The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

Youth Voices in Times of Climate Change: Strengthening Young People's Political Agency Through Participatory Workshops

Daniela Ferreira da Silva1,2 Maria Fernandes-Jesus 3 Anabela Carvalho1,2
Daniela Ferreira da Silva b13120@ics.uminho.pt
Maria Fernandes-Jesus m.fernandes-jesus@sussex.ac.uk
Anabela Carvalho carvalho@ics.uminho.pt
1 Department of Communication Sciences, Institute for Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal
2 Centre for Research in Anthropology (CRIA UMinho) / IN2PAST, Braga, Portugal
3 School of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

Abstract

Issues of voice and legitimacy render the public debate on climate change a key site for critical inquiry. Although young people worldwide have tried to make themselves heard through protest action, their recognition as legitimate political actors remains limited. Institutions such as the media and schools play a major role in shaping how young people's voices are understood and how climate change itself is portrayed. Under these uneven conditions, strengthening young people's political agency, especially among those who are less politically engaged, is vital as they navigate an issue characterised by complexity, uncertainty and contested responsibility. Drawing on participatory workshops conducted in two Portuguese cities with 23 young people with varying levels of engagement with climate politics, this study examines how participants' proposals to elevate youth voices in climate debates can inform understandings of contemporary youth political agency. The analysis is based on creative communicative products developed in the workshops, field notes and 12 interviews. Political consciousness and agency emerged against a critique of unequal power distribution, climate injustices, climate communication and education. Such agency spanned structural and transformative activism as well as localised community action but often remained limited in its capacity to challenge dominant power structures. This research suggests that fostering informal spaces in which young people can share experiences and negotiate diverse positionings may contribute to strengthening youth political agency. Through their proposals, workshop participants positioned themselves as agents of change, adopting multiple roles while advancing alternative communication formats and mobilisation strategies

Keywords

Political agency · Young people · Climate change · Workshop · Participatory methodologies · Portugal

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

Introduction

The worsening of the climate crisis calls for a systemic transformation of currently dominant practices and structures (Klein 2014). This happens in a context where power dynamics over *who gets to speak, where, and about what*, as well as over *how* possibilitieso of action are defined, are contested (Boykoff 2011). Therefore, critical approaches call for the examination of how climate change is discursively con structed (Carvalho et al. 2021) and how political agency is developed (Maiguashca and Marchetti 2013).

Discursive intervention in the climate change debate is crucial: besides connecting the issue to everyday life, discourse can challenge dominant narratives, opening space for alternative political imaginaries and modes of action. Reframing climate change as a matter of "climate justice", for example, shifts climate communication from an abstract language of greenhouse gas emissions to questions of responsibility, inequality and power (Carvalho 2023). It politicises the uneven distribution of climate impacts and vulnerabilities, foregrounds historical responsibilities and power disparities both between the Global North and South, as well as within national borders and, in some strands, highlights intersecting lines of class, race, gender, age, and territorial location (Reyes and Carderón 2021; Schlosberg 2007; Taylor 1997; Diógenes-Lima et al. 2023; Kenis and Lievens 2015). In this sense, voice – plural voice(s) – becomes a means of political agency that is all the more critical when opportunities for accessing traditional power channels (e.g., legislation, voting, lobbying) are limited (Mayes 2019).

In the last few years, the landscape of youth climate mobilisation has expanded significantly, encompassing a spectrum that ranges from institutional and awareness based groups to more radical, justice-oriented movements (e.g., Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Sunrise Movement, etc.). Collectively, these diverse groups have shed light on the deeply unequal power structures in current societies and on the emergency of action needed across all sectors (Daniel 2026; Pavenstädt and Rödder 2024; Scherhaufer et al. 2021; Neas et al. 2022; Herfort et al. 2023). Across these varied expressions, climate activism can serve as an antidote to the severity of the social and cultural challenges brought about by climate change – including economic instability, increased social inequalities, waves of migration, loss of community ties, and negative impacts on health, etc. (Schwartz et al. 2023). As an antidote, it must include a critical dimension, one that engages directly with questions of power and politics (Sanchini et al. 2019), such as voice and legitimacy (Santos et al. 2026).

Young people have raised their voices through mobilisation (Eide and Kunelius 2021). Although they are "recognized as an important demographic group by national and international policymakers," this recognition "often comes with the expectation that they conform to existing narratives and predefined terms of involvement" (Rodela and Roumeliotis 2024, p. 2). As a result, significant barriers persist regarding the extent to which these groups are acknowledged as ´legitimate` political agents.

In the Portuguese context, youth-led climate groups are heterogenous in terms of political visions. For example, clear distinctions emerge between more transformative, climate-justice-oriented groups and those aligned with ecological modernisation,

which strongly emphasise individual entrepreneurship and institutional action (Ferreira da Silva et al. 2025a). The more transformative faction of the movement has actively sought to build coalitions with trade unions, teachers, healthcare professionals, researchers, and parents. Since 2022, school occupations organised by School Strike for Climate-Lisbon, in collaboration with Climáximo, and in alignment with the global End Fossil: Occupy! campaign have galvanised secondary school students, mobilizing a demographic of young people who are ineligible to vote and who actively challenge the constraints of the formal school curriculum. Nevertheless, structural challenges remain, particularly with regard to the risk of co-optation by more mainstream groups and the complete discrediting of groups with alternative imaginaries (Santos et al. 2026).

Conventional media have not created space for substantive discussion of the concerns and demands of young climate activists, with studies pointing out the risks of co-optation or tokenism in integrating youth discourses (Santos et al. 2024b, 2026). School curricula, in turn, also restrict young people's capacity for political action. If they are not allowed and/or encouraged to participate in decision-making spaces early on (Fialho 2025), or if they are led to believe that their entry into society must be gradual – or delayed until legal adulthood (Trott 2019; Campos 2024) – then simply "having a voice" may amount to little and coexist with the internalisation of certain preconceptions regarding young people's political roles (Diógenes-Lima et al. 2023). Given the lack of opportunities for young people to develop their political agency, it is crucial to conceive alternative ways to foster young people's sense of agency and imagination towards just climate futures (Ferreira da Silva et al. 2025b). Believing that researchers can have a role in this process, we developed the #CraftingAction workshops, recruiting both young members of climate justice movements (henceforth "activists") and young individuals not involved in climate collective action. Through this deliberate categorisation, we aimed to explore how to elevate diverse youth voices in the climate debate. The workshops encouraged participants to imagine ways to position themselves and enhance their agency in public spaces through the collective development of creative communicative products. By doing so, this study addresses key gaps previously identified in the literature on youth cli mate activism (e.g., Neas et al. 2022).

This paper thus aims to analyse how young people conceive modes of expression on climate change with the goal of influencing public and political debates. Our analysis is based on participants' proposals for communicative products, field notes, and 12 interviews conducted after the workshops.

Youth Political Agency and Climate Change

Research shows that opportunities for young people's political engagement is limited, often confined to minimal involvement in formal decision-making (Marques da Silva et al. 2023; United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti 2024; Thew et al. 2022). When participation does occur, it is typically restricted to responding to institutional *invitations* to engage in community life (cf. Weiss 2020). Young people often

express scepticism towards traditional political institutions and do not simply accept the terms of participation that they offer. This tension is vividly illustrated by con temporary climate justice activism, in which young people frequently act as highly visible protagonists (Trott 2024). Through their mobilisation, contemporary youth led movements enact non-conventional modes of political engagement (Bowman and Germaine 2022).

At the heart of debates on participation and agency lies a fundamental question of power (Maiguashca and Marchetti 2013; Sanchini et al. 2019). Participation often involves managed, procedural forms that leave existing power relations largely intact (e.g., accepting the invitation of the State to participate in a consultation). In contrast, agonistic theorists such as Mouffe (2000) foreground conflict and the capacity of citizens to contest hegemonic power and rearticulate democracy as a core dimension of political participation. Critical scholarship in this tradition stresses the importance of participation as a *process*, not just an outcome, directing attention to the pathways through which democratic change occurs. Such processes require the capacity to navigate and engage with unequal socio-political structures, hold power holders account able, and envision alternative futures (Firinci Orman 2022; White et al. 2022).

Political agency is a particularly useful concept for capturing these dynamics as it is not limited to institutional forms of participation and instead encompasses the non conventional spaces in which young people more commonly engage. Thus, youth activism constitutes an illustrative case of political agency, as activism enables young people to understand and reimagine the socio-political apparatus in which they operate, to develop critical and technical skills, and to draw on the social and emotional support provided by the group (Ginsburg and Blanchet-Cohen 2025; Rebelo et al. 2026b).

The concept of political agency thus remains sufficiently flexible to allow researchers to account for its various expressions within the social contexts and to support inquiries into how such agency can be fostered among young people (Spencer and Doull 2015; WTFutures 2025). Questions on *how to act, with whom, using what tools, and in which spaces* may reveal the possibilities (and limits) of political action and the extent to which agency can be enacted.

Building on previous studies (Arya and Henn 2023; Neas et al. 2022; Walker 2020), recent research expands understandings of how young people engage with climate change. Bowman and Starzak (2024) question how youth climate activism is defined, noting the lack of clear boundaries around what counts as activism or its goals (see also Bobel 2007; Dunlop et al. 2024; McCalman 2023). Activism can be understood expansively as "doing something" (Ward 2026), spanning a broad continuum that connects radical public protest to everyday, community-level, and digital civic practices that are often indistinguishable from daily life (WTFutures 2025). In this context, simply asking young people how they position themselves and work with them to foster their political agency appears crucial (Rebelo et al. 2026b).

Participatory work with young people has yielded results in fostering critical thinking and dialogue about political issues around climate change (Bentz and Ristić Trajković 2025; Mayes and Arya 2024).

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

Participatory methodologies aiming to stimulate political agency must go beyond technical understandings of climate change and politicise the debate, thereby encouraging young people to critically reflect on its social, cultural, and political dimensions. Such methodologies can promote scientific curiosity and political literacy about social structures and their consequences, as well as embrace both rational and emotional interpretations of climate change and the surrounding public debate, making climate change relevant and meaningful to young people (Doyle 2020; Rebelo et al. 2026b). Moreover, it is crucial to intersect diverse perspectives and interpretations: bringing together highly engaged and less active youth can spark productive dialogues and shared forms of collective action (Bowman and Germaine 2022).

Participatory spaces can thus help young people to articulate positions, connect with others' experiences, and strengthen their capacity to act on the climate crisis. Considering the structural changes required to mitigate and adapt to new climate scenarios, not all pathways appear sufficient or effective; working with young people on the political dimensions of climate change and on how they can impact their com munities seems an important goal to pursue.

Methods and Materials

The #CraftingAction workshops were designed to encourage young people to consider ways to be more influential – 'elevating their voices' – in public debates on climate change. To ensure diversity among participants, we included young people with varying levels of involvement in the climate cause and individuals with different socioeconomic backgrounds (Rebelo et al. 2026a). Each workshop was conducted in two days (eight hours total), first in Porto (6 and 13 July 2024) and later in Lisbon (20 and 21 September 2024). These two cities have served as important centres of mobilisation in the north and south of Portugal, even though youth-led groups have been more expressive in Lisbon in recent years (Carvalho et al. 2022).

Regarding positionality, throughout the process, the research team maintained an explicit commitment to youth rights and climate justice, ensuring that the workshops were systematically designed through this critical lens where diverse political visions were accommodated.

Participants and Recruitment

The workshops involved 23 participants (aged 18–32), including seven participants with past experiences of youth-led climate activism and 16 recruited from the wider public who, despite not being involved in collective action, expressed an interest in climate issues. The former comprised individuals whom the research team knew from previous research activities, whereas the latter were recruited through snowball sampling (via social media, youth organisations, and flyers). Beyond the specified

age limits1, the research team had no control over self-selection. Indeed, some participants who attended the workshops through general recruitment channels had previously participated directly in climate activism but were currently in a 'suspended' phase of participation (cf. Amnå and Ekman 2014).

Participants from Lisbon were slightly older on average than those from Porto (average 26 vs. 23 years). In Lisbon, more participants were enrolled in higher education, undergraduate, master's, or doctoral programs, compared to Porto. Across both cities, the most common fields of study were within the Social Sciences, including Political Science, Communication Studies, Psychology, Philosophy, Humanitarian Action, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development Policies, alongside other areas such as Physiotherapy, Business Management, and Sports.

In Porto, a public space provided by the municipal government facilitated access to youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, while in Lisbon, a higher education institution was used to recruit primarily university students (see limitations in the final section). Voluntary participation was ensured through informed consent. Participants received certificates and a gift card. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Minho (066/2024).

Design and Structure of the Workshops

The design of the workshops was inspired by multiple resources and projects (Activ ist Handbook 2023; Imagining2050 2021). The activities were developed with the collaboration of four researchers in the areas of Education, Geography, Psychology, and Sociology, alongside youth climate activists. The first author facilitated all activities, with the support of the third author, who was present at all sessions of the workshops. The second author assisted in the development of the workshop design. The initial workshop design was proposed by the researchers and subsequently coproduced with a smaller group of activists. These individuals were invited to join the co-production team due to their extensive experience in youth-led groups. In Porto, this preparatory meeting was held in person, focusing primarily on the duration of the planned activities; during the session, one of the activists questioned the selection of the introductory video intended as a discussion prompt, suggesting instead a narrative that the research team felt was too tragic and potentially counterproductive for stimulating constructive dialogue. During the online meeting with the Lisbon-based activists, the participants broadly endorsed the proposed agenda. While one activist questioned the broader efficacy of such workshops in mobilizing young people, they

1We restricted recruitment to participants aged 18 and over to facilitate the distribution of a monetary gift card; tight timelines also precluded the inclusion of minors, which would have required parental consent and additional ethical clearance. Whilst this sample parameter may be considered a limitation, it arguably mitigated the disparity in social experiences among the young participants. Given that lived experiences could vary, the workshops' limited timeframe would not have permitted a sufficiently deep engagement with such diverse realities. The recruitment call set an upper age limit of 30, conceptualising 'youth' expansively to include students as well as individuals experiencing a protracted transition into "waithood" due to socio-economic constraints (Trott 2024; Bowman and Starzak 2024). Notwithstanding these age parameters, an exception was made for a 32-year-old activist given her involvement in a key youth-led group, making her perspective crucial to the scope of the workshops.

were ultimately unavailable to attend the main activities. Beyond these design-related discussions, the meetings established the activists' roles as workshop co-facilitators, responsible for guiding the subsequent critical discussions.

The workshops began with a human bingo icebreaker, where participants, including researchers, mingled to answer some prompts. This was followed by a viewing of the short video *The Story of Change* (2012), sparking a discussion on why citizens, not consumers, drive social transformation. After a brief debate on the political dimensions of climate change, in each workshop participants worked in three small groups (4–5 participants, including an activist as facilitator).

First, they created mental maps to identify a chosen climate-related problem, its causes, and key social agents, followed by ´power maps` to locate who is *responsible for creating the problem, who has the power to address it but is not acting, and who is actively working towards solutions*, along with the interests and resources of these agents. A collective map, then, revealed that similar agents recur across issues, prompting reflection on participants' own roles within these dynamics. Finally, groups designed communicative products addressing the question: *How can we elevate the voices of young people in the climate change debate?*

To support the creative process, materials such as zines, activist pamphlets, and alternative media were provided for collage-making. The presentation of each group's proposal was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed to be analysed, together with the written content of the proposals. The resulting communicative products were later compiled into a brochure and shared with participants (Santos et al. 2024a; SHiFT 2024).

Observation and Interviews

During the workshops, the team carried out participant observation, with one researcher per group taking field notes while the first author facilitated all activities. Field notes were used to capture group dynamics: arguments mobilised, interactions between participants (especially between activists and young individuals not involved in climate collective action), and the creative process that led to communicative products. After the workshops, these notes were shared, organised and compared.

Following the workshops, 12 online individual interviews (six per city) were conducted via Zoom with some young participants not involved in climate collective action. These participants provided insights into the barriers to engagement, emerging or latent perceptions of political agency, and how they interpreted interactions with activists – dimensions that may be overlooked when focusing on already engaged youth.

Analysis

The analysis began with a reconstruction of each workshop group's trajectory: from the identification of a climate-related problem to the development of a creative communicative output. Thus, we were able to examine participants' arguments, proposals and interactions. The communicative outputs of the workshops are central to our analysis, as they crystallise participants' political imaginaries of action. Field notes

and interviews complement these materials by capturing the discursive constructions of political agency vis-à-vis climate change.

Inspired by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021), we identified recurring issues that structured the discussions and became embedded in the communicative products. The goal was to examine how political agency expands and/or is constrained: who is attributed agency, what counts as political agency in the context of climate change, and how agency is negotiated or contested. This interpretive process was iterative and informed by ongoing engagement with conceptual debates on youth political agency (Firinci Orman 2022; White et al. 2022).

The following section focuses on the communication proposals created by participants during the workshop. We then examine two interrelated dimensions: the *background conditions and constraints of political agency* (Sect. 4) and *openings for the emergence of youth political agency* (Sect. 5).

Young People's Proposals for Elevating Their Voices in the Climate Change Debate

In this section, six communicative products will be presented (three from each city), illustrating each group's creative process. The titles of the sub-sections reflect the discussion path – from *the problem to the proposal/product*.

A. From the Lack of Information on Climate Change to the Newspaper Against Drought/Boredom

The "Jornal Contra a Seca" newspaper project emerged as a youth-led counter-information platform to tackle the perceived lack of accessible, engaging, and trustworthy communication on climate change. It aimed to produce and share content relevant to young people's everyday lives, strengthening local community ties while transforming disengagement and apathy into motivation. The Portuguese word "seca" in the title carries a clever dual meaning, referring to drought and, metaphorically, to bore dom. To launch the newspaper, the group created a campaign with a zine and video. The zine tells the story of a young woman who discovers a protest happening in her street, interviews a protester, and shares her report online (Image 12). This narrative was inspired by a member of the group, Maria, who had stated that climate change was "boring", referring to the way the issue is communicated in traditional media. The video portrays this encounter, with Carlos (activist) using it to raise awareness about lithium mining in Covas do Barroso, northern Portugal.

The political nature of the *Newspaper* lies in its attempt to democratise climate communication and reclaim the power of narrative as a tool for political engagement. By challenging elitist scientific language, opaque media coverage, and the complicity of politicians and corporate interests, the proposal positions young people as active

2This image, and those that follow, are excerpts from the brochure produced to showcase all the communicative products. The brochure can be consulted in both Portuguese and English (Santos et al. 2024a; SHiFT 2024).

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2



Image 1 Newspaper against drought/boredom, an excerpt of the zin

agents capable of questioning dominant power structures that silence or distort the climate crisis. Although the *Newspaper* was not put into practice, the exercise served to explore real possibilities for intervention, enabling young people to explore agency as knowledge brokers and producers (Ferreira da Silva and Carvalho 2025).

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

B. From Pollution to the "Voices of the Future" Manifesto

The *Manifesto* addressed pollution as a visible and everyday cause of environmental change. While critical of governments and corporations for privileging bureaucracy and profit over sustainability, the group emphasised community-based solutions, unity, and mutual care as pathways to counter fragmentation. Their *Manifesto* advocated expanding assemblies, building community networks, and securing resources for grassroots initiatives, while also using practical strategies of contestation (Image 2). Their clearest demand was that young people should take part in carrying out the actions decided in municipal assemblies: "Let us create networks of community support and take control of the means that allow us to solve our problems." (from the Manifesto).

Although the group drew on existing political formats rather than inventing new ones, this choice highlights both the barriers young people face in accessing decision making spaces and their demand for assemblies to shift from consultative to participatory structures with real influence (Marques da Silva et al. 2023; United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti 2024; Thew et al. 2022).



Image 2 "Voices of the Future" Manifesto, front page

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

C. From Floods in Brazil to Over the Waters

In addressing the issue of flooding in Brazil, *Over the Waters* is a storyboard designed for a TikTok post aimed at young audiences. Its goal is to raise awareness about the increasingly frequent and severe floods due to climate change, combining a systemic analysis of the structural and complex causes of floods – "it is complicated to know who is pulling the strings" (Madalena, during the workshop), – with creative communication strategies. This work was inspired by the floods in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) in 2024. The planned video (narration script in Image 3) emphasises the emotional catastrophic experience of a young woman who lost her community ties and her adulthood dreams during a series of floods, as a strategy to foster empathy and to spark political interest and engagement.

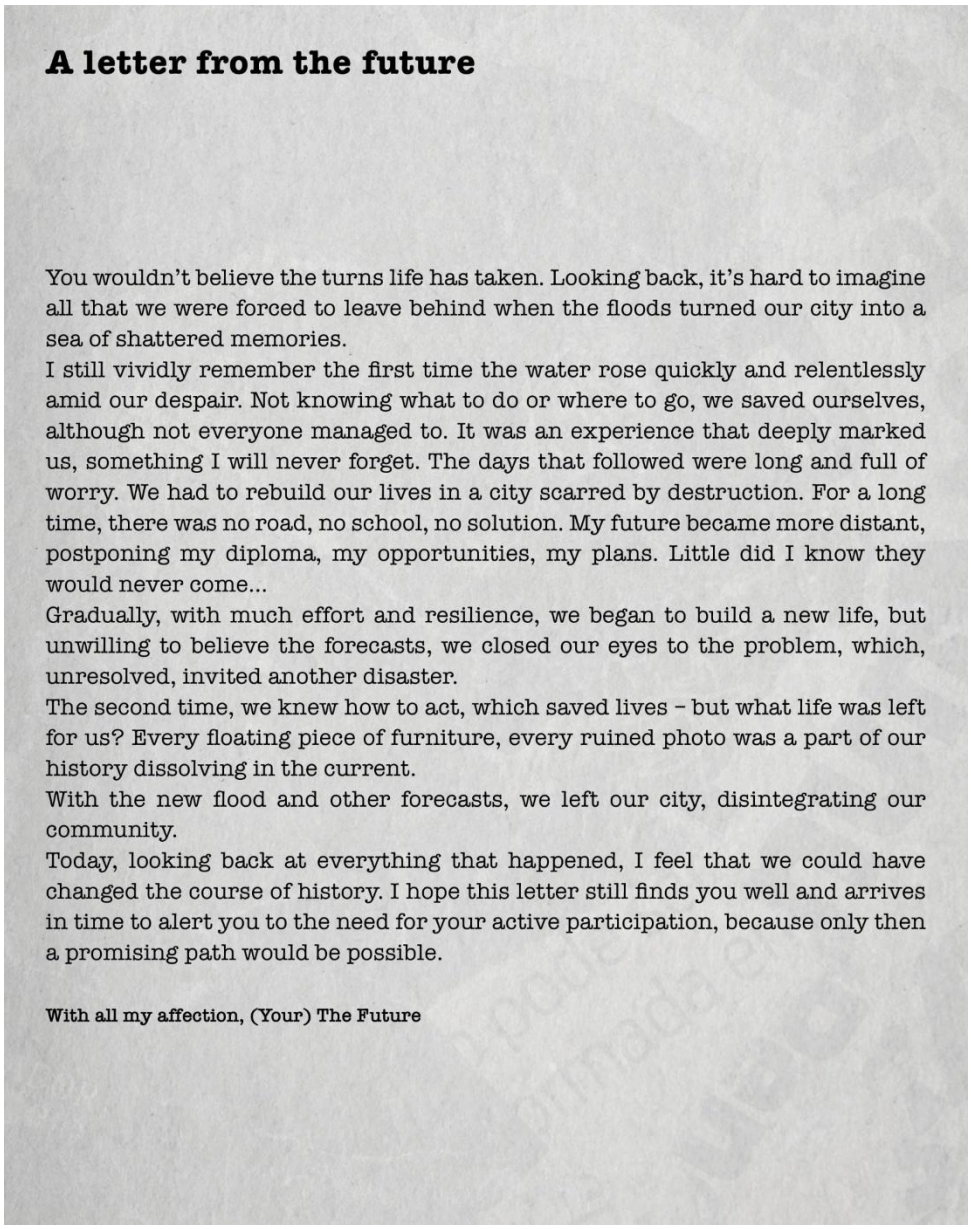
Anchored in real events in Brazil, this narrative exposes the unequal impacts of climate change in the Global South, connecting environmental collapse to issues of inequality, housing, and access to opportunities. To turn awareness into action, the group envisioned a youth-led assembly supported by the State, guided by the question "We save lives – but what do we do with those lives afterward?", as a participatory space for dialogue and proposal-making. They imagined a scenario in which the government agreed to convene such an assembly, acknowledging its difficulty and cost, thereby they exercise a sense of "perceived control" (Zimmerman 1995) beyond immediate practical limits.

D. From Wildfires to the "Get Out" Campaign

The group addressing wildfires in Portugal put forth a critically engaged and politically informed approach that combines systemic analysis with creative communication. They identified structural drivers of wildfires while highlighting the media's role in spreading panic and disinformation. The work was inspired by the wave of wildfires in Portugal in 2024, which approached the scale of the devastating wildfires of 2017 (Agência Lusa 2025). Beyond the direct environmental impacts, the participants emphasised the psychological dimensions of climate change, particularly eco-anxiety, which can lead to either paralysis or rage. This anxiety is exacerbated by a political context in which the far right is gaining ground by capitalising on fear and frustration (Jones 2025), representing, in the group's view, a real threat to both democracy and climate action.

As communication about climate change emerged as a central topic in the group's discussion, as well as the limitations young people face in accessing knowledge, the choice of a communicative product was made accordingly. "Get Out" (Image 4) was created as an Instagram carousel designed to attract a specific group of young people ("alienated" youth, as Tomás, activist, put it) to the issue of wildfires. Using xenophobic discourse as clickbait, this project seeks to redirect fear and anger towards private corporations that exploit eucalyptus plantations and related products, which should be held accountable for increasing wildfire risk. At the end of the carousel, the group presented transformative social and environmental measures to address worsening forest fires, advocating for sustainable agriculture, stronger grassroots and community movements, and a shift from profit-driven priorities to protection of people and nature.

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2



A letter from the future

You wouldn't believe the turns life has taken. Looking back, it's hard to imagine all that we were forced to leave behind when the floods turned our city into a sea of shattered memories.

I still vividly remember the first time the water rose quickly and relentlessly amid our despair. Not knowing what to do or where to go, we saved ourselves, although not everyone managed to. It was an experience that deeply marked us, something I will never forget. The days that followed were long and full of worry. We had to rebuild our lives in a city scarred by destruction. For a long time, there was no road, no school, no solution. My future became more distant, postponing my diploma, my opportunities, my plans. Little did I know they would never come...

Gradually, with much effort and resilience, we began to build a new life, but unwilling to believe the forecasts, we closed our eyes to the problem, which, unresolved, invited another disaster.

The second time, we knew how to act, which saved lives – but what life was left for us? Every floating piece of furniture, every ruined photo was a part of our history dissolving in the current.

With the new flood and other forecasts, we left our city, disintegrating our community.

Today, looking back at everything that happened, I feel that we could have changed the course of history. I hope this letter still finds you well and arrives in time to alert you to the need for your active participation, because only then a promising path would be possible.

With all my affection, (Your) The Future

Image 3 Over the waters, narration script

The proposal demonstrates that young people can exercise agency by challenging structural violence through the creation of new narratives, particularly by employing sarcasm as a tool for collective action. At the same time, the group recognised the limitations of contemporary activism and reflected on their own echo chambers. As Tomás (activist) noted in the presentation of the communicative product: "this is a self-analysis of how the Left has also failed (…) how it has been unable to communicate

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2



Image 4 "Get Out" campaign, carousel

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

with people, and a self-critique that we need to work on ourselves". During the interview, Renato (previously involved in activism), from the same group, highlighted the importance of looking into propaganda, emotional language, and digital media as potentially more effective tools for youth mobilisation.

E. From Consumerism to Unite and Build Rather than Divide and Dismiss

The group's proposal examined climate action through the lens of consumerism, integrating viewpoints that ranged from anti-capitalist critiques to pragmatic, system-compatible positions. This ideological breadth occasionally sparked a very emotionally charged confrontation, most notably when Vasco, a self-styled 'capitalist', rejected his peers' accusation that he was pursuing 'old politics'. However, instead of derailing the workshop, this conflict was transformed into a creative opportunity. One of the researchers introduced a collective emotional exercise to mediate the tension. This intervention demonstrated that climate crisis dialogue is deeply intertwined with emotional experiences, which actively shape political engagement. Ultimately, the episode underscored the necessity of establishing safe spaces in participatory research – not to eliminate conflict, but to channel it constructively. Through diverse artistic pieces, the group embodied the creative idea of a "clothesline" where differ ent viewpoints coexist (Image 5).

Elena´s comic strip reflected on the limitations that ideologically closed dialogues impose on the construction of alternative futures. It introduced a speculative "what if…" scenario in which hostile exchanges, marked by labels such as "fascist," "go away," and "capitalist", are transformed into open, inquisitive dialogue, with questions

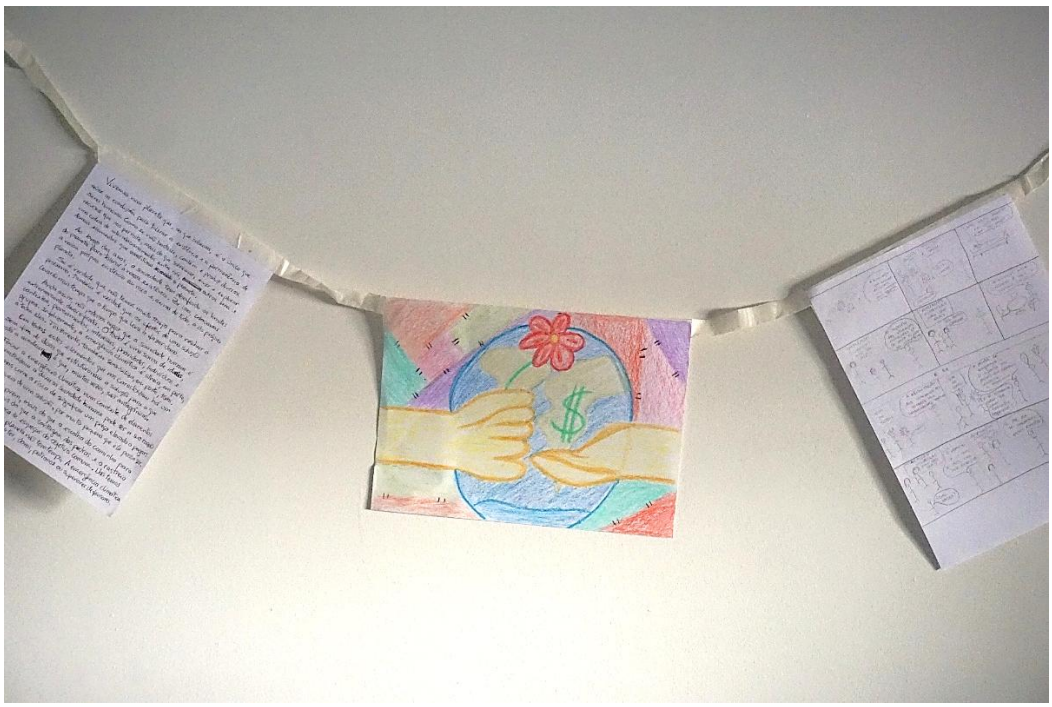


Image 5 Unite and build rather than divide and dismiss

like "what if we talked about…?", "how do you know?", or "what if I showed you these studies?".

Vasco's text aimed to stimulate discussion about the human condition in relation to the planet, calling for all young people to join forces ("The fight is necessary – not against one another, but with one another"), even if they have different political views. In Vasco's appeal, young people are given the role of "strong and courageous" mobilisers "to listen, "to empathise", "to mediate", "to bring people together", and "to negotiate" in the short time.

In turn, Elisa (activist) views conflict as constructive, depicting it through a patch work quilt that symbolises unity in diversity. She argues that solving the climate crisis requires collaboration across different ideologies combining various social and economic approaches ("all coming together in pursuit of a solution to the climate crisis") rather than attempting to overturn the entire capitalist system.

The group's experience demonstrated how active facilitation can shift debate from antagonism towards an agonistic dialogue, preventing ideological clashes from evolving into polarised disengagement, and instead channelling disagreement through creative work that emphasises empathy, listening, negotiation, and diverse perspectives (Mouffe 2000).

F. From Global Temperature Rise to The Letter from the Future 2050

This group's proposal addresses global temperature rise through a systemic analysis that links ecological, social, and political factors. Their *Letter from the Future 2050* highlighted the systemic nature of the problem, implicating governments, corporations, citizens, media, and economic elites as responsible collective agents. They acknowledged eco-anxiety and the paralyzing effects of alarmist discourse, which motivated a purposeful communicative response: the construction of a positive vision of the future.

The *Letter* was video recorded in an improvised television studio setting. The anchor interrupts the broadcast to receive the letter coming from the future; then there is a cut, and two young women appear and read it (Image 6). The letter presents a positive techno-based proposal (e.g., treadmills in gyms that generate energy to power themselves; no fast fashion; no food waste, etc.). It also accounts for what made this scenario possible, namely, a series of collective processes, including the creation of climate activism hubs in universities, which became a "trend" ("tendência" in Portuguese; Flávia). Climate action is framed as something "sexy" (Isabel, activist) and "cool" (Flávia), reflecting a deliberate effort to make activism an aspirational social value. Another key moment was the election of more environmentally ambitious representatives, driven by the dissemination of a voting guide offering pro-environment guidelines for informed candidate choices.

The choice of a simulated news broadcast as their final product demonstrates awareness of the continuing importance of mass media platforms and includes an implicit critique of how media frame climate change. After they presented the project to the other groups, the idea of creating a petition urging the media to report positive environmental news emerged in the joint discussion.

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2



Anchor: Good afternoon, the Morning News is now on air. I am Filipa Rosa, and I will be with you until 2 PM.

In today's edition, we will talk about the week's highlights in the economy—the rise in fuel and olive oil prices, the preparations for next year's election campaigns, and of course, we'll discuss the football results, including three goals by Cristiano Ronaldo.
So let's start with olive oil. Once again, the price is going up.

Wait, excuse me, are we live? Folks, sorry, we have a message here. Well, dear viewers, it seems this week's highlight has changed. I have here in my hands something that will surprise everyone. It's a letter coming directly from the year 2100 and is addressed to young people. And as incredible as it may seem, we are live with the authors of the letters. Mrs. Carla and Mrs. Francisca, welcome.



Francisca: Dear young human beings of 2024, I am Francisca Sousa, and I come from the year 2100, where Earth is at peace. This is just one of the many possible futures available to you. Today, 100% of our energy production is clean and renewable, which means it does not emit polluting gases into the atmosphere. We've been living this way since 2068, with this transformation being gradual

Image 6 The Letter from the future 2050, an excerpt of the news broadcast

All communicative products create spaces for political positioning on climate related issues and enable diverse modes of engagement aimed at influencing public and political debates. The various proposals thus unpack both the conditions and constraints of political agency (Sect. 4), and the processes through which those constraints can be mitigated (Sect. 5). They also shed light on young people's views on who holds political agency and the forms it can take in the context of climate action.

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-026-00240-2

Background Conditions and Constraints of Political Agency

This section explores four themes that are central to the analysis: unequal power distribution, climate justice concerns, communication and media challenges, and cli mate education shortcomings. These themes underpin the uneven capacities of young people to engage politically and to exert influence within climate-related decision-making processes.

Unequal power distribution functioned as the main interpretive framework through which participants understood the climate-related problems raised across the workshops. This became evident in the way participants could readily identify those *responsible for producing these problems* yet struggled to name *who was working to address them*. Such contrasts made power asymmetries particularly visible and help explain the difficulties young people face in raising awareness and mobilizing around climate issues. During the Porto workshop, Paula, one of the activists, remarked, "We don't have resources" (with the 'we' referring to activists) while Elsa added, "I'd like to be involved, but I don't have the courage to do activism," to which Paula responded, "It steals your life" (field notes). Participants also pointed to structural constraints such as lack of time, insufficient funding for investigative journalism, and limited financial support for scientific research capable of strengthening scientific and media literacy. These limitations were framed as the result of broader economic and political interests shaping how resources are allocated. As Carlos, an activist, noted during the workshop, "Investors want to keep things hidden, presenting everything as calm and controlled".

Power imbalances were reflected in the broad social injustices associated with problems that participants pointed out – pollution, consumerism, floods, wildfires, lack of information, and the increase in global average temperature –, but with a particular focus on young people's experiences (Trott 2024). The "Over the Water" proposal, for instance, reframed climate justice as both a political and generational concern, emphasizing how flooding disrupts community ties and forecloses young people's futures ("My future drifted farther away, postponing my degree, my opportunities, my plans"). Similarly, "Get Out" articulates an alternative vision grounded in ecological and social injustice, suggesting that political responses must prioritise community cohesion and local autonomy over reliance on centralised institutions. The project explicitly targets injustices towards young people, seeking to increase their awareness of manipulative discourses on social media that offer misleading "solutions" and obscure real, structural problems.

Taken together, the communicative products developed in the workshops express climate justice as a lived and collective practice of reflection and of critique of multi scale power imbalances. They also express a claim for more control of social and political processes. Participants praised the transformative role of proximity relations and local networking, valuing everyday practices such as "talking to each other," "offering lettuce," or "bringing people together". Through these gestures young people

strive to "recover the notion of community" in their communities (cf. "practical stewardship", McCalman 2023). Viewing climate change through the lens of justice thus renders it more tangible in everyday life and opens pathways for meaningful action (Fernandes-Jesus et al. 2025).

Across the workshops, participants also approached these issues through a communication lens. They argued that the way they are discussed – in traditional media, on social media, and in schools – often limits a fuller understanding of its impacts and the distribution of responsibility thereby constraining more informed political engagement. Both in form and content, young people (and especially activists) stressed how prevailing modes of climate change communication shape what can and cannot be done about it.

Participants argued that traditional, rational and didactic communication formats fail to mobilise audiences, particularly younger generations who tend to be more responsive to emotional narratives, including those circulated by far-right movements. They condemned media-driven sensationalism and alarmism for fostering fear and apathy rather than transformative engagement, producing what some described as a "culture of shock and apathy" (Tomás, activist) that alternates between catastrophic imagery and consumerist distractions without offering concrete alternatives or pathways for action.

Climate change communication was described as superficial and emotionally paralyzing. Participants noted its reliance on simplistic binaries (e.g., good/evil, activist/sceptic) that impoverish the debate while obscuring the accountability of major agents such as corporations, investors, and politicians. According to participants, these communicative practices not only weaken political engagement but also enable practices of greenwashing, for instance.

Participants criticised the disconnect between mainstream climate discourse and lived realities. Dominant narratives often ignore social, territorial, and economic inequalities. Against this backdrop, the "Newspaper Against Drought/Boredom" connected local injustices – such as the harmful effects of planned lithium mining in Barroso, northern Portugal – to global debates on climate justice. Participants further argued that an excessive reliance on scientific and legal jargon renders climate communication elitist, inaccessible, and disengaging for the general public.

Climate education was similarly criticised for being overly formal, and insufficiently integrated into daily school life, excluding experiential and action-oriented dimensions. In the "Get Out" group, Renato pointed to an "outdated, consumerism-oriented education", while Helena challenged the focus on individual behavioural change: "Using a tote bag, riding a bike… the problem is much more serious" (field notes). Elsa reflected on her schooling experience: "Do you think that school education has become too bureaucratic, or do you think they simply don't go in depth? I remember in environmental studies they cover the topic, but they don't explore it further. It's just about delivering what's written." (field notes). Although these participants had moved beyond compulsory schooling – either into university (Renato, 23, an undergraduate; Helena, 28, a master's student) or into early professional life (Elsa, 20, employed after completing compulsory education) – their critique of their school experience remained a foundational reference for their current political imaginaries. Their retrospective accounts align with the Portuguese climate education context,

in which climate education remains predominantly normative, prioritising scientific knowledge transfer and individualizing forms of environmental citizenship over critical systemic analysis (Gladcheff et al. 2024; Fialho 2025; Guerra et al. 2023).

Participants also highlighted the need for more inclusive and participatory media formats. While television coverage was viewed as passive and detached, platforms like TikTok were seen as enabling of debate (e.g., "Over the Water"). At the same time, social media occupied an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they provide visibility, awareness, and inspiration, offering entry points into climate activism through daily practices such as following activist accounts, signing petitions, or sharing content (forms of engagement frequently mentioned by participants not involved in collective climate action, in interviews). On the other hand, social media were seen as toxic, fostering consumerist pressures, misinformation, anxiety, and even withdrawal, as some youth deactivate accounts to cope with its negative effects. For instance, during a workshop, Vasco commented, "I'm tired of manipulation, I'm fed up and I left social media. Do you also recognise social networks as a form of capitalism?"; Elisa (an activist) added that the nature of social media content produces anxiety, "because it's purely influencers selling things". Vasco nevertheless acknowledged that leaving social media was difficult "because we're excluded from everyday conversations".

By and large, participants advocated for modes of communication that foreground the systemic drivers of climate change – such as corporate practices, agribusiness, and global policies – while fostering collective engagement and visions of desirable futures rooted in climate justice.

Openings for the Emergence of Youth Political Agency

This section explores the relational processes through which political agency or, at least political consciousness, emerges among participants: as a collective process, in which a shared youth identity enables collective meaning-making while accommodating differentiated roles; ongoing negotiation between global climate challenges and young people's individual experiences; an exchange of knowledge and experiences, capable of generating learning and sustaining engagement over time.

One way to understand youth political agency is by identifying to whom young people attribute agency – that is, not only those perceived as responsible for social and environmental issues, but also those who are perceived as capable of challenging dominant powers. Participants' attribution of agency evolved as they engaged in the workshop. In the initial activities, participants struggled to identify agents actively working towards just solutions, even when they could clearly name those responsible for causing problems and those with the power to act. However, during the proposal development phase – where participants could address any of the social actors identified in the initial mapping (e.g., governments, industries, etc.) – they consistently positioned themselves at the centre of collective action (Trott 2024). Across proposals, participants articulated a shared youth identity as a political agent in cli mate action, occupying differentiated roles: as producers and critical consumers of knowledge ("Get Out", "Newspaper Against Drought/Boredom"); as local mobilisers

("Over the Water", "The Letter from the Future 2050"); as co-constructors of participatory democracy ("Voices of the Future"); and as empathetic negotiators across ideological divides ("Unite and Build rather than Divide and Dismiss"). Interactions between participants during the workshops and interviews revealed both individual and collective efforts with varying contours. Participants less involved in climate activism tended to frame agency primarily through personal lifestyle changes, such as adopting plant-based diets, avoiding fast fashion, or shifting from car use to bicycles and public transportation, which they understood as environmentally motivated acts of responsibility and empathy, often inspired by documentaries and social media content. This individualised framing by less-engaged youth emphasised practices of consumption, which may be related to their less politicised understanding of cli mate change (de Moor and Verhaegen 2020). This was something that the team had anticipated, which is why we began the workshop with a video that explores the idea of citizens as consumers: "why citizens (not shoppers) hold the key to a better world?" (Leonard 2012). Subsequent activities, which were moderated by activists, helped in expanding the horizons of political agency by collectively reflecting about mobilisation and exercising influence, via e.g. demonstrations, leaflets and organised activism.

Political agency emerged and was shaped through the confrontation of collective ideas and personal experiences. In Porto, for instance, a highly productive discussion emerged focusing on institutions such as municipalities and parish councils, promoted by participants working in community projects. Ana, Elsa, and Clara, stood out because they are deeply embedded in their local community contexts. They possess an intimate understanding of everyday social dynamics, such as the precarious circumstances faced by children involved in neighbourhood projects and the political practices of local municipalities that can constrain the development of community action (Rebelo et al. 2026a, b). In this case, we saw political agency being discussed among participants with similar social experiences, highlighting the importance of situated knowledge in political engagement.

The workshops provided a space for dialogue between activists and young participants not involved in climate collective action, offering further insight into how political agency is constructed. Positive interpersonal dynamics often translated into what could be described as pedagogical moments, in which debate and confrontation fostered critical awareness while allowing empathy and recognition of social constraints (cf. McGregor and Christie 2021; Verlie and Flynn 2022). In the "Newspaper Against Drought/Boredom group", Carlos (activist) acted as a catalyst for critical reflection, challenging Maria and Raquel with provocative questions ("And even then you don't want to look for information?"). Although his tone was at times confrontational, the exchange was marked by listening and empathy – especially when Carlos acknowledged Raquel's arguments about limitations on engagement with climate action, such as job precariousness, daily exhaustion, and lack of time: "the concern is about making a living and holding a job (sometimes multiple jobs) instead… if my mother gets home late, she doesn't have time to watch the news". During the interviews, participants such as Ana and Clara (from Porto) described activists as "those who know", highlighting their capacity to guide discussions, share knowledge, and build group confidence. The workshops also helped to demystify

preconceptions on climate activism, allowing to see it as legitimate, informed, and peaceful. Ana noted that "we were always told that being an activist had more negative than positive aspects", which changed because of the conversations she had with Paula and Luísa (activists). Maria, in turn, recognised activists' value – "I sort of understood why they [activists] do it" – and considered contributing in other ways, such as "researching information." (cf. Pontes et al. 2018). From a more critical point of view, Raquel described her approach as gradual and institutional, "more reformist than revolutionary." She valued activism as "identity-based, beautiful, and comforting," but warned that it can foster isolation within social or discursive silos, limiting dialogue with dissenting voices (cf. Bobel 2007).

Finally, the workshops made visible the growing importance of communicative and argumentative skills within contemporary action repertoires. The activists were praised by young participants not involved in climate collective action for their ability to communicate their messages effectively; at the same time, among the activists themselves, there was a shared sense of the need to reflect on how this communication should be adapted for a general audience to be more influential.

Overall, political agency emerged as a dynamic process shaped through the confrontation of perspectives (more or less engaged; systemic vs. reformist), entailing practices of listening, reflection, learning, and political positioning in relation to social problems. These projects illustrate how young people are not only affected by climate change but are actively shaping responses through creative and collective approaches.

Final Reflections

The workshops offered several insights into how young people exercise political agency regarding climate change. During the activities, participants identified a range of social actors involved in the problems that they raised, often recognising that the same actors are implicated across multiple issues. Despite this awareness, many participants struggled to perceive themselves as political agents capable of acting and exerting influence. Nonetheless, the creation of communicative products allowed young people participating in the workshops to assume control over the narrative. The workshops revealed a clear awareness of unequal power differences that con strain young people's response to the climate crisis (Doyle 2020). They also fostered discussion of intergenerational responsibility on environmental issues and prompted critiques of how climate change is communicated in different settings (e.g., conventional media, social media and schools).

Some groups reimagined existing initiatives with new contours (e.g., public assemblies or newspapers), while others proposed novel dynamics (e.g., activist hubs in universities). The proposals combined structural and transformative activism and localised community action but often remained limited in their capacity to challenge dominant power structures: some of the communicative proposals reflect a techno optimism future, largely detached from considerations of the distribution of risks and costs of such technological advancements (e.g., "The Letter from the Future 2050"). Other discourses articulate a more reformist vision of society, raising questions about

the possibility of systemic and just transformations (e.g., "Unite and Build rather than Divide and Dismiss"); among young people less engaged with climate change, a lack of broader political knowledge was evident, particularly in relation to global political dynamics. This was reflected in frequent references to individual "sustainable" behaviours during the workshop discussions and in the interviews.

A notable feature of the workshops was a strong sense of solidarity. This atmosphere combined light-hearted, collaborative moments during the organisation and design of the communicative outputs (e.g., broadcast) with episodes of sharp social critique, in which participants drew on sarcasm and irony to produce social satire (e.g., "Get Out"). These stylistic and rhetorical strategies (Hee et al. 2022), together with the joyful atmosphere often fostered by participatory approaches (Bentz and Ristić Trajković 2025; Doyle 2020), are well documented in the literature and should be understood as integral to the emotional dynamics shaping youth climate discourse.

Participants expressed a desire to communicate *with* (those who are unaware of climate issues) and *among* young people (between activists, for instance), to change everyday practices, create more spaces for dialogue, and restore community ties. The workshops illustrate that political agency is collectively negotiated and dependent on engagement with diverse political imaginaries (Ferreira da Silva et al. 2025a; Gins burg and Blanchet-Cohen 2025; Pontes et al. 2018; Rebelo et al. 2026b).

The #CraftingAction workshops functioned as a space in which many participants engaged in taking political stances, challenging stereotypes, and confronting differing ideological positions within a safe environment. For those who were politically engaged, in particular, the workshops provided an entry point to recognise the inherently political nature of climate change and for an initial political positioning. In this moment of political consciousness-raising, participants began to reconfigure their relationship to themselves by occupying emerging subject positions as political agents in relation to climate issues and laying the groundwork for political agency (a more concerted orientation towards action).

These workshops highlighted the necessity of integrating local knowledge, emotional experiences, and empathetic dialogue into youth engagement research. The value of this approach was explicitly echoed by participants during interviews, who stressed the need for such spaces to be more widely available. Consequently, future research must continue to explore these dynamics, offering pathways of hope via initiatives rooted in localised communities, which is where young people ultimately can wield the greatest influence.

While highly rewarding, the practical implementation of these workshops presented significant methodological challenges. Recruitment proved difficult: the Porto workshop took place in July, when many young people were on holiday or working, while the Lisbon workshop, held in early September, coincided with the start of the academic year. These timing constraints also limited socioeconomic diversity, particularly in Porto. Moreover, 17 of the 23 participants were women. While this is a pattern consistent with gendered trends in climate engagement (Ginsburg and Blanchet-Cohen 2025), greater gender balance would have been desirable. Participant retention was another challenge. In Porto, spacing sessions over two weekends resulted in some dropouts and new arrivals,

necessitating group readjustments. To prevent this, the Lisbon's workshop was condensed into two consecutive days. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the monetary compensation provided for the time dedicated to the workshops may have attracted individuals who did not necessarily have a keen interest in the subject matter, but for whom the monetary value of the voucher was appealing. Nonetheless, all participants engaged with the theme during the workshops. Finally, the time available for completing the group projects was felt as short by several participants.

Overall, the workshops appear to have disrupted habitual ways of thinking and encouraged more holistic and critical thinking about the political, cultural, emotional, and affective dimensions of climate change, while also sparking a desire to act. Such participatory approaches enable the envisioning of new terrains of action at multiple levels. Experimental and localised practices of community care and attentiveness may operate as spaces of resistance, capable of negotiating institutional pressures and cultivating counter-hegemonic visions (WTFutures 2025). Moreover, it was also evident that some participants are willing to engage with macro-social factors that shape dominant discourses and practices.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to thank all the young participants and activists who took part in the workshops for their commitment and dedication throughout the activities. We are also grateful to the hosts and institutions that generously provided the spaces in which the workshops took place. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the researchers Tânia R. Santos and Juliana Diógenes-Lima for their essential support during the workshops and for their valuable field notes.

Author Contribution Conceptualisation: DFS, MFJ, AC; Methodology: DFS, MFJ, AC; Formal analysis: DFS; Investigation: DFS, AC; Data curation: DFS; Writing—original draft: DFS; Writing—review and editing: DFS, MFJ, AC; Project administration: DFS, MFJ, AC.

Funding This work was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) through the following grants: the research project JUSTFUTURES – Climate Futures and Just Transformations: Young People's Narratives and Political Imaginaries [PTDC/COMOUT/7669/2020]; the research project Reimagining Political Agency: The Voice(s) of Young People in the Climate Change Debate [https://doi.org/10.54499/2024.02918.BD]; and the Centre for Research in Anthropology [UID/04038].

Data Availability Observation notes and interview transcripts are held confidentially by the authors of the paper. The communicative outputs are publicly accessible at: https://justfutures.pt/en/climact-hub-en/craftingaction/ and https://shift-cost.eu/publications/#reports

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate The empirical work presented in this paper draws on material collected through a series of participatory workshops with 23 young adults aged 18–32. The study received ethical approval from the University of Minho (Ref. CEICSH 066/2024). Data collection was conducted in accordance with appropriate informed consent procedures. Participants provided written informed consent to participate in the workshops and, where applicable, in the post-workshop interviews. All names used in the paper are pseudonyms. Observation notes and interview transcripts are held confidentially by the authors.

Ethical Approval and Consent for Publication The study received ethical approval from the University of Minho (Ref. CEICSH 066/2024). Participants provided informed consent for the dissemination of the materials produced during the study, including observational notes, interview excerpts, and the communicative outputs developed in the workshops. Consent was also obtained for the publication of photographs included in this article (Images 1–6). One participant did not consent to the publication of their image, and his preference was respected.

References

Activist Handbook (2023) Strategy Vision. https://activisthandbook.org/strategy/vision

Agência Lusa (2025) Incêndios em Portugal: 2024 foi o pior ano em área ardida desde o terrível 2017. Expresso, p 25. https://expresso.pt/incendios/2025-03-25-incendios-em-portugal-2024-foi-o-pior-ano-em-area-ardida-desde-o-terrivel-2017-d31fdbfb

Amnå E, Ekman J (2014) Standby Citizens: Diverse Faces of Political Passivity. Eur Polit Sci Rev 6:261 281. https://doi.org/10.1017/S175577391300009X

Arya D, Henn M (2023) The Impact of Economic Inequality and Educational Background in Shaping How Non-Activist Standby Youth in London Experience Environmental Politics. Educ Rev 75:93–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.2007051

Bentz J, Ristić Trajković J (eds) (2025) Imagining, Designing and Teaching Regenerative Futures: Art Science Approaches and Inspirations From Around the World. Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9029-9

Bobel C (2007) I'm Not an Activist, Though I've Done a Lot of It: Doing Activism, Being Activist and the Perfect Standard in a Contemporary Movement. Soc Mov Stud 6:147–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830701497277

Bowman B, Germaine C (2022) Sustaining the Old World, or Imagining a New One? The Transformative Literacies of the Climate Strikes. Aust J Environ Educ 38:70–84. https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2022.3

Bowman B, Starzak M (2024) The Precarity of Hope at the End of the World: Young Climate Activism in Search of a Future. In: Erdal C, Kennelly J (eds) Handbook of Youth Activism. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/5DGPT

Boykoff MT (2011) Who speaks for the climate?: Making sense of media reporting on climate change. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511978586

Braun V, Clarke V (2021) One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis? Qual Res Psychol 18:328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Campos R (2024) Pensar a juventude enquanto sujeito político: liminaridade e agência política. Análise Soc. https://doi.org/10.31447/202352 Carvalho A (2023) Words for climate change are powerful but not magical. Nat Clim Change 13:4–5. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01571-7

Carvalho A, Fernandes-Jesus M, Malafaia C, Üzelgün MA (2022) Climate movement in Portugal: JUST FUTURES Project Report. https://jus tfutures.pt /en/2022/09 /16/repo rt-climatemovement-in-portugal/

Carvalho A, Russill C, Doyle J (2021) Editorial: Critical approaches to climate change and civic action. Front Commun 6:711897. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.711897

Daniel A (2026) Framing Climate Justice from a Youth Perspective: Intersectional Activism in Uganda. In: McQuaid K, Crawford NJW, Mare A, Nanduddu S (eds) Climate Justice in Action, 1st edn. Bristol University. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.25941155.18

de Moor J, Verhaegen S (2020) Gateway or Getaway? Testing the Link between Lifestyle Politics and Other Modes of Political Participation. Eur Polit Sci Rev 12:91–111. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000377

Diógenes-Lima J, Pinheiro S, Cruz J, Malafaia C (2023) If Not Even the School Listens to Us… Echos of Climate Justice on the Ground. JSSE - J Soc Sci Educ 22:4. https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-6346

Doyle J (2020) Creative communication approaches to youth climate engagement: Using speculative fiction and participatory play to facilitate young people's multidimensional engagement with climate change. Int J Commun 14:2749–2772. https://ijo c.org/index .php/ijoc/a rticle/v iew/14003

Dunlop L, Street Z, Nuttall E et al (2024) It Feels like a Parallel Universe. Worldbuilding through Clim Action Soc Mov Stud. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2024.2420932

Eide E, Kunelius R (2021) Voices of a Generation the Communicative Power of Youth Activism. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03211-z.ClimChange169

Fernandes-Jesus M, Trott CD, Barnwell G, Barnes B (2025) Toward a critical psychology of climate jus tice: Encouraging radical political imagination to shape our collective futures. Int Perspect Psychol 14:162–173. https://doi.org/10.1027/2157-3891/a000130

Ferreira da Silva D, Carvalho A (2025) Climate activist groups' discourses on science and knowledge: Merging rhetorical strategies with political visions. Environ Commun 19(8):1394–1410. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2025.2490960

Ferreira da Silva D, Carvalho A, Fernandes-Jesus M (2025a) Political imaginaries in the climate move ment: Youth-led groups constructing plural views of the future. Sociol Res Online 30:416–433. https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804241282942

Ferreira da Silva D, Fernandes-Jesus M, Carvalho A (2025b) Engaging young people with alternative climate futures: Cultivating political imagination through participatory methodologies. Environ Educ Res 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2025.2599808

Fialho S (2025) Children's Aspirations About Their Sustainable Futures in Portugal. Environ Sci Policy Sustain Dev 67:10–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.2025.2518037

Firinci Orman T (2022) Youth's Everyday Environmental Citizenship: An Analytical Framework for Studying Interpretive Agency. Childhood 29:495–511. https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682221107750

Ginsburg JL, Blanchet-Cohen N (2025) Even the Small Work That I Do, It Has Impact, It Has Meaning: Collective Meaning-Making in Youth Climate Groups. Soc Sci 14:510. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14090510

Gladcheff N, Pereira F, Torres AC (2024) Critical Environmental Education Based on the Practices and Perceptions of Early Childhood Educators in Portugal. Rev Int Educ Justic Soc 13:71–88. https://doi.org/10.15366/riejs2024.13.1.004

Guerra J, Prata L, Schmidt L (2023) Environmental Education in Portuguese Speaking Nations: A Survey of Current Practices and Priorities. Environ Educ Res 29:376–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.2136363

Hee M, Jürgens AS, Fiadotava A et al (2022) Communicating Urgency through Humor: School Strike 4 Climate Protest Placards. J Sci Commun 21. https://doi.org/10.22323/2.21050202

Herfort N, Johnson J, Macintyre C, Born S (2023) Mapping the Global Youth Climate Movement. Climate Vanguard Imagining2050 (2021) Deliberative Futures Toolkit: Toward Future-Oriented Communities and Decision Making. University College Cork. https://www.ucc.ie/en/imagining2050/

Jones S (2025) Far-Right Chega Party Becomes Main Opposition in Portugal's Parliament. The Guardian, May 28. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/far-right-chega-party-becomes-main-opposition-in-portugals-parliament

Kenis A, Lievens M (2015) The Limits of the Green Economy: From Re-Inventing Capitalism to Re Politicising the Present. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315769707

Klein N (2014) This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate. Simon & Schuster

Leonard A (2012). The story of change. The story of stuff project. https://www.youtube.com/

Maiguashca B, Marchetti R (eds) (2013) Contemporary Political Agency: Theory and Practice. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203696200

Marques da Silva S, Martins da Silvaa N, Arezes S, Sérgio Martins P, Faria S, Dias V, Milheiro Silva A (2023). Constraints on and facilitators of young people's participation: The case of border regions of mainland Portugal. JSSE - J Soc Sci Educ 22(3). https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-5212

Mayes E (2019) The mis/uses of 'voice' in (post)qualitative research with children and young people: Histories, politics and ethics. Int J Qual Stud Educ 32:1191–1209. https:// d o i . o r g / 1 0 . 1 0 8 0 / 0 9 5 1 8 3 9 8 . 2 0 1 9 . 1 6 5 9 4 3 8 Mayes E, Arya D (2024) Just Participatory Research with Young People Involved in Climate Justice Activ ism. J Appl Youth Stud 7:385–395. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-024-00139-w

McCalman C (2023) A Proper Environmentalist Wouldn't Do That: Discourses of Alienation from the Environmental Periphery. Soc Mov Stud 22:530–548. https:// d o i . o r g / 1 0 . 1 0 8 0 / 1 4 7 4 2 8 3 7 . 2 0 2 2 . 2 0 5 4 7 9 6 McGregor C, Christie B (2021) Towards Climate Justice Education: Views from Activists and Educators in Scotland. Environ Educ Res 27:652–668. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2020.1865881

Mouffe C (2000) The Democratic Paradox. Verso

Neas S, Ward A, Bowman B (2022) Young People's Climate Activism: A Review of the Literature. Front Polit Sci 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.940876

Pavenstädt CN, Rödder S (2024) Between Evidence First and Political Fight – Understanding Dynamics of (de-)Politicization in US Climate Movements' Future Narratives. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2024.2324710.EnvironPoliticshttps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/

Pontes A, Henn M, Griffiths MD (2018) Towards a Conceptualization of Young People's Political Engage ment: A Qualitative Focus Group Study. Societies 8:17. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010017

Rebelo D, Garcia AD, Santos TR, Carvalho A, Malafaia C, Fernandes-Jesus M (2026a) Prioritising com munities: Barriers to climate activism and political imagination among minoritised youth groups. J Youth Stud 29:222–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2024.2419928

Rebelo D, Santos TR, Garcia AD, Carvalho A, Malafaia C, Fernandes-Jesus M (2026b) Young people's conceptions of political agency in relation to climate change. Environ Politics 35:477–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2489206

Reyes M, Carderón A (2021) What Is MAPA and Why Should We Pay Attention to It? Fridays For Future, March 13. https://fridaysforfuture.org/newsletter/edition-no-1-what-is-mapa-and-why-should-we-pay-attention-to-it/

Rodela R, Roumeliotis F (2024) Young People as a Political Subject in the Context of Environmental Gov ernance. Humanit Soc Sci Commun 11:938. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03373-y

Sanchini V, Pongiglione F, Sala R (2019) On the Notion of Political Agency. Phenomenol Mind 16:10–15. https://doi.org/10.13128/PHE_MI-26068

Santos TR, Ferreira da Silva D, Diógenes-Lima J, Carvalho A (2024a) Criando dinâmicas de ação: Desen volver a agência política dos jovens e construir futuros climáticos mais justos. https://justfutures.pt/climact-hub-pt/criandodinamicasdeacao/

Santos TR, Üzelgün MA, Carvalho A (2024b) Young climate activists in television news: An analysis of multimodal constructions of voice, political recognition, and co-optation. Commun Rev 27:32–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2023.2251310

Santos TR, Üzelgün MA, Carvalho A (2026) Reporting on young climate activism: How journalistic mul timodal choices on television can delegitimise disruptive dissent. Journalism Pract 20(6):1898–1918. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2433649

Scherhaufer P, Klittich P, Buzogány A (2021) Between Illegal Protests and Legitimate Resistance. Civil Disobedience against Energy Infrastructures. Util Policy 72:101249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2021.101249

Schlosberg D (2007) Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature, 1st edn. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199286294.001.0001

Schwartz SEO, Benoit L, Clayton S et al (2023) Climate Change Anxiety and Mental Health: Environmen tal Activism as Buffer. Curr Psychol 42:16708–16721. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02735-6

SHiFT (2024) Crafting action | Building youth political agency and just climate futures. Reports. https://shift-cost.eu/publications

Spencer G, Doull M (2015) Examining Concepts of Power and Agency in Research with Young People. J Youth Stud 18:900–913. https: //d oi. or g/10 .1080/13 6762 61.20 14.1001827

Taylor DE (1997) American Environmentalism: The Role of Race, Class and Gender in Shaping Activism 1820–1995. Race Gend Cl 5:16–62

Thew H, Middlemiss L, Paavola J (2022) You Need a Month's Holiday Just to Get over It! Exploring Young People's Lived Experiences of the UN Climate Change Negotiations. Sustainability 14:7. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14074259

Trott CD (2019) Reshaping Our World: Collaborating with Children for Community-Based Climate Change Action. Action Res 17:42–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750319829209

Trott CD (2024) It Can't Just Be the Younger People: Exploring Young Activists' Perspectives on Intergen erational Tensions and Solidarities for Climate Justice. J Community Appl Soc Psychol 34:e70001. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.70001

United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti (2024) Voices for Impact: Meaningful Youth Engagement in the Multilateral System. UNICEF Innocenti Verlie B, Flynn A (2022) School Strike for Climate: A Reckoning for Education. Aust J Environ Educ 38:1–12. https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2022.5

Walker C (2020) Uneven Solidarity: The School Strikes for Climate in Global and Intergenerational Per spective. Sustain Earth 3:1

Ward A (2026) The Way I Channel My Anxiety Is through My Activism: Young Climate Activists, Story telling, and the Emotion Culture of Cultivated Hope. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-025-09620-1.QualSociol

Weiss J (2020) What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes. Front Polit Sci 2:1. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001

White PJ, Ferguson JP, Smith NO, Carre HO (2022) School Strikers Enacting Politics for Climate Justice: Daring to Think Differently about Education. Aust J Environ Educ 38:26–39. https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2021.24

WTFutures (2025) KEY LEARNINGS. Plurality University Network; European Climate Foundation. https://wtfutures.xyz/

Zimmerman MA (1995) Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations. Am J Community Psychol 23:581–599. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506983

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations. Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.