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Youth, Communication & Climate: A Pluridisciplinary Analysis of Distancing Strategies in Response to Climate Change among Belgian Youth

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Abstract: Our paper investigates Belgian young peoples' discussions about climate change, specifically how they distance themselves from various dimensions related to climate issues. The study includes a pluridisciplinary analysis combining sociological, linguistic and semiotic approaches to process textual data collected in 2022 from six focus groups organised within local youth associations. This study focuses on 33 socially and economically diverse young people who joined a youth club. The paper explores the strategies employed by the respondents to distance themselves from climate change issues. It sheds light on various aspects related to climate distancing: How young people embody their vision of climate change through voice-switching, how societal norms and beliefs influence them, how they perceive the global impact of the changes, and how education plays a role in the issue of climate change. The study highlights the barriers, paradoxes and conflicts that hinder young people's active involvement in addressing climate change. It goes on to propose a set of recommendations aimed at transforming these barriers into actionable steps that can drive positive change. By identifying and addressing the contributing factors to climate distancing, this research offers potential pathways for empowering young people to become more engaged in the fight against climate change.

Keywords: youth; climate change; distancing; involvement; empowerment; school; doxa

1. Introduction

The perception of climate change as a fundamental problem of humanity is now commonly shared by the European population [1,2], notably by Belgians: "80% of Belgians consider climate change as a problem that requires urgent action" [3] (p. 106). More generally, 93% of Europeans consider climate change a "problem" and 78% a "very serious problem" [4]. However, the perceived gravity of this problem is in tension with that of other issues and crises affecting the daily lives of Europeans and Belgians, especially among the young populations.

Differences in perception of climate change are a subject of regular study in both psychology [5–8] and sociology [9,10]. In these studies, the question of risk perception plays a fundamental role [11,12]. Some of them focus on the prediction of these perceptions, focusing on the central role of education [13–15]. Other studies [16–18] highlight the diversity of predictors such as experience, affect, norms, values and knowledge. Most of these studies also conclude that moral obligations play a crucial role in determining climate commitment intentions [17], as do gender, political party, knowledge of the causes, impacts and responses to climate change and personal experience of extreme weather [3,14]. Regional diversity has also been at the centre of attention of research studies: Understanding the anthropogenic responsibility of climate change is, for instance, the strongest predictor of perceptions of climate change in Latin America and Europe [15]. Finally, a number

of studies, such as [19], highlight the abstract logic and discursive structure of delayed discourses about climate change among populations.

Among the youngest populations, particularly teenagers and young adults, research results have often presented a homogeneous strong interest in climate issues [2,20,21]. In 2016, RTBF (which stands for Radio Télévision Belge Francophone and is the public broadcasting organization serving the French-speaking community in Belgium) launched a major survey of 30,000 Belgians aged 15 to 34 called "Génération Quoi?" [21]. The survey showed that the young Belgian participants did consider the environment their main concern. However, as with other age groups, concerns for the environment are often dissolved among competing concerns (education, employment, social integration, etc.) [2]. Previous research [6] (p. 79) even advises against "deluding ourselves" into considering a uniformly aware and committed generation behind the climate strike movements of 2018/2019. Greta Thunberg's media exposure, youth online activism and the movement "Fridays For Future" have given the wrong impression that young people were all very committed to climate issues. Previous authors [22] (p. 8), for example, conclude from a quantitative survey of Swiss young people that they are "neither significantly more nor significantly less favourable to the environment than their elders". Other studies concluded that young people's commitment is plural: It is "more active and less militant" [23] (p. 150). Young people's commitment can take the form of a rejection of consumption, a search for alternative consumption or even an adoption of different lifestyles. It can also take the more traditional form of involvement in long-term political movements (political parties, trade unions, non-profit associations, etc.) or contextual movements (demonstrations and strikes). In short, most young people are not less committed, they just commit differently than their elders [24].

In addition, ref. [25] highlights the obstacles that prevent some young people from taking climate action. These include concern, indignation, pessimism, defeatism and powerlessness. The feeling of powerlessness, of a lack of personal effectiveness, also appears to be one of the most important disincentives to action. Ref. [26] thus asserts that a lack of hope can "undermine individual response and collective effectiveness". The study by [27] (p. 6) confirms this hypothesis: They "seem [...] to possess certain knowledge of how to reduce the impact of major social and environmental problems, but do not believe that this type of change is possible". Young people do not feel that they have sufficient power to act on these issues [27]. In addition to this, many young people are psychologically distanced from the realities of climate change [28], which makes them assign responsibility for climate change action to other age groups or authorities. They often invoke, as climate actions, solutions that distance them from individual action (e.g., reducing the pollution of private companies and tree planting) [29]. Climate distancing has been described as a "growing disconnection from the fate of the natural world" [30]. Distanciation is a process among young people that can be observed in other domains, such as responsibility or politicisation, often with a negative connotation. However, several sociologists have focused on the positive impact of distancing strategies, notably to create a new paradigm [31], which is a scope we will take in this paper.

Another focus of this paper is how the effects of climate change are unevenly distributed among individuals in terms of gender, social class, geographical location or socio-demographic level [28,32–36]. These considerations prompt us to put children and teenagers at the centre of our research. Indeed, although climate change is expected to have a significant impact on future generations, the majority of academic research on perceptions of climate change focuses on adults or young adults rather than children and adolescents [10]. In their review of the literature, ref. [10] deplore the lack of representativeness of certain quantitative studies on this subject and also suggest that a qualitative approach directly in the field would be a good way of gathering young people's feelings.

Finally, we are also interested in the role of schools in climate change education. Ref. [37] shows how Belgian schools remain incapable of addressing these issues: "unfortunately, schools are no better. The biggest gap observed in our study is, as always, the one

that separates pupils according to the type of education they attend. We decidedly cannot accept that schools should reserve essential knowledge [about climate] for only some, if we are to understand the challenges facing our society and mobilize the means to address them" [37] (p. 39).

In conclusion, this paper will look into how young people, in their discourses, distance themselves from climate change actions and issues. Four main research questions drive the study:

1. What discourse strategies do young people employ to distance themselves from climate change issues?
2. What barriers are mentioned by young people that prevent them from getting more involved in climate change mitigation?
3. How do they express their (dis)empowerment in climate change mitigation?
4. Is their discourse imbued with a mental conflict linked to the climate emergency and a feeling of incapacity to act?

2. Materials and Methods

Data collection took place during the summer of 2022, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of young Belgians' perceptions of climate change. To achieve this, collective semi-directive interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups. An interview grid was drawn up in advance to ensure that the various themes of interest were covered, but the aim was to leave the respondents free to discuss the issues in order to gain a better understanding of what was important to them.

The data were collected during six focus groups in the French-speaking part of Belgium. The focus group field analysis consisted of discussions and debates in groups of four to ten participants aged 10–22 and lasted between 30 min to one hour. In total, the focus groups gathered 33 young people. The focus groups were organised in youth centres and clubs, mainly in AMOs (Action en Milieu Ouvert, "Open Field Action centres"), which offer temporary accommodation or follow-ups for young people in difficulty. They welcome young people who are more socially and socio-economically vulnerable (but not only), which is an important variable to consider when interpreting the analysis results, although this variable does not concern all the groups. The youth groups included both young men and women. The discussions were anonymous, and no personal data (age, education, parents' professions, etc.) were collected. The study was conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, with all subjects giving their informed consent for inclusion before participating.

One or more mediators were responsible for the smooth running of the exchanges, but it was, first and foremost, the participants who were invited to discuss among themselves. We know that, during group discussions, the same young people tend to do most of the talking. The moderators tried to give everyone a fair chance to speak. However, some of the young participants, either through lack of interest or shyness, participated less, while others asserted their ideas more clearly. These limitations of our research study will be discussed in the final section of this article. The mediators also helped to maintain a certain regularity between the different focus groups, particularly with the help of the constructed interview grid already mentioned, composed of follow-up questions around four themes related to young people and climate change: Their perception of climate change, their role in the climate transition, their relationship with school and their access to information. Focus groups were all audio recorded, anonymised and transcribed; the transcription is the basis of our analysis.

This pluridisciplinary study (Figure 1) is based on the contributions from three disciplines: Linguistics, sociology and semiotics. The linguistic approach to the data is dual. First, a conversational analysis framework [38,39] is used, which enables us to identify various "voices" used by young people. Secondly, the framing approach in ref. [40] paved the way towards a better understanding of young people's relationship with the school institution. To achieve this, we adopted a qualitative analysis of the data combined

with a lexicometric approach (using Sketch Engine). For the sociological approach, we adopted [41] four socio-spatial levels of analysis to understand the various references evoked by young people. A third semiotic approach was used to support and complement the conversational analysis and sociological approaches. Inspired by [42,43] narrative semiotics, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of the focus group transcripts. This analysis identified some general patterns regarding the attribution of roles of those who cause climate change ("the villains": [44]), the actors working against it ("the heroes"), the social actors who create obstacles to the heroes' action ("the opponents") and those who support the heroes ("the helpers"). The results of these three approaches are examined in the following sections.
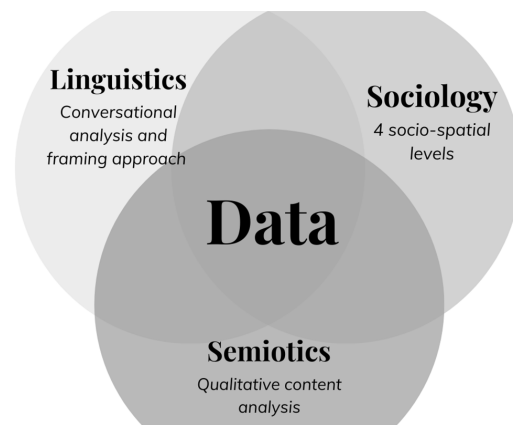

Figure 1. A pluridisciplinary three-dimension approach.

3. Results

The theoretical model (Figure 2) used to explain climate distanciation among the youth around the three disciplines is the socio-spatial levels of analysis of [41], which is a specific approach to studying the environmental behaviours of individuals and focuses on the influence of their social and physical environments. For [45], it is essential to study the relationships that the individual has with his or her direct space and time to determine the dynamics of this relationship with the subject of climate change. The approach includes four interconnected levels on a scale ranging from close to distant. These levels take the form of the individual level (personal factors, such as beliefs and attitudes), the micro-social level (factors in the immediate environment, such as interactions with peers and friends), the meso-social level (factors in the community environment, such as participation in local groups and organisations) and the macro-social level (factors in the broader political and economic environments).

	Physical aspect of the environment	Social aspects of the environment	Space type and control
Level I	Micro-environment Private space/housing Work space	Person Family	Private area Extended control
Level II	Local environment, neighborhood. Areas open to public	Inter-individual, community, users, customers	Semi-public areas Intermediate control
Level III	Public environment. Towns, villages	Inhabitants, aggregation of people	Public areas Intermediate control
Level IV	Global environment	Society Population	Country, nation, planet Hypothetical control

Figure 2. Socio-spatial levels of analysis [41] cited in [45].

3.1. The Individual Level: Young People and Their Family

At the micro-social level, "[t]he feeling of control [...] of individuals over their environment stops at private spaces, at their home" [45] (pp. 253–254). This limitation reflects the idea that people may have a sense of influence or agency within the confines of their personal spaces, but their ability to impact broader social and environmental issues diminishes beyond these boundaries. In other words, individuals may feel empowered to make decisions and take actions within their private domains, but they may perceive a reduced ability to effect significant change in the larger social and environmental context. At this level, we observe three avoidance strategies: The use of the over-representation of the waste theme, the use of personal pronouns and the role of the family as a brake.

The first observation that has been made is the importance of the issue of waste management. The lemma "déchet" is cited 32 times in the focus group transcriptions. Young people often link waste collection to the environment, whatever the specific question asked. When they refer to themselves ("nous") as actors (heroes) in the fight against climate change, they point out actions like not littering or sorting or collecting waste. Young people consider waste management actions they can handle at their level as important to help protect the environment (Examples 1–3: all examples are translated in Appendix A).

Example 1.

- *modérateur : et tu disais que y'a des gens qui polluent?*
- *jeune 1 : il y en a qui polluent, tout ce qui est cigarette tout ça. Les déchets, les papiers, à la mer et tout//*
- *jeune 2 : qui jettent leur Capri-Sun//*
- *jeune 1 : leurs cigarettes au sol//*
- *jeune 2 : leurs canettes de Coca* [FG5]

Example 2.

- *éducateur : j'ai une question à vous poser, si vous vous regroupez/entre 5 et 10 jeunes/enfin peu importe le nombre de jeunes/quelles idées vous viendraient à l'esprit à faire ensemble pour changer la donne?*
- *jeune : ramasser les papiers dans la rue* [FG1]

Example 3.

- *modérateur : pour vous il y a quoi comme pollution?*
- *jeune 1 : euh//les cannettes, les pailles*
- *jeune 2 : le plastique quoi* [FG6]

A lexicometric analysis of the occurrences of the lemma "déchet" makes it possible to detail its use by the speakers. The most frequently occurring verbs of which "waste" is the object include "to sort", "to throw out", "to keep", "to remove" and "to collect". Sorting, throwing out, keeping, removing and collecting represent the concrete actions confirming the concrete representation of the climate issue in the daily lives of young people and the fight against climate change in which they can, thanks to waste management, actively participate because of its accessibility. In addition to the acts (of sorting, throwing out, keeping, removing and collecting) in their daily life, they also share personal beliefs and attitudes that go beyond these simple gestures. A concordance analysis of the data shows that young people do express their personal beliefs in the focus groups, mainly using "je pense" (44 occurrences in Figure 3) and "je crois", with the pronoun "je" often reinforced by "moi" ("moi je", Figure 4).

Figure 3. Concordance of the "je pense" locution in the focus groups (extract).

Figure 4. Concordance of the "je crois" locution in the focus groups (extract).

Young people's beliefs are opposed to a feeling of losing control, sometimes embodied by their parents' control over their life [18] and other times, a more ambiguous group composed of "high people" (the opponents: Government, politicians, celebrities, etc.) (Example 4) who will not take youth opinion into consideration.

Example 4.

- *jeune 1 : le problème avec nous/c'est que on aura beau/par exemple/essayer de parler/de trouver les bons arguments/les bons mots pour euh//on ne peut pas faire changer l'esprit de certaines grandes personnes haut placées/ils vont nous regarder de haut/ils vont dire "beh toi/tu fais quoi toi?"*
- *jeune 2 : paysan*
- *jeune 1 : genre "t'es à l'école/tu fais quoi toi?"* [FG1]

The feeling of being unable to act is associated among the youth with a less concrete vision of the consequences of climate change on their daily lives. As a result, they fall into the trap of the globalising framework: The objective to mitigate climate change is too ambitious and goes beyond their sphere of daily action, making them less sensitive to these issues in their daily lives.

In this regard, the family also plays a non-negligible role. The family is notably consistent with the findings of [46] who showed that, statistically, family plays a crucial role in shaping the climate change beliefs and behaviours of those in the family. Thus, understanding family dynamics can help to design effective strategies to raise awareness about and encourage sustainable behaviours among families in response to climate change. In the focus groups, the family theme occurs frequently: "family" is cited nine times (three times by the moderator), and "parents", "father" and "mother" are cited 30 times in total (14, 5 and 11, respectively). Rather than focusing on parental control over their life, young people accuse their parents or grandparents of being the villains responsible for worldwide pollution (Example 5).

Example 5.

- *jeune : c'est tout le monde qui pollue*
- *jeune 2 : les parents ils polluent plus* [FG6]

According to the young people interviewed, it also appears that the family is not particularly supportive of adopting climate-friendly practices (Example 6).

Example 6.

- *modérateur : avec vos familles/vous en parlez vite fait ou?*
- *jeune : non [. . .] en vrai/pour moi c'est soit quand on voit un truc sur Insta qui nous a choqué/et on en parle/soit euh//c'est euh//quand on regarde les infos*
- *éducateur : je ne sais pas vous/mais moi j'en parlais avec mes parents/même mes grands-parents/et c'est marrant comme ils sont euh//un peu à côté de la plaque [. . .]*
- *jeune : c'est eux qui ne se soucient pas vraiment du futur parce que [. . .] ça ne les impactera pas/parce qu'ils seront morts (rires) ouais ils se disent: « ben tant pis ce n'est pas nous »* [FG1]

Moreover, some testimonies highlight a disincentive force in the family sphere (Example 7).

Example 7.

- *jeune : ah ouais moi le seul truc que j'ai fait avec mon cours d'environnement là c'est que je ne devais pas manger de viande du tout/et après j'en ai parlé à ma mère et tout je voulais trop le faire puis ma mère elle m'a dit « non c'est n'importe quoi » du coup j'ai quand même mangé de la viande* [FG4]

The focus groups have shown that the variation in families' influence over climate beliefs and behaviours needs to be deepened in research. The perception of environmental commitment within the family is an essential dimension of this socio-spatial level. In addition to this, the importance of waste management among young people at home seems to mainly represent the heavy burden of climate change management for youth: Young people prefer to hide behind and adopt a concrete action within their reach.

3.2. The Micro-Social Level: Young People and Their Peers

The micro-social level delves into factors within the immediate environment, particularly interactions with peers and friends. This point explores how individuals' social interactions with those in their close circles shape their beliefs, behaviours and experiences. Understanding these intimate social dynamics seems essential for understanding how social influences materialise in individuals' lives and how these influences can be harnessed for various social, psychological and behavioural interventions. This level provides an opportunity to see how young people distance themselves from generations to which they do not belong, whether younger or older. As a local environment where pupils coexist, the school is also covered in this section.

3.2.1. Tensions between Generations

To begin this section, Example 8 is particularly enlightening, as it illustrates another voice exploited as a distancing strategy by young speakers in our corpus: The new generation. The people interviewed are 10–22 years old, and they refer to "la nouvelle generation" as one "who pays attention to nothing, who lacks respect, who does not take things seriously". The phrasing makes it clear that the people interviewed do not view themselves as part of this new generation, but the age group of the latter is ambiguous. Are they kids aged 5–10, pre-adolescents aged 10–12, or another age group and range? Such discourse of younger people fits into the more general concept of "institutionalized mistrust" as defined by [47] (p. 166): "Youth has historically occupied the 'wild zones' as imagined within the institutional spaces characteristic of modernity [. . .] young people have been viewed as being 'ungovernable' and lacking in 'self-regulation'". This mistrust is shared by younger people themselves, who feel that "'grown-ups run everything' [. . .] 'we're just kids' [. . .] 'they don't trust us'" [48] (p. 248).

Example 8.

- *médiateur : est-ce que votre vie/du coup dans le futur/ce sera mieux ou moins bien que celle de vos grands-parents?*

- *jeune : et nan//franchement nan//si le réchauffement climatique ça arrive dans 20 ans on sera tous euh [. . .] enfin c'est surtout pour la vie qui sera trop chère/ce sera/trop dur à vivre quoi/parce que on va dire les conditions de travail et tout on va dire il augmente pas pour qu'on puisse vivre correctement/on a le minimum/et après on doit se débrouiller avec ça/mais vu que la vie elle augmente/elle augmente/à chaque fois hein/tu vois déjà quand tu étais plus petit tu pouvais aller euh//comment c'est//avec les//les pièces la comment ça s'appelle//les francs belges avec 50 centimes tu pouvais t'acheter un grand paquet de bonbon alors que la avec ça tu peux même pas t'acheter un petit paquet/tu peux t'acheter/aller//une chique//voilà*
- *modérateur : et tu penses que ce sera pire dans 20 ans encore?*
- *jeune : ouais! clairement/surtout avec la nouvelle génération qui fait attention à rien/qui manque de respect/qui ne prennent pas les choses au sérieux* [FG5]

Yet, such intergenerational attitudes and discourses usually appear in the context of adults versus younger adults or adults versus teenagers. Less often do they appear in the context of young people versus younger people, which is the case here. In the general context of this focus group, it appears that the speaker (aged 14) projects herself as older and uses the generic "tu" to allow for criticism of young people in general, of which she is no longer a part.

Example 9.

- *jeune : après moi je suis d'accord qu'il ne faut pas tout à fait stopper [la viande] parce que par exemple pour les enfants/moi je me rappelle une que je connais/elle voulait le faire végétarien dès petits et c'est dangereux pour ton enfant carrément parce que y a certaines protéines dont on a besoin donc pour moi il ne faut pas l'arrêter tout à fait/il faut juste savoir se dire « tu ne vas pas manger de la viande matin midi soir » mais il ne faut juste pas en abuser et éviter la surconsommation quoi* [FG4]

In Example 9, the generic statement "tu ne vas pas manger de la viande matin midi soir" is notable. It is a reported speech where the speaker develops a character who is both himself and someone external to himself and who then uses "tu" to address "je". This shift may reflect a kind of cognitive dissonance, namely introverted consciousness [49] (p. 147), that [50] can be interpreted as a lever of ethical self-regulation.

Indirect reported speech, sometimes introduced by specific formulae (cf. "en mode" in Example 10), does work as a doxa. However, the difference here is that the doxa is not assumed by the speaker, unlike in the previous examples. So, the speaker develops specific characters, such as those we have already defined ("notre generation" in Example 10), to play the role of the doxa enunciator.

Example 10.

- *jeune : je pense déjà/notre génération elle est beaucoup en mode [. . .] "ouais les grands gèrent, les grand gèrent" et tout ça//du coup maintenant que ça commence à être plus nous/on se rend compte qu'on va devoir gérer* [FG2]

In Example 10, the speaker highlights the disengagement of young people who assign the burden of climate change management to older generations via a reported speech, allowing him to exclude himself from this attitude.

This micro-social analysis highlights how social interactions, particularly between generations, influence young people's beliefs and attitudes. The concept of "generation" is used to distance ourselves from behaviours perceived as irresponsible or, in contrast, too restrictive in environmental terms.

3.2.2. The School as Scapegoat

School played different narrative roles during the focus groups. The participants sometimes portrayed schools—and teachers—as positive actors in charge of fighting against climate change; other times, schools played the role of helpers. However, in general, schools are depicted as opponents upon whom young people call to do more. The young people in the focus groups explained that climate change mitigation strategies are not taught efficiently at school. Climate issues are only mentioned in some courses and are not developed as a concrete theme in any. The results obtained through the focus groups corroborate those of [27] (p. 10), who states that "nearly half of the young people we met mention that at school, they only hear about knowledge when it comes to climate change. They specify that they must write about the subject and deplore the fact that they are not invited to take action".

A framing analysis of school's influence on young people's discourse sheds more light on their feelings of disempowerment, and it offers ideas of the dynamic routes that schools could follow to unravel youth blaming. In the focus groups, the word "school" is mentioned 55 times, "teachers" 6 times and "lessons" 28 times. We analysed the 89 occurrences and classified them following a framing approach [40]. The analysis of school-related occurrences in the focus groups reveals several views and frames of reference on the role of school in understanding and addressing climate change; they all converge towards a feeling that the mission of school does not correspond to the reality of climate change: The participants feel that school is failing to provide them with the skills, knowledge and motivation to deal with climate change challenges. In fact, the analysis of focus group dialogues brought out four different school frames, which all refer to the need for climate activities beyond disciplinary boundaries, more tangible lessons, learning outside school and relevance beyond the school context.

Young people agreed that climate change is not sufficiently addressed at the school level. Instead, climate change is discussed in a fragmented way, such as through a short exercise or project within the context of other subjects, for example, science, geography and religion. The limited attention dedicated to climate change issues indicates that schools do not consider climate change a cross-curricular subject. One young participant's comments even suggest that the issue is taken too lightly and dismissed abruptly (Example 11).

Example 11.

- *modérateur : est-ce qu'à l'école on vous a parlé un peu d'environnement?*
- *jeune : on fait un petit exposé puis après hop c'est fini (rires)//c'est vrai en plus* [FG2]

This raises the question of how to integrate climate change into the school curriculum and how to emphasize the need for a multidisciplinary approach to effectively address the topic. Participants feel that schools should play a more active role in raising awareness and educating young people about climate change. This is in line with [51] (p. 102), who states that pupils are individuals who construct and make sense of their school experience; they look forward to learning more than theoretical lessons. Some of the young people interviewed seem to be looking for more systemic, in-depth and engaged lessons about climate change. This highlights the need for more comprehensive education on climate change that goes beyond disciplinary boundaries.

The focus group speech analysis also testifies to a need for more student empowerment. Some young people seek an engaging education in which they are encouraged to act accordingly and concretely. Traditional climate change education often focuses on imparting theoretical knowledge and factual information on the subject. However, this is not sufficient to empower the young people from the focus groups (Example 12). Ref. [52] (p. 4) notes, for example, that in schools in Quebec, education sometimes produces the opposite effect of what is expected: A decrease in the empowerment of young people.

Example 12.

- *médiateur : l'école ça vous motive à faire des trucs ou?*
- *jeune : grave pas (rires)*
- *jeune : tout l'inverse en fait* [FG1]

A purely informational education focusing on problems without offering concrete solutions or ways to act can leave young people feeling powerless or disconnected from climate issues. Young people aspire toward immersion in practical activities [53] that will make sense and practical actions that are tangible for them (Example 13).

Example 13.

- *jeune : mes profs ils voulaient toujours Ecosia jamais Google [...] et ma prof d'informatique aussi/au lieu d'Office elle utilisait un truc qui fait marcher l'écologie/je sais pas//*
- *médiateur : vous en parlez avec vos profs?*
- *jeune : oui//enfin euh//on en parlait juste comme ça et puis au final quand on a vu les chiffres d'arbres augmenter à chaque fois* [FG4]

The limits of school are in contrast with the quality of other teaching environments, for example, youth centres and clubs like the one in which the focus groups were organised. We noted one occurrence that could attest to this quality in the discourse of one teenager who said, "what we learn at the youth club, I think it's the only place where we talk about everything, climate change, what's happening in the world and everything, it's really the only place where we actually get informed". Of course, the presence of the club supervisors in the focus group may have influenced the teenager's positive discourse on this subject. In addition to this, we did not collect any other comment on the role of youth clubs during the focus groups. However, the fact that youth clubs and centres are mentioned as helpers, among other places where young people can discuss this issue more openly, suggests that young people are searching for education and discussions about climate change: They value the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions about the issue outside the classroom (Example 14), highlighting the need to provide open spaces for young people to think, debate and take action about climate change.

Example 14.

- *jeune 1 : faire des voyages*
- *jeune 2 : ouais/y a peut-être des musées//*
- *jeune 3 : juste, genre, tu sors dehors/tu regardes un peu/tu fais des comparaisons et tout/ce qui ferait par exemple travailler les méninges de certains* [FG1]

Finally, young people regretted the fact that the school's mission did not correspond to the reality of climate change nor with the reality of their future professional life: They feel that school education does not prepare them for their future life in any practical way (Example 15).

Example 15.

- *jeune : ouais/parce que vraiment à l'école/ça nous dit juste faut avoir un bon boulot/faut travailler/faut faut retenir tic tac/tac/et quand tu sors des secondaires/t'arrives ok t'as un papier/t'as un diplôme/mais et quoi maintenant?* [FG1]

Pupils' criticism and resistance to schooling have been discussed in numerous studies [54–57]. This general criticism can be seen as another strategy of young people to distance themselves from the problem. However, climate change, as a "second order learning" subject [58], may also be kept at a distance by teenagers because school has not included the emotional component linked with the subject. Recent findings show that

"although there are emotional problems when teaching climate change this should not prevent students learning, but emotional resilience should be taught in tandem" with climate change issues [59] (p. 1). Schools must consider pupils as creative agents able to effect change and as young people emotionally impacted by climate change issues.

3.3. The Meso-Social Level: Young People, Public Areas and "Les Gens"

The third socio-spatial level includes the impact of institutions, towns and local governments on individuals' environmental behaviour. Local policies, regulations and economic incentives are important factors at this level. In this section, we return to the theme of waste management, but this time from the point of view of the social normalisation of this practice. In addition, another avoidance strategy is identified at this level: The use of indefinite pronouns.

Why is waste sorting such a popular focus-group topic? Part of the answer undoubtedly lies in the fact that recycling and refraining from littering have become normalised environmental behaviours in many industrialised cities, and individuals who do not adopt these behaviours may be viewed as going against social norms. Other waste management-related norms and climate-friendly measures include, for example, towns having their own colour-coded bags for waste disposal, offering compost grants and setting up temporary waste management sites for local residents. However, at the same time, many young Belgians in smaller towns and villages only have access to a relatively poor public service system. The traditional model of two parents-two cars remains indispensable in areas where buses are infrequent, shared cars uncommon and railway lines are increasingly becoming obsolete (cf. the concept of mobility justice [60]).

This inconsistent political governance suggests that efforts to promote sustainable behaviour should focus not only on individual action but also on changing social norms and cultural values among local populations and governments [61]. The lack of consistency may be explained by excessive social marketing support that encourages climate-friendly habits, such as the procurement of street recycling garbage cans, but simultaneously promotes the use of cars in the city or countryside. The "car" is quite a recurrent theme in the focus groups (41 occurrences), and the concordance of the word shows a diversified use and representation of the car by young people. Some criticise the subject, defining it as a source of transport pollution, much like the aeroplane. However, most of them talk about "une voiture non polluante", "la voiture électrique" or how "il y avait moins de voitures avant". They do not exclude the car from their current or future life.

In Belgium, the local government's behaviour regarding climate change measures varies across the country. This variation is recognised by the young respondents whose discourse presents a precise illustration of this geographical heterogeneity (Examples 16–19).

Example 16.

- *jeune : à Bruxelles tous les trois quatre mètres/il y a une poubelle pour jeter nos déchets et un petit truc pour écraser les cigarettes* [FG2]

Example 17.

- *Jeune 1 : ben tu vois déjà toutes les grosses entreprises là à Charleroi/ou tu vois tous les gaz là tout dégueu* [. . .]
- *jeune 2 : à Charleroi, t'as pas par exemple de cendrier de ville partout//même dans les plus petits endroits y a pas* [FG4]

Example 18.

- *jeune : à Marche moi je trouve y'a pas assez [de poubelles]* [FG1]

Example 19.

-   *jeune : à Liège y'a pas autant de pollution* [. . .] *à Liège les gens polluent beaucoup moins parce qu'il y a des poubelles mais genre vraiment partout* [FG4]

In many Western countries, recycling and refraining from littering are likely the most normalised environmental behaviours [60]. Individuals who practice these behaviours are considered normal and environmentally friendly, while those who do not are seen as going against social norms. We deliberately return to this topic because waste management is an important measure to keep cities clean and avoid visual and olfactory pollution, even though we know today that its impact on mitigating climate change is very limited. For example, in Belgium, 1.1% of emissions are due to waste. Moreover, most of the waste collected is simply sent to landfills or incinerated, which can have negative impacts on the environment, especially in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and air and water pollution. This information about waste management is widely unknown by most citizens, especially the young.

The discrepancy between the importance of waste sorting in public discourse and its inefficiency for climate change mitigation has notably been explained by [61], who identified a paradox in how people mobilise around environmental issues. According to [61], people tend to perceive environmental problems as remote from their daily lives, which, in turn, can lead those people to feel powerless and not act. However, when environmental problems such as floods, droughts or pollution have direct and concrete impacts on their daily lives, people are more likely to mobilise and take action to find solutions. Without such direct effects of environmental changes, access to the reality of acting for climate change mitigation is complicated for the public.

The use of indefinite pronouns in waste management is also of great interest in the focus group discussion. Besides the voice of "les humains", the speakers refer to other similar groups of people, such as "les gens" (Example 20) or "des gens" (Example 1). Recently labelled as indefinites, gens-based nominative syntagms (NS) constitute a new fuzzy group with a blurred semantic reference in French [62] and semantic ambiguities that are very advantageous for speakers wishing to distance themselves from their responsibility for climate change without identifying precisely those responsible. Gens-based NSs are used in the discourse in opposition to the indeterminate nous, which again represents a group to which the speaker belongs. In Example 20, "les gens à qui" is used with the value of "des gens"; they are simultaneously determined ("those people who throw their things outside") and undetermined: Who are they? The ambiguity offers a solid basis for the comparison with "nous", emphasised this time by a determined "on" (a non-identifiable group of people including the speaker), who are responsible young actors who sort their waste.

Example 20.

-   *modérateur : et ça serait plutôt à qui de s'occuper de la situation?*
-   *jeune : à nous/c'est nous qui devons changer nos habitudes et/et//comme le tri par exemple c'est tout bête mais le fait qu'on trie ça fait une grosse différence/comme les gens à qui on dit de pas jeter leurs trucs dehors, par terre parce qu'il y a des choses, il faut tant d'années pour que ça soit//pour que ça se dégrade et tout* [FG2]

In Example 21, "plein de gens", standing for "des gens", is again determined ("those people who say no, we can't do this") and undetermined (who are they?). It is followed by what [38] call a "theatre mode", whereby speakers make other characters speak, often in an exaggerated manner. Here, it is the theatre mode enabling the comparison between a fuzzy group of people with pointless chatter ("na na ni na na na") and a reasonable "on" who warns this group ("if we are not careful, there won't be any economy anymore).

Example 21.

- *jeune : il y a plein de gens qui disent "non on ne peut pas faire ça parce que « na na ni na na na » niveau économique et tout"//non mais les gars dans tous les cas si on ne fait pas attention, il y aura plus d'économie à un moment* [FG4]

The meso-social level illustrates some solutions to empower young people in climate actions. For example, there is a need to standardise urban environmental policies, to make them more coherent and to emphasise the role of local authorities in climate issues. The use of indefinite expressions such as "les gens" or "les humains" by young participants demonstrates, once again, how young people find it difficult to position themselves in the constellation of human responsibility in climate change.

3.4. The Macro-Social Level: Human Nature, le "Monde" and Politics

The fourth level represents the impact of global issues on citizens. This level includes the broader European and International socio-economic and political structures that shape an individual's environmental behaviour. The distancing strategies identified at this level take the form of "monde" and doxa expressions, political distancing and depoliticisation.

3.4.1. The Doxa and le Monde

The macro-social level first consists of the analysis of young people's relation to the "monde" (Europe is not evoked). First, the collocational analysis of 63 tokens of the use of "monde" highlights various interesting trends. Example tokens include "un monde de consommation", "un monde pas possible", "des trucs qui se passent dans le monde", and "moi le pire truc que je peux plus voir dans le monde c'est la cruauté animale". The world is depicted as a vast and blurred entity that is mostly, but not always, evil.

A segmented analysis of the word "monde" used as an object and as a subject highlights a dual position towards the world for the young people interviewed. When the *monde* is an object of a verb, it is associated with proactive and positive verbs (Examples 22–25), whereas when the *monde* is the subject ("tout le monde"), the view is much more depreciative (Examples 26–28).

Example 22.

- *médiateur : et vous pensez que les politiques/ils devraient faire quoi?*
- *jeune : faire réagir le monde* [FG6]

Example 23.

- *médiateur : vous aimeriez bien qu'on vous en [le CC] parle plus à l'école?*
- *jeune : en vrai, moi oui pour faire agir le monde!* [FG6]

Example 24.

- *jeune : peut-être que par la suite je vais penser à un peu à changer le monde* [FG1]

Example 25.

- *jeune : moi je veux faire militaire ou policière/un des deux*
- *médiateur : qu'est ce qui te plait là-dedans?*
- *jeune : pour sauver le monde* [FG6]

Example 26.

- *jeune : c'est tout le monde qui pollue, il n'y a pas plus [. . .] il n'y a pas de différence entre les garçons et les filles* [FG6]

Example 27.

- *jeune : si tout le monde consomme, bah voilà la terre* [FG6]

Example 28.

- *jeune : tout le monde a sa façon de penser et que ça fait qu'on arrive à un conflit au lieu d'aller dans la même direction* [FG2] *the doxa distancing strategy*

This comparison of collocations depicts, on one hand, an optimistic vision of the future, the world needs to be saved and awakened, and on the other, the current world, which is polluting, careless and consuming. This information suggests that young people in focus groups look forward to a better future. However, this observation also reinforces the feeling of distancing strategies that emanates from the discussions: They are not planning for a better today but for a better tomorrow.

However, among the pessimistic visions, a strategy of distancing appears, as illustrated in Example 29. This doxa distancing strategy is related to human nature: As explained by the speaker, whether one engages in climate action depends on that one person's very nature.

Example 29.

- *modérateur : est-ce que vous pensez que si vous étiez riches, vous vous soucieriez du climat?*
- *jeune : […] je ne sais pas/c'est une question d'individu/y'en a qui sont bons, y'en a qui sont mauvais et c'est comme ça* [FG1]

The expression "y'en a qui sont bons, y'en a qui sont mauvais" is in line with the sociological theory of naturalism developed by Bourdieu and reinterpreted by [63] (p. 13): "[It is] an attitude which consists in looking at social facts as 'natural' phenomena and more precisely in explaining human practices and behaviours by systematically invoking a 'human nature' […] the a priori inscription of these properties in the human organism, before any social experience". This naturalistic illusion can lead to resignation and powerlessness among individuals who see no alternative to the existing social order. It can also make social change difficult by making any questioning of social structures seem like an attack on the very nature of things.

3.4.2. Political Distanciation and Depoliticisation

Several elements highlighted in the focus groups show that young people encounter difficulties in connecting and positioning themselves politically on the subject of climate change. There are very few direct mentions of politics in their speech (four mentions of "politique" and two of "politiciens"). When politics and related concepts are mentioned, it is often through rejection, especially of political staff and institutions, which the youth portrayed as useless or guilty (Example 30).

Example 30.

- *modérateur : et vous pensez que les politiques/ils devraient faire quoi?*
- *jeune : arrêter de polluer!* [FG6]

This low mention of political issues seems to be linked to what previous authors [64,65] identify as a depoliticisation of the environmental stake through individualisation of the issue. As already mentioned, the discussions in the focus groups spontaneously and systematically turned around individual waste management practices. We already hypothesised that the political distancing observed among young people could be partly explained by the way this issue is handled politically, in the local management of the city. Now, we look at how they perceive the national and federal political management.

During the focus groups, it was difficult to engage the participants in conversations about politics, and some participants implied that the topic was not even directly understandable ("C'est quoi les politiciens?"). We know that, for young people, politics seem unreachable because they do not feel part of the decision-making process. However, it is also because the climate change communication of politicians seems disconnected from young people's ordinary lives. Young people do not experience most of the realities that are mentioned as sources of pollution (cars, planes, household consumption, isolation, etc.). This distant world ("ils") is opposed to the individual actions of waste management and sorting, which is considered concrete but insignificant (Example 31).

Example 31.

- *jeune : et puis ils nous parlent beaucoup des mêmes trucs genre les avions/les voitures/les trucs les machins mais en soi nous//personnellement on ne peut absolument rien faire/même arrêter de rouler//on roule pas donc//*
- *médiateur : ouais//c'est trop lointain quoi?*
- *jeune : ouais/ou les grosses usines ou quoi bah c'est des trucs que nous on ne sait rien faire//*
- *médiateur : ça vous parle pas à vous quoi en fait?*
- *jeune : ouais/et juste le fait de moi personnellement jeter ma canette//ben c'est pas ça qui va changer le monde quoi* [FG2]

When the subject of politics was raised during the focus groups, it was usually by adult speakers, and young people answered these questions by talking about "ils" or "eux" (Example 32). This may also be due to a lack of interest and knowledge of the subject. Some young people even consider politicians as direct opponents to climate change mitigation: They are viewed, for example, as hypocrites, "commonly claiming that they wish to preserve the world for future generations, while maintaining policies that do the opposite" [66] (p. 12). Moreover, in the focus groups, young people's discourse highlights the impossibility of politicians to represent the youth's voices on climate change matters (Example 32).

Example 32.

- *jeune : je ne dis pas qu'ils vont tout faire comme par magie aussi mais faudrait qu'ils prennent un peu plus en considération ce qu'on leur demande et essayer d'apporter le changement qu'il faudrait/parce que quand on parle par exemple au niveau de la surproduction et de tout ce qui a un impact sur le climat/tout ce qu'on veut/c'est eux qui ont le pouvoir de faire quelque chose et ils le font pas malgré que bah//entre guillemets/la population le demande* [FG2]

The lack of political mentions in young people's discourse may be related to the systematic evocation, mentioned in the previous section, of shared responsibility as evidenced by the use of "on" and "tous les humains" (Example 33). It suggests that politicians should share the same responsibility as others, not more, not less (Example 41).

Example 33.

- *jeune : l'être humain en tout cas/si nous on ne change pas nos manières de consommer les entreprises et tout changeront pas leurs manières de faire non plus donc euh* [FG2]

Young people interviewed do not feel heard or represented by institutional politics; on the other hand, they seem to have integrated the idea of a collective responsibility for the consequences of climate change. They recognise their responsibility while at the same time pointing out their political impotence (Example 34), which could partly explain the dead end in which they find themselves: Young people feel the need to distance themselves from and feel powerlessness on the climate change issue [27]. In this situation, distanciation is a form of self-protection.

Example 34.

-   *jeune : ben moi/j'essaye de mon côté d'améliorer certains trucs et tout mais/après c'est vrai que en soi/on ne peut pas faire non plus grand chose/je n'ai pas non plus une grande marque d'influence/je ne suis pas présidente/hein?* [FG4]

In conclusion, the macro-social level has brought to light the distance that exists between the reality and understanding of young participants and global issues. Political individualisation of climate issues appears in the focus groups as a cause of political distancing among young people (see Example 34). Ref. [2] explains that the lack of commitment from companies and governments is a major obstacle to young people's engagement. Since the 1970s and 1980s, environmental issues have suffered a form of depoliticisation driven by individualistic management of the climate crisis. Ref. [64] shows that the political management of ecological issues has moved from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. Environmental problems were first discussed on a macroscale by, for example, governments and large organisations; then the focus shifted to the role of individuals, such as consumers, and their ability to mitigate environmental problems [67]. The subject of climate change mitigation is largely depoliticised by an individualising management system that "restricts problems to the domestic sphere and removes them from the space of public debate" [65] (p. 470). In this situation, young people can only feel powerless: There is a real necessity to include them and empower them at the global level.

4. Discussions Today

The need for further exploration of the nuanced ways in which psychological distancing of climate change is manifested in the views of adolescents has already been presented and detailed [62]. We proposed in this study to analyse focus group discussions about climate change and highlight the differences that can emerge in various sociocultural and age groups. We have seen that several authors, such as [28], point out that the psychological distance among young people encourages them to disclaim responsibility for action. We wanted to study the possibility that these various distancing strategies were also developed to avoid the mental conflict they endure because of their anxiety concerning climate emergency and their feeling of powerlessness. To accomplish this, we present the discourse tactics employed by young individuals to disassociate from climate change concerns on the basis of the four socio-spatial levels formulated by [41].

At an individual level, it has been observed that young people feel they have a certain amount of control over their environment in their private spaces, particularly in their own homes, especially when it comes to waste management. They often associate waste collection with environmental protection. They see these actions as concrete ways of combating climate change, and this reinforces their feeling of involvement. We also observed that the feeling of control of young people happens in their everyday lives at home, where their beliefs (the hero's mission) are opposed to a feeling of losing control (disempowerment), which is sometimes embodied by their parents' control over their lives. However, this sense of control decreases when it comes to wider social and environmental issues. Young people sometimes feel a lack of control towards their parents. The family plays an important role in these perceptions. Young people sometimes blame their parents or grandparents for contributing to global pollution. They also feel that their families are not particularly supportive of sustainable environmental practices. Some young people even attest to their family's resistance to adopting environmentally friendly behaviour. Furthermore, young people have difficulty imagining the concrete consequences of global warming in their daily lives, which leads them to consider the global objective of reducing climate change as too ambitious and beyond their reach. Discourse strategies that emerged in the focus groups also showed that, while young people do not feel highly responsible for climate change, they do feel responsible for finding concrete and available solutions to climate change.

The micro-social level analysis presented how young people's interactions with their peers in opposition to the younger and older generations, as well as the influence of formal education at school, contribute to the shaping of their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards climate change. Participants express distrust of the "new generation", whom they characterise as disrespectful and careless of environmental issues, including climate change. Participants clearly distance themselves from this "new generation", which raises questions about the precise definition of this group in terms of age. A distrust of the older generation is also observed, particularly when it comes to taking responsibility for consumption practices. Another significant barrier is represented by the school, which endorses different narrative roles in the focus groups. Some schools and teachers appear as positive actors in charge of fighting against climate change, but they are more often depicted as an opponent of the hero. Young participants feel that school is failing to provide them with the skills, knowledge and motivation to deal with the challenges of climate change; they look forward to learning more than theoretical lessons. Recent studies [68] also pointed out the barriers created by schools, through their lack of emotional components in teaching climate change issues.

The meso-social level section has looked at the impact of institutions, cities and local governments on individuals' environmental behaviour, highlighting the role of local policies, regulations and economic incentives. Waste management has been once again the main theme of this section, focusing on the social normalisation of this practice, while identifying another avoidance strategy linked to the use of indefinite pronouns. The normalisation of environmental behaviours such as recycling and waste management are considered to conform to social norms in many Belgian cities. However, this normalisation varies in the function of local policies, incentives and infrastructures available, creating a heterogeneous geographic area in the manner in which young people perceive and practise these behaviours. Moreover, in young people's discourse, we observe the frequent use of indefinite pronouns such as "les gens" to evoke other groups of people, creating a semantic ambiguity that allows speakers to distance themselves from responsibility for climate change without precisely identifying those responsible. We observed that the focus-group speakers use a variety of strategies to manage and reduce climate change responsibility. We observed the summoning in their speech of different voices and enunciative positions. The indeterminate *on* is omnipresent in the speakers' discourses, which can lead to disempowerment and a reduced sense of individual responsibility. "On" represents a "fuzzy group" with a blurred semantic reference, as "les gens" is. The blurred reference is similar to what [69] defined as common wisdom in their typology of disagreement: "comment advancing an argument [...] refers to common sense, to the collective unconscious". These blurred references are opposed to the pronoun "nous", which stands for a group to which the speaker belongs. In the focus groups, opponents to climate change mitigation are portrayed as, for instance, "les gens" or "on", which constitute fuzzy groups. Young people also feel included in "tous les humains", a social norm that recognises the Anthropocene and reflects young people's general inclusion in the circle of responsibility. We also demonstrated that, paradoxically, this general recognition also appears to be a distancing strategy of young people who, lost in the masses, can only have a position of normativity.

At the macro-social level, this section examines the impact of global issues on citizens, focusing on the European and international socio-economic and political structures that influence people's environmental behaviour. Several distancing strategies are identified at this level. The "monde" is used variously in their speeches, sometimes optimistically, such as when they evoke the need to "save the world", and sometimes pessimistically, describing it as polluting and indifferent. This duality suggests both a desire to improve the future and a strategy of distancing oneself from the present world. A second strategy of distancing from doxa is also observed in the focus groups: Young people's discussions abound with deontic principles and generic statements that evoke that engagement towards climate depends on the very nature of the human being. The positive ecological practices, for example, are pictured as inherent to those who "have been educated". This naturalistic

illusion, which is omnipresent in the data, can make social change difficult by making any questioning of social structures seem like an attack on the very nature of things This fits with the three axes identified by [42], particularly the axis of power concerning the roles of opponents and helpers to a mission. Opponents can be embodied by humans and non-humans.

When it comes to politics, the young participants show little interest or knowledge of the subject, and when they do talk about it, it is often to express a rejection of politicians and political institutions. The depoliticisation of the environmental issue is also highlighted, as discussions focus mainly on individual waste management practices rather than broader political issues.

Our research conclusions highlight several conflicts and paradoxes in young people's discourse and representation. The most important conflict that emerged is that while young people recognise the climate emergency, they can only admit their incapacity to act, which is a summary of all our observations. Other conflicts emerged from their use of reported speech, in which they developed characters who were both themselves and the villain. When we discussed the omnipresence of the issue of waste, we also pointed out a paradox in the way young people mobilise around environmental issues, which can lead them to feel powerless. The analysis of the speakers' voice switching and several mental conflicts highlights the ambiguity of their position. They are convinced by the reality of the changes and the need to act. They criticise those who do nothing, those who have power or those who do wrong. However, by explaining that they, such as the rich, politicians or people in high places, do not give young people sufficient credit or do not listen to the youth, speakers also admit their inefficiency towards climate change mitigation. "They" and "us", once divergent in the staging, finally converge in reality. It is their duality that they illustrate in their discourse, by exteriorizing themselves, not to relieve themselves of responsibility but to show the discomfort they feel because of the lack of control and power they have over this reality. Ref. [50] calls it an ethical self-regulation. Ref. [2] also explain that such distancing strategies among young people are part of a constructive process of "meaning-focused coping"; it is a way to adapt rather than a will to disempower themselves about climate change issues.

This research has its limits. Our results are based on six focus groups conducted in 2022 in Belgian youth local associations; therefore, they are not representative of the Belgian young population aged 10 to 22. Nonetheless, our results, based on a qualitative multidisciplinary analysis, can improve scientific knowledge and pave the way for future research. A larger and more diverse sample could provide a broader range of perspectives and potentially enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. We also know that focus groups with young adults sometimes make it difficult for alternative ideas to emerge, for several reasons. Firstly, during each of the focus groups, despite the moderators' attempts to keep the conversation going, two or three young people tended to mobilise the debate. As a result, some young people's ideas were better represented. However, there were regular arguments between the young people. These confrontations put off the young people who were less willing to speak up. Furthermore, it is sometimes difficult to motivate young people to engage in discussion, and when they do, those most able to speak up may want to say what they think the moderator wants to hear. This limitation was mitigated by the statement questions: When young people were asked to position themselves on certain controversial climate change issues. Another limitation is the subjectivity of data analysis. The interpretation of focus group discourses is subjective and open to researcher bias. Different researchers might analyse the same data and arrive at different conclusions. This dimension is limited in the sense that several researchers from different disciplines have worked on this dataset. Furthermore, the study did not employ a longitudinal perspective. It relied on cross-sectional data from focus group discussions, providing a snapshot of participants' perspectives at a specific point in time. A longitudinal approach, tracking changes in attitudes and behaviours over time, would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics and developmental aspects of climate change engagement among young

people. It is important to consider these limitations when interpreting the findings of the study and to further explore these areas in future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding youth engagement with climate change.

A series of recommendations emerge from the study among which we detail the most relevant and urgent ones: (1) Foster youth participation: Increasing empowerment is a recommendation often mentioned when it comes to promoting youth engagement and environmental awareness. To achieve this, it seems more important to encourage the politicisation of young people in general terms and enable them to take responsibility in the political arenas and political debates than to educate them to sort waste. It is necessary to create platforms and spaces for young people to actively participate in decision-making processes related to climate change. Young people should be involved in the development and implementation of climate policies, projects and initiatives at local, national and global levels. We should ensure that their voices are heard and perspectives taken into consideration. (2) Improve teacher training and make climate change a cross-disciplinary subject: Elements relating to the environment and sustainable development should be included in various school subjects in a cross-curricular way. Teachers should be offered specific training on environmental issues and innovative teaching approaches for integrating the environment as a topic into their lessons. We need to prepare teachers to tackle environmental issues in a cross-curricular way and encourage pupils to become agents of change. In addition, teachers have to be trained properly to instil emotional resilience at school in tandem with climate change issues. (3) Rekindle the flame of environmental commitment among young people: The fact that youth clubs and centres (helpers) are mentioned as places where they can discuss this issue more openly also suggests that young people are not totally disengaged about climate change. They value the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions about the issue outside the classroom. They need open spaces to think and debate about climate change so they can take action.

Appendix A. Translation of the Examples

(1)   moderator: and you were saying there are people who pollute?
       young 1: there are some that pollute/everything that is cigarettes/all that/waste/ paper/at sea and everything//
       young 2: throw away their capri sun//

young 1: their cigarettes on the floor//
young 2: their coke cans [FG5]

(2) educator: I have a question for you/if you get together/between 5 and 10 young people/finally regardless of the number of young people/what ideas would come to your mind to do together to change the situation?
young: picking up papers in the street [FG1]

(3) moderator: for you/what is pollution?
young 1: uh//the cans/the straws//
young 2: plastic what [FG6]

(4) young 1: the problem with us is that we will try to talk/to find the right arguments/the right words for uh//we can't change the minds of certain high placed adults/they will look down on us and say "well you/what are you doing?"
young 2: stupid
young 1: kinda "you're at school/what are you doing?" [FG1]

(5) young 1: everyone pollutes
young 2: the parents they pollute more [FG6]

(6) moderator: and with your families/do you talk about it?
young: no//in reality/for me it's either when we see something on insta that is shocking/or when we watch the news/or when the parents hear something or what//
educator: I don't know about you/but I was talking about it with my parents/my grandparents/and it's funny how they are a little off the mark//
young: yeah even them/they don't really care about the future because it won't be the same generation and it won't impact them//they will be dead (laughs) yeah they say never mind it's not for us [FG1]

(7) young: oh yeah/the only thing I did with my environmental class was that I shouldn't eat meat at all/and after that/I talked to my mum about it and I really wanted to do it/then my mum said to me "no it's nonsense" so I ate meat anyway [FG4]

(8) moderator: will your life be better or worse than that of your grandparents?
young: and nah//frankly nah//if global warming happens in 20 years/we will all be uh [. . .] well/it is our life which will be too expensive/it will be//too hard to live with you see/because we will say the working conditions and everything/they do not get better so that we can live properly/we have the minimum/and then we have to deal with that/but since life increases/it increases. . .every time/huh/you can already see when you were younger you could go uh. . . how it is. . . with the. . . the coins what it's called//the Belgian francs/with 50 cents you could buy a big packet of sweets/but now/with that/you can't even buy yourself a small packet/you can buy yourself//go//one candy//this is it
moderator: and you think it will be worse in another 20 years?
young: yeah! clearly/especially with the new generation who pays attention to nothing/who lacks respect/who doesn't take things seriously [FG5]

(9) young: I do agree that we shouldn't completely stop [meat] because/for example/for children//I remember one woman I know/she wanted to make the child veggy from a young age and it's dangerous for your child/alright/because there are certain proteins that we need/so for me it shouldn't be stopped altogether/you just have to know how to say to yourself "you are not going to eat meat morning noon evening" but you must not be extreme and you should just avoid overconsumption [FG4]

(10) young: first/I think our generation believes in [. . .] "yeah the adults manage/the adults manage" and all that/so now that it's starting to be more us/we realize that we're going to have to manage ourselves [FG2]

(11) moderator: did you learn about environment at school?
young: we do a little exercise/then after that it's over (laughs) it's true though [FG2]

(12) mediator: does school motivate you to do things or. . .?
young: not at all

(laughs)

young 2: quite the opposite in fact [FG1]

(13) young: my teachers always wanted ecosia/never Google/and my computer teacher too/instead of office she used something that makes ecology work/

mediator: do you talk about it with your teachers?

young: yes//well uh//we were just talking about it and then in the end when we saw the tree numbers increase each time [FG4]

(14) young 1: take trips

young 2: yeah/maybe there are museums

young 3: just/like/you go outside/you look a little/you make comparisons and everything/which would make some people's brains work for example [FG1

(15) young: yeah/because really at school/they just tell us to have a good job/to work/to remember bla bla bla//and when you leave secondary school/you land with a paper/a diploma/but then what? [FG1]

(16) young: in brussels every three to four meters there is a bin to throw away our rubbish and a little thing to crush cigarettes [FG2]

(17) young 1: all the big companies there in Charleroi/where you see all the gas there all disgusting [...]

young 2: in Charleroi/you don't have a city ashtray/for example/everywhere//even in the smallest places there isn't//[FG4]

(18) young: in Marche/I don't think there's enough [garbage cans] [FG1]

(19) young: in Liège there is not as much pollution [...] in Liège people pollute less because there are garbage cans like really everywhere [FG4]

(20) moderator: and who should rather take care of the situation?

young: we should/it's us who have to change our habits and//and//like sorting/for example/it's very simple/but the fact that we sort makes a big difference/like the people who are told not to throw their stuff out on the ground because fo several things/it takes so many years for them to be//to be degraded and everything [FG2]

(21) young: there are lots of people who say no/we can't do that/because "bla bla bla" our economic level and everything//no/but guys/in any case/if we're not careful/there will be no more economic wealth at some point//[FG4]

(22) mediator: and what do you think politicians should do?

young: make the world react [FG6]

(23) mediator: would you like to hear more [about climate change] at school?

young: I do/yes/to empower the people! [FG6]

(24) young: maybe later I will think about changing the world a bit [FG1]

(25) young: I want to be a soldier or a policewoman/one of the two.

mediator: what do you like about that?

young: I want to save the world [FG6]

(26) young: it's everyone who pollutes/there is no more//there is no difference between boys and girls [FG6]

(27) young: if everyone consumes a lot/well the earth... [FG6]

(28) young: everyone has his own way of thinking and that leads to a conflict instead of going in the same direction [FG2]

(29) moderator: if you were rich/would you care about climate?

young: [...] I don't know/it depends on the person/some are good/some are bad and that's how it is [FG1]

(30) moderator: and you think politicians/what should they do?

young: stop polluting! [FG6]

(31) young: and then they talk to us about a lot of the same stuff like planes/cars/stuff/ things/but in reality//I think we can do absolutely nothing/even stop driving//but we don't drive//

mediator: yeah//too far away?

young: yeah/or the big factories or what/it's stuff that we don't know how to change

mediator: it doesn't mean a thing to you?

young: no/and just the fact that I personally sort my can//well/that's not going to change the world [FG2]

(32) young: I'm not saying that they will do everything like magic/but they should take a little more into consideration what is asked of them and try to bring about the change that is needed/because when we talk/for example/about overproduction and everything that has an impact on climate... they are the ones who have the power to do something and they don't do it despite the fact that well//in quotes/the population asks for it//[FG2]

(33) young: the human being: if we don't change the way we consume/companies won't change their way of doing things either/so uh//[FG2]

(34) young: well me/I try on my side to improve certain things and everything but// afterwards it's true that in itself/we can't do much either/I don't have a big influence/I'm not president/huh? [FG4]

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