one of the participants, Alex explained a flow to me that helped him express this: people often think that they need to “do” something first (study, work) to “have” something (degree, materialized goods, like a car or house) so they can “be” someone (precious people, feeling enough). However, when you are grounded in yourself, you focus on how you want to “be” first (host yourself, understand your needs), then you can “do” the things you need and want (fulfill your needs), therefore, you “have” what you would like to have. Instead of a “do-have-be”, shift your mind to the “be-do-have” flow.²⁸

All these illustrate students’ needs to slow down to feel enough. Instead of trying to fulfill pre-set expectations, they found and followed their own *spark*, meaning questions and topics that *moved* them. Therefore, YIP truly and explicitly involved feelings, talking honestly about one’s fears and dreams. By this, students learned to navigate in the pressure to perform by prioritizing and choosing options that brought them closer to their “favorite” version.

Critically assess authenticity as the starting point for social change

YIP highlighted one’s authentic spark as the starting point of social change, which provides opportunity to critically assess questions around the focus on the individual.

The self-centered, individualistic worldview in the Western higher education was expressed as an obstacle of contemporary social challenges by the participants several times.²⁹ Similarly, Pais and Costa (2020) argue that the above-described entanglement between the “critical democratic” and the “neoliberal” educational agenda dismiss the contradiction between individualistic and collective thinking. It promotes entrepreneur and self-centered values (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017), but wrapping it in a collective-centered discourse of solidarity, emancipation and communitarianism. As YIP was also centered around the individual, the question is how the regenerative practices use this individualistic thinking to move forward to the promoted collective values?

As Darwish and Huber (2003, 47) describes

²⁸ Fieldnotes – Interview 5 – 07/03/2022

²⁹ Fieldnotes – Interviews – between 04 and 16/03/2022

Individualism is defined as a situation in which people are concerned with themselves and close family members only, while collectivism is defined as a situation in which people feel they belong to larger in-groups or collectives which care for them in exchange for loyalty—and vice versa (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

In this sense, I regard individualistic thinking when the *goal* of one’s actions is concerned around the oneself. However, the individual focus which the Young Innovators Program followed is different: it took the oneself not as the aimed *end* of the actions and care but as the *start* of social change. Students were concerned about global collectives as the “shared [sense] of humanity” was described above (Esteves 2020; Hayden 2017, 249).

I argue that the concept that makes it possible to regard the individual as the center of social change is authenticity (Handler 1986; Lindholm 2002), which I regard as the first pillar of social change. It was mentioned in this chapter, meaning as one’s “true self” – however, now I critically assess it by the connection of the individual and social change.

From an anthropological perspective, Handler (1986, 3) critically studies authenticity as part of modern “possessive individualistic” cultures. The concept here stands to describe individuals regarding themselves “as a locus of ultimate meaning and reality”. Handler presents the concept as a “function of a Western ontology”, where the possession of properties, in this sense, an authentic self means the basis of the collective. Historically speaking, he connects the emerging to authenticity as an answer to sincerity. Sincerity appears as the first wave of highlighting the “true self”, after the emerged modern notion that social classes do not indicate and mark individuals’ existence. However, sincerity was still centered about relationships: the oneself was determined by the judgement of the public on their actions. Therefore, the highlight of authenticity came as an answer to free people’s “true and real side”, establishing the individual existence as a basis. Handler describes how frustrations develop in modern societies when the individual sense struggling to express their true side.

Therefore, the YIP practices supported students to find their *own true spark* and their authentic self. However, as Handler reflects on authenticity, it shows that YIP does not exist in a vacuum and connects dynamically to the Western academic environment, as part of it. While YIP also operates with this “Westernized” concepts, such as the highlight on the individual’s authentic self, it turns the narrative and embraces these “Westernized” ways to benefit the university Master’s students – and therefore, by their pursuits, the collective as well.

For regenerative practices, collective social change is based on the individuals’ growth by realizing and revealing one’s true self. “If we have more YIP, we would have less shit in the world.”³⁰, said one participant during our Reflection Day. The Young Innovators were concerned around the global society and felt connected to a larger community (Esteves 2020; Hayden 2017). However, they shifted their focus to start the change by their own transformation.

Teasdale et alii (2021, 26) critically assess when social formations “adopt a narrow, individual-centered focus on a process of transformation” rather than focusing on social change in a broader context. They conclude that these organizations and movements regard the making of social change by transforming the individual to learn to navigate oneself within the social challenges.

This question is unpacked throughout the whole thesis to dive deeper in the different aspects of reconstructing oneself as regenerative changemakers. In the next chapter, it is in relation to the Young Innovators’ community feeling, how people connected and created a collective by sharing their authentic side. In the third chapter, it is in relation to the “making”, how people crafted to create direct change with their initiatives.

Within this chapter, I showed that the YIP practices embraced the individualistic focus by helping reveal the real and authentic self (Handler 1986; Lindholm 2002) – instead of promoting individual achievement on a path that had been framed by pre-set requirements. Therefore, YIP’s way to create social change did not start from the external goals and ethical values, such as diversity, equality, and justice – while it certainly promotes those –, but took the internal primary and unpacked roles, meanings, struggles and possibilities from there. “Everything is possible, but what is the spark that moves *me* in a way that I want to make the change possible?” That was the question that YIP asked the participants to ask themselves. Moreover, providing overwhelming freedom by its educational approach itself, students learned to navigate in this freedom by prioritizing based on their own needs and drives.

It took time to make the shift that the “you can do anything” does not mean “you need to do everything.” But the practices gave dedicated time and space for students to slow down and realize one’s authentic side. Thus, it provided tools to handle the frustration around the urgency and pressure to always perform one’s best to others, and instead, do your favorite version for yourself. This was the first pillar in their constant navigation and reconstruction as regenerative changemakers.

³⁰ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

Chapter 2: Connect – and be with those who make the change?



Cover photo of harvesting the YIP kick-off weekend taken by Borbála Jáger (24/10/2021)

Chapter 2: Connect – and be with those who make the change?

“We feel alone

because no one shows how they really feel

So how should we know we are not”³¹

*The opening description of Friede’s poems
at the Art Exhibition at the Young Innovators’ Final Festival*

By sharing one’s authentic side, YIP aimed to build interactions between the students. Their second main frustration is the *deep desire to be part of communities*. In this chapter, I show those regenerative practices that facilitated creating a social space where students could honestly share their personal journey – both powerful and vulnerable – while listening to each other. This non-judgmental attentive space helped create a strong sense of community.

First, I unpack the roots of desiring collectivism, then turn to the practices. We had three Phase-ending Exhibitions (Appendix 1), which I present as basis for sharing one’s authentic side. I unpack practices that helped students co-creating these Exhibitions, like hand signals and visual harvesting. The Exhibitions were private, except the Final Festival which was public for friends and family. I particularly highlight the Art Exhibition part, where many YIP students shared their one-year journey by poems, paintings, and installations. While the *co-creation* could be connected to the “reflective crafting” aspect which I discuss in the third chapter, here, I highlight the *cooperative* creation. I present how students collaborated – as the second pillar of regenerative change – by sharing their individual sparks.

Need for communities: hosting others and being hosted

Students expressed a huge willingness for communitarian values many times since YIP started. While discussing challenges around social change, the “individual-centered Western thinking” appeared as an obstacle multiple times by multiple participants. Students’ frustration around the lack of meaningful collectives on a personal and societal level can be rooted in the discussed highlight on self-investment and individual achievement in education (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017; Pais and Costa 2020) and in success being distributed by focusing on the isolated, autonomous individuals in the contemporary democratic societies (Ehrenberg 2009).

³¹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/08 – 27/05/2022

There was a need to connect to oneself, and beyond that, to connect to others. While many students highlighted the connection to the non-human and natural elements, here, I focus on interactions between people, specifically, between the participants.

YIP aimed to support *collaboration*, as the second pillar of regenerative change (Wahl 2016). Active listening and the understanding of a certain topic, location, or group of people’s needs were highlighted as basis of relevant and meaningful change (Gibbons 2020a). Regenerative co-creation is based on “honest, deep and ongoing dialogue”(Hoxie, Berkebile, and Todd 2012, 65) between the involved participants. Participants recognized³² the importance of communicating shared goals to “create *with* and not *for* people” (Meyer, Louder, and Nicolas 2021), as it also appears in the literature which critiqued universities’ intervening Third mission approach (Dempsey 2010; Rubens et al. 2017). While collaboration is included in education – for example with group assignments – there little focus on how students experience these engagements (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017). Mobilizing ethnographic studies can unpack students’ perspectives to help answer the question of Pais and Costa (2020, 10): “what will make students work collaboratively and ethically towards a common goal amidst a school system that grades individually?”

The problem arises when we conceive education not as the realisation of a collectively motivated goal through continuous ethical commitment, but as the strictly individualistic goal of passing the course or achieving the highest grade. The school system is inherently individualistic, and this feature is obliterated in global citizenship education through the illusion that students are indeed working for a collective purpose.

How to enhance collaboration in individualized academic education then? Sennett (2012) argues that the art of cooperation lies in enhancing those social practices that help craft together. Based on my ethnography, I argue that basing students’ collaboration on their *individual spark* can contribute to co-creations which students experience as meaningful. While I discuss critically this individual-centered collaboration below, first I present the cooperative YIP structure and practices. While the coaches were involved in the co-creation too, I focus my thesis on the students – a whole separated ethnography would be needed to describe the coaches’ presence. Now they appear as facilitators who guided us designing our own quests.

³² Fieldnotes – Interviews – between 04 and 16/03/2022

YIP did not give grades to students. As for example Nina said it during our interview, she hardly imagined at the beginning how we would work then.³³ However, as she and many other students expressed later, they aimed to participate, due to the freedom to work in their own pace and time and the collaboratively-designed structure (Howes-Mischel and Tracy 2021), which engaged students in meaningful interactions.

As *hosting oneself* was previously described, *hosting others and being hosted by others* were also crucial elements to sense others’ needs. Regarding hosting a meeting, we grouped needs as (1) universal needs (contribution, connection, equity), (2) needs of the meeting, (3) individual needs (from going to the bathroom to specific needs).³⁴ The art of hosting was described in the flow of “noticing when needs are not met, identify which need it is, pause the conversation and try to fulfill it.”³⁵ Therefore, while sensing one’s own need, people could (and should) pay attention to the needs of others, therefore building mutual attention.

This flow may seem recipe-like and unrealistic. However, it gives an overview and makes people get used to engaging in dialogues attentively. We experienced honest expressions of personal needs several times during the meetings, for example sharing the recent death of a good friend or the overwhelming effects of the discussed topic. We have never cried that much during a university-related meeting, that at YIP – we joked with Mar after I started sobbing unstopably while journaling about transgression.³⁶ In this non-judgmental community, we dare to be honest and open. The presence of a person affects the meeting, therefore sensing and communicating one’s needs is a common interest.

The practices below all facilitated sensing each other’s needs. By the Exhibitions and open input sessions, collaboration was designed in YIP’s structure (see Appendix 1). Since the Exhibitions were attended by most of the students, further I build on those. Overall, YIP did not advocate community-building and co-creation. It *implemented* them in its structure by its practices, similarly as Pais and Costa (2020) argues in answering their question.

Exhibitions based on co-creation

In YIP’s collaborations, while everyone stepped in with their own needs, ideas, and projects, students listened to the needs of others and gathered the individual pieces to create wholeness.

³³ Fieldnotes – Individual Interview 2 – 04/03/2022

³⁴ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

³⁵ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/01/2022

³⁶ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

Exhibitions. YIP divided the one-year into three Phases (Appendix 1), each of which was closed by an Exhibition. Here students could share what they have been doing in the previous months in the forms of workshops, storytelling, or art installations. The first two was private, whereas the last one became a one-day open Festival, inviting friends and family. The participants shared their one-year’s milestones – again, in various forms that fit to one’s journey. Students could sign up their idea beforehand in a shared online sheet. However, while *sharing* one’s spark and authentic side was the key element, students were welcomed to *co-design* these Exhibitions. Generally, the coaches had plans around the practicalities (for example arranging location in a cultural center). However, students could step in to design the order of the workshops, the collective check-ins and check-outs, and envision the atmosphere.

Having the possibility to compose the events made it a more personal and unique experience. As Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017, 9) describe, student-centered educational settings are “personalised and diverse”, so the learning process is more powerful.

However, besides the personalized focus, these Exhibitions emphasized the community feeling. They were space for the self and for the collective by both sharing one’s individual journey and experiencing how to co-create together, how to host others and being hosted by them. How did the practices facilitate this interplay?

Hand signals. A fundamental collaborative practice was the use of hand signals. Starting a discussion, one sign helped someone talk or share an information even if it was cheerful loudness during a break for example. Instead of shouting or asking for silence, the person simply raised their hand. Anyone else who saw this, joined – and while the hand is in the air, one stops talking. Like a waterfall, everyone noticed people raising their hand. Silenced filled the whole room quickly and smoothly – and the person easily shared their thoughts.

During a discussion, instead of interrupting each other and creating a chaotic atmosphere where someone can while others fail to speak up, we also relied on the hand signals. We had a sign for agreement, so in case of a proposal, it was easy and immediate to see the reactions. We had a sign for direct comment – when a person aimed to share something connected to someone else’s thoughts, but originally it was not their turn to talk if we went in a circle for example. There were signs for needing clarification when an assignment was presented, or one that asked the speaker to speak louder if it was hard to hear. Instead of interruption or resignation and passivity, these signs made the discussions smooth, vivid, and collaborative.

Harvest visually together. When we aimed to get to know everyone thoughts or get a collaborative decision after a discussion, we harvested visually together. This meant

collectively sharing thoughts or comments, noting and displaying them by using visual elements. We put post-its on the floor, draw on a board, or online, used the Miro Whiteboard. Visual educational elements help to follow, understand, and deepen the connected thoughts and reflections, as Mauksch (2018) describes relating to teaching anthropology as well.

While preparing for the second Exhibition, we discussed “How do we aim the Exhibition to happen?”. The welcomed answers were not only practical (location or number of the workshops). First in pairs, we shared how we envision the Exhibition, *including all the senses*. What would I like to see, smell, hear, taste, and feel?³⁷ Answers included the warmth of an outdoor fireplace, the taste of ginger tea, the sound of instruments and cheerful laugh or spaces with calmness and quietness, the feeling of acceptance and celebration. We used post-its to note and group them while sharing. Therefore, we had focus points to start working on the practicalities: what do we need to make these happen? These practicalities however truly based on students’ needs by using collaborative decision-making (Meyer, Louder, and Nicolas 2021).

At YIP, these practices became such core elements, that we could smoothly and comfortably share our ideas or concerns. Therefore, we could co-create, as the Art-Exhibition illustrates.

Art Exhibition. It was both a collective an individual space which connected students’ various interests by various artworks. While their installations could exemplify the process of *reflective crafting* which I discuss in the next chapter, here, I highlight *co-creation*, when students collaborated an event by various ways of expressing themselves. We created the first Art Exhibition for the second YIP Phase-closing Exhibition, which came when I was interviewing students for the podcast in March (Appendix 1 and 3). After interviewing Alex, who guided meditations several times for us, we stayed a bit longer.

We were talking about the Botanical Revolution Exhibition at Utrecht Central Museum³⁸ – he mentioned some paintings that were connected to recorded meditations. Word followed word, “Imagine, having a gallery like this...”, “I know some YIP member who loves painting...”, “We have the Exhibition soon...” and then “Let’s do a mediation-painting exhibition!”. It was such a spark-moment, collaborating based on each other’s ideas. We both almost jumped out of our skin, we were super excited, “This is a seed, let’s invite others, give water and sunshine for this!” said Alex.³⁹

³⁷ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 02/10 – 22/03/2022

³⁸ [Exhibition at Utrecht Central Museum – 11/09/2021-01/05/2022](#)

³⁹ Fieldnotes – Individual interview – reflection – 07/03/2022

We just discussed during the interview what helps collaborative changemaking. Then, we experienced how open brainstorming could lead to new initiatives. “I am curious, what is going to happen”⁴⁰, I wrote in my reflection notes. Now I know, we co-created two real Art Exhibitions.

We texted in the main WhatsApp group chat with our proposal and invited people to join. Then, we created a separated group chat with 12 people, where everyone expressed what they would like to add. People with paintings or different pieces of art – for example, Regina joined with crafts from waste materials – could pair up with students who aimed to record meditations, or paintings could base on meditation – for example, I painted inspired by Merlijn’s recording.

On the Exhibition, we put the art pieces in the cultural center’s main room and marked those which had connected meditation. We uploaded the audio files in a Google Drive and shared with the whole group. Our idea was that people can stop by throughout the Exhibition and listen to the recording with their earphones. However, we did not design a separated timeslot for this. Therefore, the quiet immersion to mediate while looking at the artworks did not happen how we envisioned.

However, this did not discourage but inspired us to re-create the Art Exhibition in a slightly different way for the third Exhibition, the YIP Festival – which was even open for friends and family. With the support of Eva, one of our caches, we designed two dedicated half-an-hour-timeslots for checking the artworks – the first one in a full silence to ensure the listenability of the recordings. We had an official Opening, where all students introduced their artwork and shared some thought behind it. Various forms – paintings, photography, drawings, collective crafts – presented the various topics – emotional literacy, being enough, slavery, food waste and dumpster diving. We also used a Miro Whiteboard with videos and meditations to offer an online option for the Art Exhibition (Appendix 5).

I present these pieces now to show how bringing together individual expressions created a collective entirety. Therefore, dear reader, I invite you to experience our Art Exhibition. These lines are the opening of the “Art Exhibition – thesis-edition”.

I highlight that not all pieces from the YIP Festival are presented here. I incorporated those which were manageable to share in this written form. However, thank you for all who brought your pieces there – it was a unique and remarkable moment. All artworks reveal students’ honest, powerful, and vulnerable feelings and thoughts. I am grateful for Carmen, Lisa, Giorgio, Alex, Martha, and Rosa to share their installations on these pages.

⁴⁰ Fieldnotes – Individual interview – reflection – 07/03/2022

As this ethnography is centered around the regenerative practices, I highlight this Art Exhibition as a possibility for students to collaborate by expressing themselves. Therefore, I do not present their personal journey in-depth behind the artwork – since I cannot do it conscientiously. For example, I saw Carmen and Lisa’s artwork first at the Exhibition, since they mostly participated online. My aim is here to invite the reader to experience our Art Exhibition as a co-created event that brought together individual elements.

Therefore, let’s our thesis-edition Art Exhibition begin.

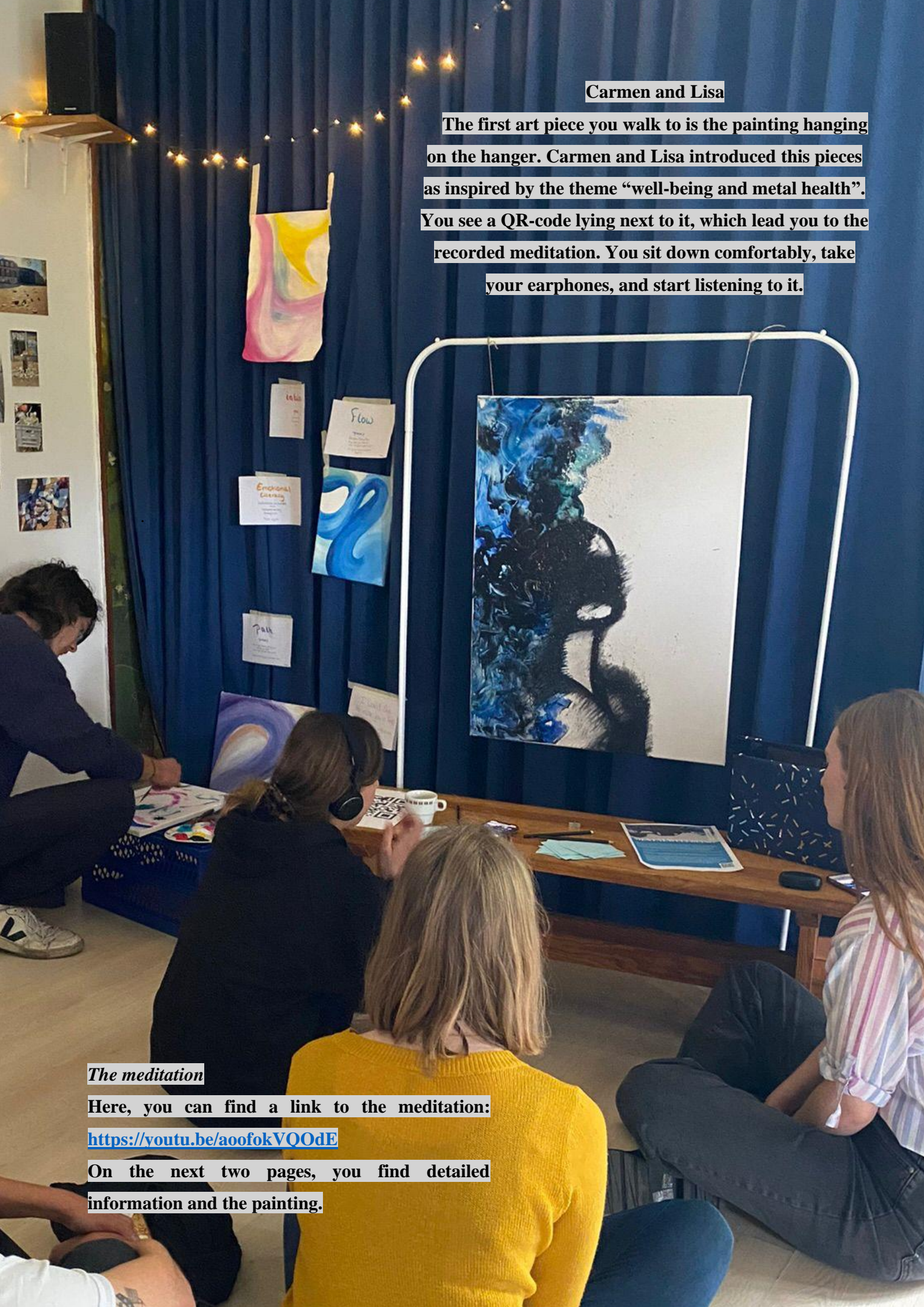
You are standing in a bright, spacious room. On the wall, there are colorful paintings, printed documents, from enormous size to very tiny one. There are tables around with various installations, dried fruits, colorful vegetables... there is even a hanger with a huge painting close to the middle of the room.

There is silence. People are walking around, holding a cup of tea and munching home-made oat cookies, but they do not say a single word. Everyone is stopping by and deepening themselves in the artworks by listening to pre-recorded meditations via their headphones. People are standing or sitting, some is quietly walking – the whole room is full of attentive silence, in which you aim to explore the Art Exhibition in your own time.

You start walking and without any further overthinking, you step to the first piece.

Carmen and Lisa

The first art piece you walk to is the painting hanging on the hanger. Carmen and Lisa introduced this piece as inspired by the theme “well-being and mental health”. You see a QR-code lying next to it, which lead you to the recorded meditation. You sit down comfortably, take your earphones, and start listening to it.



The meditation

Here, you can find a link to the meditation:

<https://youtu.be/aofokVQOdE>

On the next two pages, you find detailed information and the painting.



BY CARMEN & LISA

MENTAL WELLBEING

Many of us have inherited the belief that we need to be hard on ourselves or self-critical to become the best version of ourselves. The painting represents how we can get consumed by these dark thoughts. In these moments, we forget that we need to show ourselves kindness and understanding too. We want to invite you to practice unconditional self-compassion with us – something, that is fundamental for our mental health and wellbeing.

- Use the [QR code](#) to find a short meditation on self-compassion and further information.
- Write down a kind thought or compliment to yourself and to someone else on a piece of paper and put them into the 'compliment' box.
- Think about your wellbeing here at university. Have there been moments where you needed support? While the UU already offers a range of [resources](#), we would like to hear your opinion on how this can be improved. Write down your ideas or wishes on a piece of paper and put them into the 'wellbeing' box or into this [Google Docs](#), for example on what kind of support you or others need, what workshops could be offered, or how you think these resources should be communicated to students.





Giorgio

Next, you walk to a table where you see various colorful fruits and vegetables. You also discover pieces of paper around them. Giorgio introduced this installation as inspired by the theme “belonging”, where he connects people’s notions about belonging with dumpster-dived fruits and vegetables.

You find the description, closer pictures, and the texts from the pieces of papers on the next pages.



Belonging

From humans to vegetables.

From existential questions to practical sense.

Should good veggies *belong* to the trash? The answer might be easy to answer.

Where do I belong? And what does *belonging* mean to me? If there is one, the answer might be quite of another level.

Places, cultures, communities, experiences. At the core of one's identity, the sense of belonging constitute what could probably be described as a primal element of what being human entails.

For today's exhibition, fresh fruits and veggies have been taken out of the place they have currently been assigned to belong to: the dumpsters.

In a similar manner, fragments of discussions with strangers, their thoughts, their experiences, have been taken out from the streets of Utrecht.

Assembled altogether, these veggies, these thoughts, these extracted elements, are brought out of their usual settings just for a day, to be oddly exposed together.

This short exhibition offers to its' observer the opportunity to reflect on its' own sense of belonging, all the while contemplating the practical absurdity of food waste.



« Do I need to belong somewhere? »

(Martha) .

« I belong to the people that do not belong anywhere. Even then, I cannot escape from *belonging*. »

(Daniel)

« I belong where I can be myself. »

(Leonie) .

« My culture gives me the feeling of belonging. »

(Fatima)

« To me, belonging ties in with acceptance. »

(Laura)

« What gives me a sense of belonging? My connection to God. »

(Lisanne)

« I belong where I can love and be loved. »

(Lara)

« For the next hour of my shift, I belong to my boss. »

(Klaudia)

« I belong to my kids. »

(Jennifer) .

« What gives me a sense of belonging? The sun. »

(Bruno)

(note: for privacy reasons all the names of the interviewees have been changed.)



...and the world is full of love
...and the world is full of love
(Jason)

« Belonging is love, belonging is bonding »
(Jason & Peter)

« I build up my sense of belonging through the experiences I live. In that sense, I belong to my experiences. »

(Jack)

« I belong to depression. »

(Greg)

« A crisis of belonging is an identity crisis. Nowadays we are pressured in having to belong somewhere. »

(Raoul)

« I don't feel like belonging to any specific place, but I do feel like belonging with certain people. »

(Nicolai)

« Belonging is dynamic, it has no ultimate finality. »

(Are)

« Belonging is love, belonging is bonding »

(Jason & Peter)

« Belonging cannot be reduced to one specific place, one group of people, emotion, feeling nor one culture, it is the emergent property arising from the interaction of all of these together. »

(Yu)

« I see belonging as a social arrangement marked by rules. And they change so often that I find it hard to *belong* »

(Flo)

Alex

Next, you notice another table, this one is full of dried mushrooms, oranges, pumpkins and many more vegetables and fruits.

Alex introduced this table as a “food waste mosaic”.

He has been dumpster diving for a long time and inspired by connecting art and food waste, he dumpster-dived and dried these veggies and fruits to invite people to create a collaborative artwork.

He recorded meditations which people can listen to while taking out the dried pieces from the jars, place and move them around the table – everyone individually yet creating a food mosaic collectively.

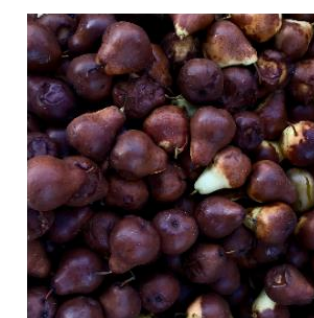


Alex also took pictures about the dumpster-dived food how he found them (such as the one you see on this page) and placed them next to food mosaic.

While in this thesis-edition, you cannot experience collaborating the food mosaic, you can explore the pictures while engage in the meditations – and think about your relationship with food and waste, as this was Alex’s inspiration and intention.

You can listen to [a recorded welcome introducing](#) by Alex, in which he explains more. On the next page, you see the pictures and links to the meditations. There are several ones you can choose from – start with the one that calls you the most.





[Link to braiding
sweetgrass passages
\(meditations\)](#)

[Link to sounds from
around
\(meditations\)](#)

[Link to mindfulness
\(meditations\)](#)

I can imagine exploring these artworks took quite a bit of time. There are three more pieces which are both possible to share in this written form – paintings from Rosa, Martha, and me – and present students’ diverse interests. However, to ensure the readability, you can find those in Appendix 5. Even first checking them or continuing reading, I suggest you stopping a bit and reflecting. Note down any thoughts you happened to have and would like to grasp.

Take your time.

Feel free to take a cup of tea and some homemade oat cookies.

Co-creating the Art Exhibition illustrated moving from the individual to the collective by sharing students’ personal expressions. Moreover, showed YIP encouragement to go beyond the traditional expressions (for example, using a PowerPoint presentation) and include embodiment, visual or collaborative elements to reveal one’s authentic side and related milestones (Mauksch 2018). Students expressed their need for these non-traditional expressional ways in academic education, to not only focus on intellectuality but including a holistic view that supports growing them as a person (Esteves 2020; Orozco 2021).

“Feeling at home” – the Young Innovators’ community

YIP used individualism to create meaningful communities. Pais and Costa (2020) critiqued the individual-centered education; however, YIP embraced this individualism and turn to collaboration. The practices created a social space in which students could share their personal journey to co-create. By that, they could navigate frustrations around the need for communities.

YIP’s community feeling provided individual attention to everyone (Orozco 2021), while nurture the connections as a collective. The community was based on a personalized collectivism with loose yet strong connections. Due to the busyness of the students, combined with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, students sometimes joined online, or needed to skip a meeting. My ethnography is centered around the practices rather than the individual’s stories, since rarely the same participants met from week to week. However, the practices created an atmosphere in which students felt connected, moreover, “at home”.⁴¹

⁴¹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

YIP did not exist in a vacuum: the efficiency- and individual-centered “Western” way affected it. Students and coaches were juggling with other duties and schedules. For example, we planned a museum-visit one month ahead with Thieu, Merlijn, and Isa, as part of our coaching session – we had not spare time to meet before that. However, YIP embraced the proactivity and individualism and turned to advantage by (1) giving dedicated time to realize one’s spark, as described in the first chapter and by (2) creating a social space where students’ individual expressions build a community.

I argue that this lies in those practices that facilitated collaboration. “Here I feel I am enough”⁴², said Alex once when we shared our struggles to perform in different parts of our lives. “Even with those I did not talk particularly a lot... I felt connected. And it was on ease and not a competition.”⁴³, said Mar when we reflected on the one-year. Therefore, instead of individual grading and focus on self-achievement, regenerative change facilitated collaboration by honest dialogues (Hoxie, Berkebile, and Todd 2012) and building on one’s spark.

I do not wish to paint a rosy picture about a world where there is no competition, only love towards everyone. I acknowledge, as Balarin (2011) describes “the empirical reality” of neoliberal policies where competition is not an avoidable but crucial element. However, in academic education, I present students’ need to collaborate freely based on their interests, in a non-judgmental atmosphere, instead of pressuring individual achievement. I suggest implementing practices that allow students to start initiatives they can lead and design – which are also answer the “ivory tower” critique (Dempsey 2010) to create something “real”, as discussed in the next chapter.

Here I focused on the YIP community experience. However, being part of a community means people outside the community. “Feeling in a bubble” came up several times when students discussed struggling to describe YIP to others or wondered about how to expand the “YIP spirit” to bigger scale. However, they expressed wishing to continue and share the created atmosphere, especially after experienced involving friends and family at the YIP Festival.

Overall, YIP, building on its structure and social practices, did not only helped students to realize their own spark, but moreover to *share* it with others. Revealing our vulnerability and passion to each other created a strong and meaningful community. Even if it is challenging to communicate by words on paper, I hope the real and authentic co-creations of the students expressed it.

⁴² Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 02/02 – 25/01/2022

⁴³ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

Chapter 3: Craft – and experience how to change?

Is this

CHANGE ?

THE PODCAST

FROM
& TO

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Chapter 3: Craft – and experience how to change?

“We won’t solve any of the world problems here. We might change something. But the real point is to get you excited, so you are creating meanings and learning every day.”⁴⁴

*Thieu, one of the YIP coaches
at our very first coaching session*

The YIP students aimed to contribute to collective social change by ensuring fairness, equality, and solidarity to create a “more just world” (Teasdale et al. 2021; Wessels et al. 2021, 85). However, as I described, YIP turned the narrative to start from the internal instead of the external challenges. Did it by revealing one’s *authentic spark*, supporting *collaboration*, and, as I present here, encouraging to *reflectively create* small-scale initiatives in a process-focused way.

Academic education is often seen as an entry-point to contribute to social change (Donath 2015). Connecting the Third mission to education (Vorley and Nelles 2008), students are often promoted “to participate in meaningful dialogue and bring about real change for our planet.”⁴⁵ This quote is from an event called “From ambition to reality: Higher Education’s role in realising COP26”, organized by the British Council Netherlands and the British Embassy The Hague, as part of the British Council Climate Connection, which we attended with Niki and Mar from YIP. Students were advocated to contribute to social change. However, as there is no single and known solution to the contemporary global challenges (Lansing 2003; Sennett 2012), educational practices should give the freedom to students to participate by *creating and crafting in a reflective, process-focused manner* – instead of regarding them as passive receivers by pressuring predetermined requirements (Hayden 2017).

YIP encouraged creating small-scale, direct initiatives to help students navigate the frustration of the individual responsibility around global challenge, that arose from the possible contribution. While students successfully gained self-confidence of being capable to craft and create on a direct level, this aspect gives the possibility to critically assess what YIP and the participants mean by “changemaking” and if the regenerative practices are capable to bring global social change.

⁴⁴ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/04 – 08/02/2022

⁴⁵ [“From ambition to reality: Higher Education’s role in realising COP26”](#) – 09/03/2022

Therefore, first I discuss the benefits of reflexive, process-focused education (Hayden 2017) and the “making” (Gette, Gould, and Salovaara 2020), then present the “podcast-journey” as my personal YIP craft. The podcast appears as an ethnographic method (Cook 2020; Fantini and Buist 2021) and a fundamental element of my autoethnography (Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2016; Reed-Danahay 1997), as it allows to analyze “changemaking” both content-wise – by assessing the participants’ perspectives on social change – and action-wise – by reflecting on the creation. I conclude assessing regenerative changemaking practices critically to discuss the meaning of regenerative changemakers in the contemporary world.

“Create – and flow like a river”

Academic education aims to foster critical research skills and entrepreneurial thinking (Donath 2015). However, tackling contemporary global challenges needs reflective adaptation and experiments (Wahl 2016). Students expressed a growing need to include “more creative/culturally orientated forms” (Vorley and Nelles 2008, 6) since education often tends to use rigid and linear teaching practices (Macfarlane and Tomlinson 2017). Scholars, including anthropologists raise that education should give freedom to students to craft, including non-traditional element such as art or embodiment (Mauksch 2018). In relation to teaching anthropology for example, Gette, Gould, and Salovaara (2020, para. 1) collected several educational courses to “emphasize “making” as central to the process of coming to know a thing or to reach across relations.”

Making is central to knowing. Doing ethnographic fieldwork makes this obvious. It is less obvious in the classroom, however, where sitting and reading texts together for hours-long seminars is not only the traditional pedagogical model, but becomes normalized as the “right” way to learn.

While some research shows its positive effect on learning (Mauksch 2018), more in-depth analyzes is needed by mobilizing ethnography to assess students’ experience. At YIP, students expressed their need to navigate the pressured individual responsibility around global challenges. YIP’s answer was letting students create, as *making* was highlighted to “provoke new ways of doing and thinking” (Gette, Gould, and Salovaara 2020, para. 1). By *reflectively crafting* I mean (1) starting from one’s authentic spark and (2) constantly re-evaluating the actions in a process-centric way. Hayden (2017) presents that the learning is experienced more

meaningful by emphasizing self-governance, internal motivation, flexibility, and adaptivity. I do not separate crafting from a materialistic view: I regard intangible assets (Secundo et al. 2010) and digital creations like the podcast (Cook 2020) as crafts. The highlight is on the process-centric way. As a YIP member, Tak expressed it once: YIP felt like a river and not a paved road – it was about exploring a process and not rigidly follow a structure.⁴⁶ Therefore, I regard reflective crafting as the third pillar of regenerative change.

Students’ previously presented creation would exemplify this process. However, I presented Isa’s and Friede’s poems to highlight revealing one’s authenticity, and the Art Exhibition initiatives to discuss encouraged collaboration. Therefore, to assess “the making” in a reflective manner, I present creating a podcast series as my “YIP craft” and feature autoethnography.

The podcast-journey to experience crafting

The podcast-idea first appeared to assess students’ perspectives on changemaking by discussing their “stories of change”. I aimed revealing the process of social change: “I create a podcast to explore key concepts that are seen/believed to be essential to change. Even though I believe that you cannot write a recipe for social change, the key factors can tell interesting stories and insights.”⁴⁷, wrote in my fieldnotes. Since the topic circled around change and innovation, I was tempted to use non-traditional ethnographic methods (Fantini and Buist 2021; Lundström and Lundström 2021). Moreover, as Cook (2020) argues, podcasting can convey participants’ experience without “dehumanizing” it: one can hear the interlocutors’ own voice in discussion with the anthropologist, that moves the experience beyond the textual format. In addition, the podcast provides a “slow experience” by inviting both the guests and later the listener to focus on the conversation (Kinkaid, Emard, and Senanayake 2020). It seemed to be aligned to students’ need to slow down, discussed in the first chapter.

Moreover, the highlight of community-interactions started around that time at YIP (Appendix 1). I sensed interesting contradictions around the individual and communitarian aspects of changemaking.⁴⁸ Therefore, the podcast seemed like a dynamic approach to assess creating a community of students – meaning both the guests and listeners.

I interviewed 18 Young Innovators (Appendix 3) and asked them to bring a story where they felt they started “making change”. I did not specify what *I* mean by changemaking – my aim

⁴⁶ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

⁴⁷ Fieldnotes – Reflections – 15/02/2022

⁴⁸ Fieldnotes – Reflection – 25/01/2022

was to comprehend *their* perspective. Both successful and unsuccessful stories were welcomed – the key was to unpack what happened, what helped or held back change, how people worked together.⁴⁹ I really aimed to understand how social change works – however, my perspectives changed, which I discuss some paragraphs below.

The participants described change related to internal feelings due to moving to a new country, reconciling two always-arguing family members, supporting animal protection by volunteer projects, or organizing climate marches so the local government created bike-lines in the city. After analyzing and coding, I featured three main topics: (1) personal feelings around change, (2) communicating the common points to communities, meaning cooperating with others to bring change, and (3) questions around actions and time in relation to change. Each topic was discussed in one podcast episode with three-three guests from the interviewed Young Innovators. While I wished to invite all, due to the studio’s limited capacity, I needed to decide based on how their stories and the main theme corresponded or diversity in study fields, sex, nationality. The busy schedules and last-minute changes, like an overbook on the studio made it a dynamically challenging time: “I feel supported by them”⁵⁰, I noted when reflecting on the participants’ flexibility and patience as sing of collaborative ethnography (Rappaport 2008).

It resulted [in three final episodes](#)⁵¹ – “Change & Me”, “Change & People”, “Change & the Systems” – to which I added a reflectional and an explanatory episode. I am grateful for the interviewed participants, and for Nana, Marta, Alex, Tak, Merlijn, Niki, Nana, Mar, and Tommy who made the podcast talks vivid and thought-provoking. I suggest listening to some minutes from [the first episode](#)⁵² to get a taste and see Appendix 4 for detailed description.

I planned to somehow create a community of listeners by collecting feedback: having a workshop after listening to an episode or interviewing again personally or by voice messages. However, none of these happened. I needed to critically reflect that neither the fieldwork’s limited time nor the participants’ schedule allow these. Therefore, the podcast shifted from assess community-creation to analyze the “crafting experience” – and became a fundamental part of my autoethnography to assess *creating in a process-focused way*.

While publishing a podcast is equally important as preparing and recording it (Fantini and Buist 2021), here I do not reflect on the listeners, since I do not know who they are – I received some feedback from YIP members, friends, and family, but not deeply enough to assess “the

⁴⁹ Fieldnotes – Interview preparation – 23/02/2022

⁵⁰ Fieldnotes – Reflections – 12/04/2022

⁵¹ [“Is this change?” – the Podcast - 2022](#)

⁵² [„Is this change? EP01 – Change & Me” – the Podcast – 2022](#)

community of listeners”. While I do not highlight the listeners themselves, I do emphasize the podcast’s publicity – as during the recording, this aspect distinguished our conversation from our other daily ones. Therefore, I highlight our experience with the *recording* since that stage illustrates the process-focused thinking in the most tangible way. I had a result in my mind (having a podcast series), however, *reflectively changing my attitude to adapt to our needs* came into focus after the second recording.

“This was AMAZING! Pure Perfection. How it is.

This was funny and deep with concrete examples I think I needed that shift in my mind yesterday that this talk is not about listing all the wisdom I heard during the interviews, but really about EXCHANGING IDEAS, having A DIALOGUE, coming together in a group, a community, put the ideas together on the table and see what is going to happen. It more like be here and now in the moment. [...] The DOING is more important than the CONTENT. The fact that we are sitting here together, uni students, in a podcast studio (Tak first sentence when he entered the studio “This is how it feels when your uni is rich”) and record a talk → awesome. It is not about the *what* but about the *how*. We dare to do it.

Or something like this, elaborate on more.”⁵³

I wrote this in my fieldnotes after the second recording which was dedicated as the first episode – our busy schedules created such arrangements. To assess the process-focused way, I highlight “the joy of creation”, as recording reflectively encouraged us to focus on the *doing* instead of fulfilling pre-set requirements – which often tends to characterize educational practices. Leaving space to create, reflect, renavigate, thus, being in the process is a fundamental element of regenerative change (Wahl 2016). In the next sub-chapter, I reflect critically on whether the podcast was changemaking and how publicity affected the process.

The first recording was my very first experience of recording a full podcast conversation. While I aimed to be flexible by letting the experience happen, my mindset focused on “listing all the wisdom I heard during the interviews”⁵⁴. I had a strict structure in my mind I wanted to follow and left little space for emerging new directions when Alex, Nana and Marta brought up

⁵³ Fieldnotes – Reflections – 07/04/2022

⁵⁴ Fieldnotes – Reflections – 12/04/2022

new stories. I aimed to tick boxes as a to-do list when we mentioned a point from the interviews, instead of focusing on *exchanging ideas*.

However, by reflecting on this, I shifted my perspective for the next recording. Moreover, I was more comfortable with the technicalities to be more attentive to the guests. They were amazed by entering to a “real” studio, Tak used the word “exclusive” to describe the experience. Noteworthy to acknowledge UU’s fully equipped studio, which can be used by students. It is on campus, a room around 4x4 meters with black soundproofing elements and no window – yet the white ceiling and the lamps make it bright. A big table stands in the middle with four chairs, microphones, and headsets – and with one big computer connected to a colorful control panel. I appreciate this possible support, that indeed made the joy of creation smoother.



Pictures of the UU podcast studio taken by Borbála Jäger (12/04/2022)

We checked-in as a zero step and made us comfortable by stretching a bit, removing shoes, and discussing how we arrived. Then we put up the headsets and I started the recording. I aimed to get the guests comfortable in this new setting before the “official” start. Especially as they expressed emerging alert to perform by the professional setting and the podcast’s publicity.

I first asked them to describe what their breakfast was – so they could talk and get used to their own voice echoing in the headset while I adjusted the microphones. By encouraging each other to keep the “YIP spirit” – where we do not need to perform, anything is welcomed –, Niki suggested to have a “brain freeze” hand-sign (putting your hands on your head with a shocked yet funny grimace). I found this appealing – bringing in new ideas and construct the process together. The last step to release any pressure was to give a head massage to ourselves. I have a background with local youth radio programs as a high-school students where I learned the benefits of relaxing one’s forehead, cheek, or move the tongue up and down, right to left before

a recording – even if it looks very funny and embarrassing. However, by everyone doing it together, it created a light and fun atmosphere instead of embarrassment.

These practices helped us start the recording in a mindset that released pressure and encouraged crafting. There was no rigid, unchangeable framework to stick to. Before the first recording, I planned to record 30-40 minutes talks to ensure the listenability. However, during the 30-40th minutes of the first recording, we were very much in the discussion with Marta, Alex, and Nana – therefore I consciously decided to prioritize our “making”, meaning the recording with the guests, over the possible future listeners. We had a one-hour discussion. This also illustrates reflective creating, instead of sticking to a defined end-goal. It was similar during the second recording, while the third one went even longer with Nina, Mar, and Tommy – we finished after 1 hour 40 minutes. We were all shocked but content – based on the guests’ feedback, letting the conversation goes was the right choice.



Pictures of (1) Niki, Tak and Merlijn at the reflection (2) “On-air” sign above the door and (3) myself after the recording, taken by Borbála Jäger (07/04/2022)

Similarly, I intended to record a 15–20-minute reflectional monologue. At the end, I was reflecting for [50 minutes](#)⁵⁵ – I had some keywords in my notebook, but I decided to leave all rigid structures behind and share my real train of thought in the moment – to connect crafting to authenticity. While I understand that it can challenge the listeners to follow, I see this unstructured way more beneficial in this particular situation, as I experienced in-moment

⁵⁵ [„Is this change? EP04 – Reflection” – the Podcast – 2022](#)

“making” and reflection. Similarly, as deciding that the recorded introduction-episode will be an [additional explanatory](#)⁵⁶ – since the first episode’s start felt as a better first impression to share the main point: exchanging ideas together (see the episode descriptions in Appendix 4).

Constant reflecting and changing my role appeared during the conversations as well. While I was guiding the talk during the first two recordings, at the third one Mar explicitly [asked me at the beginning](#)⁵⁷ if they can ask questions from me as well. Since the point was to craft together, I answered yes. Technical-wise the recording was on, so I decided to leave this question in – to give an overview why and how we all became hosts and participants. “Maybe sometimes I let the talk too out of scope to be everywhere. But we always brought it back and hey, anyhow, this is an [experience!](#)”⁵⁸, I wrote in my reflection – just as the whole podcast-journey was a remarkable crafting experience for me.

Is the podcast changemaking?

The podcast had been published both on the UU SoundCloud and Spotify account after I created an artwork by Canva design platform and wrote episode-descriptions (Appendix 4). I decided on the title “*Is this change?*” to imply the core pillar: asking questions and exchanging ideas together instead of stating all-encompassing answers. However, it brings a new question: was this podcast a way of making change?

Based on reflective crafting, students’ perspectives on changemaking and the literature, I reflect on how the podcast contributed to gaining self-confidence and new insights about making change – however, critically assess its connection to social change.

YIP helped students navigate and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers by not pressuring to solve all contemporary challenges at once – but finding one’s scope to a topic and create real, direct input (Gette, Gould, and Salovaara 2020; Wahl 2016). The podcast illustrates gaining self-confidence by feeling capable to *create* tangible interventions. By its publicity, this experience felt even more serious, seeing our creation appearing on Spotify. Moreover, by the common reflections during the interviews and podcast talks, as students expressed, they gained new insights. The most remarkable change in my perspective was that social change does not always need more activism. As Pais and Costa (2020, 17) describe, in a world of pressured urgency to act, react, intervene all the time, the real reaction lies in

⁵⁶ [„Is this change? EP05 - In case you are wondering...” – the Podcast – 2022](#)

⁵⁷ [„Is this change? EP03 – Change & the Systems” – the Podcast – 2022](#)

⁵⁸ Fieldnotes – Reflections – 08/07/2022

withdrawing from all this. In this sense, *slowing down, reflecting, asking questions, and listening to oneself and others’ needs* became “actions”.

However, we did not change the world with the podcast. YIP encouraged creating initiatives, which I do not describe as small-scale, bottom-up comparing to big-scale, top-down approach (Esteves 2020). Instead, I prefer the word *direct* change as students’ actions connected directly to themselves and their environment. Instead of aiming all-encompassing yet vague vision, students learned to reflectively understand the needs of a particular group or topic (Hoxie, Berkebile, and Todd 2012). A too big frame would have led nowhere – but a direct scope and tangible actions led to navigating in the individual pressure.

Therefore, the process-centric, reflective, and direct initiatives as educational practices supported students. However, they raise question if regenerative practices can achieve the desired social change and the “more just world” (Wessels et al. 2021, 85). At YIP, the practices primarily helped internal and not external, worldwide change. It is a question how students can continue navigating and possible expanding their contribution after ending the Program.

I cannot answer to this yet. I can only share students’ pursuit, shared at our Reflection Day: even if YIP felt like a bubble, we aim to spread the words by keeping “the flame”⁵⁹ inside us, as Hilde said. We became regenerative changemakers.

During the interviews, I asked this as a final questions: are you consider yourself as changemaker? Students were generally surprised and replied like “*only* in my small environment” or “*just* trying to be”.⁶⁰ All these after they stated that direct initiatives and people by their personal presence can create meaningful change. There is an ongoing academic debate whether “everyone is a changemaker” (Teasdale et al. 2021) and how to identify “changemaker” attributes (Rivers, Armellini, and Nie 2015). However, in this question I recall the interview with Nina when she reflected that maybe the biggest change we need in Western societies is not to regard changemakers as some grandiose, exceptional individuals, who alone can make the change, but let space to anyone who aims to step in to contribute.⁶¹ “Unlearning is already the change you want to see in the world”⁶², she said during our Reflection Day

Therefore, YIP members are not seen as “the changemakers” who come, see, and solve all worldwide issues. Instead, they create tangible initiatives and flourish themselves by following their spark and cooperate with others – to be regenerative changemakers.

⁵⁹ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

⁶⁰ Fieldnotes – Individual interviews – between 04 and 16/03/2022

⁶¹ Fieldnotes – Individual interview 2 – 04/03/2022

⁶² Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 03/09 – 28/05/2022

Conclusion

“The essence of innovation”⁶³ is letting people reflectively crafting and collaboratively co-creating based on their authentic, internal drives. Tak phrased it simply yet profoundly – the essence of innovation – when we discussed what happened during our YIP journey.

We experienced a new way of discussing and making change in academic education. Regenerative practices started with the internal. Based on one’s authentic spark, students found their scope to contribute to change what they found meaningful (Wahl 2016); learned to co-create by sharing their authentic side in honest dialogues (Hoxie, Berkebile, and Todd 2012; Wessels et al. 2021); and crafted direct initiatives in a process-focused way (Hayden 2017). Therefore, by engaging in the practices, the Young Innovators learned to navigate the contemporary social challenges and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers.

While writing my thesis, I once shared my “YIP-experience” to my cousins, and without any overthinking, I said: “It is so nice to realize what you are good at, being encouraged by others and then, really do that.” A second later I realized that I just summarized my three chapters: (1) “realize what you are good at” – slowing down, revealing your fears and dreams, learning to prioritize to do what you want – (2) “being encouraged by others” – showing our authentic side to each other, create a community based on these meaningful interactions – (3) “and really do it” – craft and create direct initiatives in a reflexive, process-focused way.

My conducted ethnographic fieldwork revealed these silent points by the Young Innovators’ lived experiences. Students aimed to contribute to the social change they saw as necessary. Yet, in their academic environment, they often struggled to navigate the overwhelming frustrations around the pressure of performing their best, their need to be part of meaningful communities, and the individual responsibility to manage global complex challenges. They were looking for support to growth holistically as a person, including socio-emotional or embodied experience (Orozco 2021). These could be entangled with what scholars call friction between universities’ conveyed Third mission-message and the experienced educational practices (Vorley and Nelles 2008). While equality, justice, and solidarity is often advocated to create social change, education risks to pressure individual goal- and utilitarian-oriented focuses (Pais and Costa 2020). Therefore, a need to bridge the Third mission and academic education can emerge.

⁶³ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 3/03 – 26/04/2022

YIP came to “reimagine academia in a regenerative way”⁶⁴, as I wrote it once in my reflection. Its practices gave dedicated time and created a social space where students were welcomed to reveal their struggles, showing their vulnerable side, and co-create direct change (Wahl 2016). It was built on what I saw as the three main pillars of regenerative change: (1) *authenticity* – students prioritized their “favorite” version of themselves instead of pressuring to perform their best; (2) *collaboration* – students experienced a community feeling based on honest interactions; and (3) *reflective crafting* – students were encouraged to regard their development as a process and create direct and tangible initiatives as this journeys’ milestones. I connected these pillars to the YIP students’ three main frustrations around contributing to the aimed social change.

Therefore, my ethnography – based on students’ lived experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) – regards regenerative practices as an answer for how academic institutes can support university Master’s students to navigate contemporary social challenges and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers.

This ethnography was centered around the practices, rather than the Young Innovators’ individual story. I can highlight this as a limitation of the research, that happened due to always-changing group-composition because of the partly hybrid meetings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and students’ busy schedule. However, by being a participant-researcher and collaborating with students to co-create the Exhibitions or the podcast series, I hope I could shed light on how YIP’s core elements, the regenerative practices supported us. The practices, like check-ins, journaling, meditations, hand-signs, or visual harvesting; the different forms of expressions, such as paintings, poems, art installations; and the interviews, podcast talks and autoethnography all inspired or helped to unpack regenerative change.

The practices took the individual as the center of social change and transformed individualism, many times expressed as an obstacle, into possibility. However, I do not wish to assume that these practices can solve all contemporary challenges. As internal change was highlighted and students crafted small-scale direct initiatives, the question emerged whether these regenerative practices can truly contribute to the aimed global social change. Moreover, whether students can continue their regenerative growth without YIP’s constant presence. I aim to argue that by reconstructing themselves as regenerative changemakers, students possible craft their quest further and continue this navigation – potentially involving further people on bigger-scales. However, this thesis cannot answer where the Young Innovators will be in 5-10-

⁶⁴ Fieldnotes – YIP meeting Phase 2/01 – 21/02/2022

50-years. I can only recommend assessing regenerative practices in a long-term: for example, exploring students’ perspectives on their YIP-experience later in their lives. This thesis will be there as something to reach back to.

Further noteworthy is the coaches’ perspective on designing and facilitating regenerative changemaking. Future research can assess their involvement and, moreover, experiences with regenerative changemaking practices on different age- and educational-levels, such as among Bachelor or high-school students. Furthermore, examine how these practices can be implemented by involving teachers and staff in academia from various fields.

YIP took a “slow” approach for changemaking by internal reflections and listening to oneself and others before quick fix interventions. The slow effect of these practices can challenge and question their usefulness. However, for broader implementation, I suggest that academic education first comprehends and includes university students’ perspective – which is possible by ethnographic studies – and second, leave behind advocating noble yet vague visions that can manifest in linear and procedural education, pressuring excellence by fulfilling expectations. Instead, since there is no blueprint for social change, encourage students to reflectively co-create direct, tangible initiatives based on their authentic spark. Therefore, the conveyed Third mission-message can be aligned to the academic educational practices. Perhaps a key for tackling contemporary social challenges is not more activism, highlighting all-encompassing solutions – but reflecting, listening, asking questions, and aiming to understand before reacting. A primary step to create the desired social change is to critically assess academic institutes themselves and bridge their conveyed message and teaching and learning practice. Therefore, students can navigate and reconstruct themselves as regenerative changemakers.

I hope that the poems, meditations, paintings, my reflections showed what Thieu said at the beginning: something has changed.

Us. We changed. Or better to say, the way we treat ourselves, others, and the world around us. We learned to host ourselves and others, listen to the needs and fulfill them, and be brave to co-create together.

We faced the pain to see the beauty of regenerative change and reconstruct ourselves as regenerative changemakers.

Takeaway messages to flourish regenerative change

In this one-pager, you can find highlighted key points that may help students and staff in academic education to start flourishing regenerative change in their own environment. These takeaway messages shed light on grounded practices that already illustrate a Young Innovators Program “lesson”: to create real and meaningful change, one can start with feasible steps in their everyday life - instead of waiting for grandiose, all-encompassing solutions. These practices have no magical power to immediately solve any problems but stand as inspiration - take as much as you feel you need to. I connect one message to each of the pillars of regenerative change. Hopefully, the visual elements may help you to remember more easily.

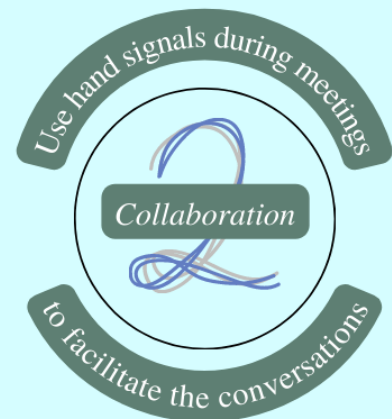


Start a lecture, workgroup, meeting with the question how you are and what you need to be fully present. If there are many people, do it in small groups or pairs. The point is to realize how your feelings may affect your presence and the meeting (Handler 1986; Orozco 2021).

Agree on hand signal you can use to provide simple yet effective way to discuss and co-create (Sennett 2012; Wahl 2016). Using these is also a learning process - recommended being patience and reminding each other at the first phase until they fully integrated.

Use hand signals during meetings

to facilitate the conversations



"The assignment serves you and not you the assignment", was told at YIP. Explore different ways - visual or embodied elements - that fit you and the purpose of your communication and reflect on the process constantly to re-navigate (Mauksch 2018), (Hayden 2017). Share yourself to co-create.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for all humans and non-humans who accompanied me during this journey.

First, I am grateful for the “YIPeople” for being those enthusiastic, attentive, and always-curious human beings who they are. It is way more that can fit in this thesis what you gave me by crossing each other’s path. Merlijn, Niki, Alex, Tak, Nina, Mar, Tommy, Nana, Marta, Jess, Elena, Isa, Renée, Friede, Giorgio, Rosa, Lisa, Martha, Lauren, Frits, Adele, Jytta, Hilde, Esther, Regina, Aysem, Andrew, Anthony, Silvia, Nouk, Katja, Eva, Thieu and Gerard, thank you for honestly and bravely revealing your pain and beauty.

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I am grateful for my teachers at Utrecht University to academically inspired me in the infinite realm of anthropology. I thank to Tessa Diphooorn for the supportive thoughts about making a podcast, and to the staff at the Audiovisual & Media Productions department for patiently listening to all my technical questions.

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Everyone from SCIMterklaas – you are the greatest, bravest, and funniest anthropologists I met, and I am looking forward to seeing you growing on your journey.

Arundhati, thank you for all our “kitchen talks”, shared struggles, dreams, and excitement. You helped me through a lot (not only the Dutch winter) by being, as you know, who you are.

And thank you for the support of my Grandmother, who speaks Hungarian, therefore, I address her in that: *Drága Mama, köszönöm a folyamatos támogatásod, nem csak a maratoni írásom, hanem minden pedagógiai és személyes beszélgetésünk során.*

Finally, I am grateful for the unpredictable Dutch weather to be that sunny when I was doing the individual interviews. The long walks in nature and sits in parks really helped flourish the conversation.

Check-out to open the next door

As I said, a check-in can be a check-out as well, when the time calls for that – and since it is the end of this thesis, it is time for a check-out.

However, as we said with Nouk, with one of our coaches during our Reflection Day, the quests are constant and continuous for all of us, therefore, there are no ends really – only new doors to step through. The next door of this journey has arrived.

Before closing this file on your laptop – or the book if you happen to have this thesis as an actual book – please, stop a bit, get yourself comfortable, take some deep breath and then: think about some moments, stories or statements that grabbed your attention. Moments when you may agree or disagree, felt excited or angry, inspired or outraged, touched or sad. Points or one point that moved you.

If you had none, it is also welcomed, think about what could make you feel differently.

If you happened to have a moment – hold it.

This moment is a way to your spark. It might not be an answer for your questions. Very likely it raises a new mountain of questions. However, I do believe that sometimes what we need is not more answers, shouted statements, and all-encompassing ideas, but more questions – specific, direct and reflective. Sometimes the ones that seem the simplest – like “how do you feel?” or “what do you mean by that?” – can be the most powerful.

So, hold your moment and start to unpack it. Explore different ways to find the most fitting to you, construct and reconstruct yourself in them. Involve others, share your ideas, start discussions, build yourself together. At the end, regenerative change in the academic world is about sharing our authentic side to connect and co-create direct initiatives together.

I wish you all the best to find your way and the people you can share this journey with.

I am really grateful that I could share the story of the Young Innovators.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. – Overview of the Young Innovators Honours Program at Utrecht University (2021/2022)

Here, you can find the official description about YIP from the [Utrecht University website](#).

Young Innovators

Young Innovators explore and creatively contribute to the renewal of their social, economic and natural ecosystems

Young Innovators is an extracurricular honours programme designed for curious and socially involved students. You can follow this programme (15 EC) on top of any Master’s degree of the Utrecht University.

Combine head, hearts, and hands

The Young Innovators programme stands for sustainability, social innovation, and regenerativity. A regenerative society contributes to and cares for the earth and its diverse communities. This programme is a community of changemakers that focuses on creating positive impact through social innovation and personal leadership. The programme offers you the chance to work on interdisciplinary issues related to the wellbeing of our society. It is a practical learning journey during which you work in an interdisciplinary team of students towards social innovation. Through systems thinking you think about the structures, paradigms of thought, and sources of visible behaviours and how to affect change.

Workshops

Workshops are organized on topics such as innovation processes, teamwork, group dynamics, and leadership. Young Innovators allows room for reflexive growth, with learning spaces to develop these skills and practices. The programme asks you to develop personal and community leadership. You will embark on an inspired journey for meaning and understanding amidst the complex challenges our societies face.

Creative and active-oriented research

The Young Innovators programme is based on creative and action-oriented research in diverse groups of international students. During the programme you will focus on who you are as a person and what drives you to enact social change. You will reflect on who we are as a community and how we can support each other. Lastly, Young Innovators works with outside communities on real issues to achieve change.

Programme layout

In 3 modules you will learn to approach real world issues from a systemic and personally relevant perspective. You will develop your personal leadership, deepen your understanding of regenerative practice, your social innovation skills and build a learning community.

1. Foundations in regenerative practice
2. Learning from place and building a learning community
3. Personal quests and collective interventions

Upon successful completion you receive an Honours Certificate.

Time investment and meetings

- The programme is 15 EC (1 EC = 28 hours)
 - The programme runs from October until May
 - Time commitment is approx. 6-8 hours a week
 - Fifteen Tuesday evening meetings
 - Three weekend gatherings
 - One five-day trip abroad in February/March (*with an official exculpation for their respective master courses*)
 - Final presentation event in May
 - Graduation ceremony in June
-

On the next page, you can find an overview of the Phases, sharing their theme and dates, copying from the official emails we got, written by the coaches.

Overview of the YIP Phases

Phase 1 – between 24/10/2021 and 18/12/2021

“Dear Young Innovator,

We are very happy to welcome you to the Young Innovators Program: towards regenerative societies. Perhaps the oldest university, is the university of the tree around which we gather to inquire and exchange. In a way, our first weekend goes back to that idea. We meet on the Veluwe, a beautiful natural park formed mostly by the moraines from the penultimate ice age, and by overlogging during the middle ages. We start our journey here because it gives us time to unplug from our daily routines, get to know each other in a spacious environment, gather around a fire, and to have some time for ourselves in nature.

Regenerative practice starts with taking care of- and looking into ourselves, as does the first movement of our program. This movement of the program revolves around exploring personally relevant questions and themes. We are interested in where the personal meets the public, because to make a real change outside in the world, requires an equal change inside ourselves if we are not to repeat the past. This weekend we kick-off not only our collective learning journey but the programme pays particular attention to our personal one.”

Phase 2 - between 21/01/2022 and 26/03/2022

“Thematically, the coming phase will be about ‘Building in Community’. Building in community means that we continue to build whatever it is that calls us in the world, as a community. It means that you can work on any theme that calls you when it comes to regenerativity. You can do so by yourself or in a team. And if you do not have anything that calls you (yet), you can use the space to explore, play, experiment, and see what emerges. But whatever it is that you do, you will have a community around you, to share with, to find support through, and to be on a journey with.

And at the same time, ‘Building in Community’ means that our activities ‘out there’ also contribute to our own community. Your experiences, the skills you learn or use, the connections that you make in your building, they can be brought back to our own Young Innovators

community, in the form of sharing, workshops, toolkits, artistic activities, social events etcetera. Lets build this community together.

Practically there will be three kinds of sessions

- Group coaching sessions, where we come together with 10-15 people, share experiences, and learn from one another
- Workshops and tools sessions, we (the hosts) offer you practical skills for hosting change processes in the world out there
- Open input sessions, where you can organize workshops, host dialogues, do arts or crafts, dance, tell stories or whatever calls you to bring to the community”

Phase 3 – between 09/04/2022 and 28/05/2022

“This Saturday we will start our 3rd phase with a community kick-off at the Creative Playground in Lombok. During this kick-off we can practice learning from, hosting, and intervening in a place. It marks a moment where we will go out and meet the world even more, and extend the regenerative work we have been doing in our own community to the outside world.

The Creative Playground is a temporary social and cultural initiative that attempts to strengthen the health of the neighborhood (see www.thecreativeplayground.eu). We will be working from here as basecamp during the day.

We will not change the world in a day, nor are we the saviors of this place, but we can with our attention, open hearts, and interventions generate a little life. A place like the neighborhood can be as much an inspiration for us as we could be for it. We may recognise the themes and questions that we have been exploring in the past phase in the neighborhood. They can be a lense that guides your inspiration. You will see that things become meaningful and grounded in a place, from how food works here to what form and potential spiritual practice has in the community. At the same time, we will try to really listen to the place, connect with it in different ways, and let our interventions spring from that.”

**Appendix 2. – Table of the Young Innovators’ meetings
 in connection to participant observation
 (from the start of the official fieldwork period)**

Phase	Meeting	Date	In person/ Online*	Notes
2	01	21/01/2022	Online	Collective kick-off of Phase 2
	02	25/01/2022	Online	Collective meeting
	03	01/02/2022	In person	Collective meeting
	04	08/02/2022	In person	Coaching session
	05	15/02/2022	Online	Workshops by the hosts
	06	22/02/2022	-	Open input session
	07	01/03/2022	In person	Coaching session
	08	08/03/2022	In person	Workshop by the hosts
	09	15/03/2022	In person	Open input session
	10	22/03/2022	In person	Preparing for the Exhibition
	11	24/03/2022	Online	Co-host meeting for Exhibition
	12	26/03/2022	In person	Phase 2 Exhibition
3	01	09/04/2022	In person	Collective kick-off of Phase 3
	02	12/04/2022	In person	Collective meeting
	03	26/04/2022	In person	Collective meeting
	04	10/05/2022	-	Collective meeting
	05	17/05/2022	In person	Co-host meeting for the Festival
	06	24/05/2022	In person	Collective session
	07	25/05/2022	In person	Co-host meeting for the Festival
	08	27/05/2022	In person	Young Innovators’ Open Festival
	09	28/05/2022	In person	Reflection Day

*This indicated my presence during the meeting, since even when we had an online option, YIP operated with hybrid modes (except for meeting 11). Online meetings were held via Zoom calls.

Appendix 3. – Table of the individual interviews

	Date	In person/ Online	Details of the interviewee				
			Name	Discipline	National background	Age	Sex
1.	04/03/2022	In person	Renée	Applied Ethics	Netherlands	24	F
2.	04/03/2022	In person*	Nina	Social Policy and Public Health	Netherlands	32	F
3.	06/03/2022	In person	Tak	Water Science and Management	Japan-USA	23	M
4.	06/03/2022	Online	Isabella	Sustainable Business and Innovation	Columbia	22	F
5.	07/03/2022	In person	Alex	Sustainable Development (Track – Energy and Materials)	United Kingdom-Sweden	26	M
6.	07/03/2022	In person	Niki	Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship	Uzbekistan	23	F
7.	08/03/2022	In person	Giorgio	Bio Inspired Innovation	Italy-France	22	M
8.	08/03/2022	In person	Jytta	Intercultural Communication	Netherlands	23	F
9.	09/03/2022	In person	Tommy	Sustainable Development (Track - Energy and Materials)	USA	25	M
10.	09/03/2022	In person	Marta	Sustainable Development (Track - International Development)	Spain	23	F
11.	11/03/2022	In person	Mar	Sustainable Development (Track – Environmental Change and Ecosystems)	Spain-Hong kong-Singapore	22	F
12.	13/03/2022	In person	Merlijn	History and Philosophy of Science	Netherlands	22	F
13.	14/03/2022	Online	Nana	International management	Indonesia	26	F
14.	14/03/2022	In person	Adele	Toxicology and Environmental Health	Italy	27	F
15.	15/03/2022	In person	Lauren	Public International Law	USA	22	F
16.	15/03/2022	Online	Jess	Public International Law	Brasilia	29	F
17.	16/03/2022	In person	Frits	Artificial Intelligence	Netherlands	21	M
18.	16/03/2022	In person	Martha	International Relations in Historical Perspective	Greece	29	F

* All the interviews were in Utrecht, except this one, it was in Amsterdam. The in-person meetings happened during a walk or in a coffee place. The online interviews happened via Zoom call. The interviews were between 50 minutes and 2 hours.

Appendix 4. – Information about the podcast “Is this change?”

You can find to the “Is this change?” podcast one the [Utrecht University Spotify channel](#) or the [UU SoundCloud channel](#).

In addition, I created a [website](#) where I introduce the podcast and the journey behind more in-depth, collect episode description and offer contact to people who would like to connect.

Table of the information about the “Is this change?” Podcast episodes

Episode name	Date of recording	Release date	Guests	Length
EP01 – Change & Me	07/04/2022	21/04/2022	Merlijn, Tak, Niki	1:08:15
EP02 – Change & People	05/04/2022		Martha, Nana, Alex	1:00:41
EP03 – Change & the Systems	08/04/2022		Mar, Nina, Tommy	1:42:08
EP04 – Reflection	12/04/2022		Only the host, Borcsi	50:29
EP05 – In case you are wondering...				13:38

Detailed description of the episodes

General description, appear below each episode description

‘CHANGE THE SYSTEM AND CREATE A BETTER FUTURE!’ - trendy to say, trickier to answer: what does it actually mean? Who, where, when, why, how and with whom can, want or need to change? Lots of questions, with even more possible answers. In this podcast, *changemaking* is unpacked by young Master’s students and how they think, feel and act all around it. A Cultural Anthropology student, Borbála (Borcsi) Jäger invites students from the Young Innovators Honours Program at Utrecht University to bring their stories of change, ask questions and exchange ideas. All of this to explore... What does one mean by *change*?

EP01 – Change & Me

Is changemaking something that starts within the one-self, connecting to the personal feelings, motivation, thoughts, struggles and questions? If yes, how can we know what kind of changes we would like to create? How do we navigate our feelings, where do we start sharing our ideas? Niki, Merlijn and Tak share their personal stories and practices here to challenge some questions and discuss new insights together.

EP02 - Change & People

If changemaking means ‘involving people’, ‘forming a community’ and ‘create something together’... then how is it happening? How do people work together? How do we form communities, find the common points and communicate to each other? What is the language of change? Marta, Nana and Alex visited the studio to exchange their ideas and discuss these questions.

EP03 - Change & the Systems

Scale, time, leadership... Abstract aspects of change. However, Nina, Mar and Tommy bring their own stories, concerns and questions to break them down and discuss them in relation to a pressing issue: climate change. Does the one-self have an effect on the system? What is a direct change? What kind of superpowers do we need to find a solution? Or maybe, there is no one solution and we should step back, observe and understand the system before we start to change it...?

EP04 - Reflection

Wow... This podcast-journey was a big ‘wow’ for me. But was this a way of changemaking? How did it feel to record a podcast for the first time? What kind of questions remain still ‘out there’ for me? I reflect on these and more in a very experimental setting: yes, I am sitting in the studio and talking by myself very frankly for 50 minutes. If you are listening to this: thank you for bearing with me and hope to spark some questions or ideas for you.

EP05 - In case you are wondering...

In case you are wondering what the full story behind this podcast is, here is an in-depth overview to share the whole background and some practical details. Originally, I recorded this as an introduction, but listening back to the episodes, I felt better to start in medias res with the first conversation. However, I still wanted to provide a more detailed explanatory episode - in case you are wondering about the full story. So here we go, but if you have more questions, get in touch with me: I am more than happy to talk about your questions, ideas, feelings, concerns, thoughts and stories of changemaking!

Visit the Contact page!

Artwork designed by Borbála Jäger used Canva design platform:



Appendix 5. – Art Exhibition – thesis edition and the Miro Whiteboard as the online section of the YIP Festival

Welcome dear reader to continue exploring the Art Exhibition – thesis edition. Here, you can find the artworks of three more YIP members – paintings of Rosa, Martha, and mine – while also explore the online section of the YIP Festival.

Since some YIP members, friends and family aimed to experience the YIP Festival even not in person – due to the COVID-19 pandemic or being abroad – we used the Miro Whiteboard online collaborative platform to present some initiatives there.

[Click on the link to explore this online version.](#)

Otherwise, continue with the following paintings to see how the YIP students collaborated a collective Art Exhibition by bringing their individual initiatives and installations.

Martha introduced her piece as connecting to the theme modern slavery – it expresses the ethical questions around the chocolate industry, which topic she discovered and dived deeper into during YIP. This painting is an expression of her findings and thoughts.



Rosa introduced her paintings as inspired by the theme emotional literacy to “connect the the oneself in a rational society through art”. She painted a picture at the end of each Phase.

To the first she connected “*intuition*” and the questions “What is intuition? How to trust intuition to feel?”. The second centered around “*flow*” as “Let your feelings flow – how are you feeling? What do you need to feel? Art is a way to connect to feelings.”. The third Phase appeared as “*path*” to discover “What s your feeling telling you? What do you need? Feeling to find you path.”

Phase 1 – Intuition



Phase 2 - Flow



Phase 3 - Path



Borcsi – the author of this thesis as this is my nickname how I am known in the Program – introduced the following paintings as inspired by the one-year YIP journey. The first three are a collection, painted during the first Phase, titled as “ME”. The fourth painting was inspired to the second Phase Exhibition, titled as “THE COMMUNITY”. The last one was created to final YIP Festival and presents “ME AND THE COMMUNITY.” Together, they express joy, care and connections, experienced during this remarkable one-year journey with YIPeople.

ME





THE COMMUNITY



ME AND THE COMMUNITY

