

Workshop Title: *Agency in the Polycrisis: Young People as Architects of their Education*

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Main issues, questions discussed:

- Initial questioning: Youth left out of the conversations that concerns them (here: education) - missing from the decision-making table. How can we ensure that youth affected by crises can be the primary decision-makers for their own education/life/future?
- What is agency?
 - Ability to act (≠ behaving) -> conscious, willful, direct toward something, conscious-eyes that takes this decision
 - Bring a sense of ownership & commitment.
 - Connected to the abilities we have; you need to have the space to experience it - social rules
 - Is the classroom the right place to experience agency? Is it the only place it can/has to happen?
Unconscious assessment to make use of our abilities: what are the risks for me if I use my voice for change making? Not everybody has the same capabilities/ privileges - not everybody is taking the same risks to make use of their agency: who has agency?
 - You must be able to understand what agency is to experience it; education to strengthen youth and ensure they know the rights and obligations they have as citizens. Teaching by doing.
 - Post human agency (for ex ChatGPT): do you need to have consciousness to have agency? Reproduction of content that in the end influences us. Take over a lot of functions of consciousness.
 - How do we ask what the youth need to engage in other spaces? We need to be very articulated.
 - Power is embedded in all our relations. Also on how the things are set up (arrangement of the places of people within a space for ex)
 - Freedom from vs. freedom to: we often infantilize and patronise youth → when youth express their voice is often reduced until you “graduate from childhood”, or sometimes you are labeled as a superstar encompassing all voices

- Importance of making connections - having multiple social spheres to get support; shift from the individual level and risks taken.
- Collective agency different to individual agency; extend to which youth agency is involved: on important or cosmetic topics?
- Modalities to express agency.

Conclusions:

- This workshop reaffirmed what many of us have long sensed: that young people—especially those caught in overlapping crises—are too often positioned as passive recipients of decisions made on their behalf. We began with a simple but urgent question: *What does it mean for youth to have agency in their education, and how do we center them in shaping the futures they will inherit?*
- We explored agency not as mere behaviour, but as a conscious and intentional act—one that requires space, trust, and recognition. Yet, we acknowledged that not all youth can take the same risks when stepping into their agency. Social norms, structural inequalities, and power asymmetries shape who gets to speak, be heard, and act. Education, when approached critically, can offer pathways to both understand and experience agency. But the classroom is only one of many sites where this happens.
- We wrestled with deep questions—about the limits of individual agency, the power of collective action, and the fine line between tokenism and true participation. We noticed how often youth voices are diminished or idealized, and how rarely they're met with the infrastructure needed to sustain their leadership. The polycrisis doesn't just demand resilience—it calls for reimagining how systems like education are co-created with those most affected.

Do you have any concrete recommendations? (to yourself, to participants, to RECI, to other actors?)

- **To ourselves as educators and practitioners:**
Let us actively question the spaces we design, the assumptions we hold, and the risks we ask youth to take. Make room for discomfort. Invite young people not only to the table but into the design of the table itself. Teach by doing, but also by listening.
- **To RECI and partner organisations:**
Shift from consultation to co-creation. Develop mechanisms that move youth from being subjects of research and programming to being full collaborators—on funding priorities, project design, and evaluation. Youth advisory councils are not enough if they have no power.
- **To broader educational actors (UN bodies, INGOs, national systems):**
Build frameworks that acknowledge both *freedom from* structural harm and *freedom to* act meaningfully. Move beyond superficial inclusion. Recognize that youth agency is not just an individual trait, but a collective process shaped by context, culture, and connection.
- **To youth themselves:**
Know that your agency is valid, even when it isn't recognised. Seek out community, find the cracks in systems, and push through them together. You don't have to represent everyone—your voice matters as it

