

CONFUSION AND CRISIS



Delay is the new climate denial, fuelled by confusion and crisis. “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” How will we act in the forced transformation that is coming?



We are surrounded by confusion and dissent. Tensions and mistrust between global south and north are growing, eating at the foundations of collective action and common good. Deliberate disinformation has become a professional practice. And while the problems deepen, a poly-crisis seems inevitable. People look for answers in these moments of reckoning.



— The climate crisis seems to be riddled with confusion and disagreement. Metrics, criteria, how to measure performance, the value of ESG, voluntary carbon markets, to geo-engineer or not, the necessary, dangerous role of A.I. and the limits of the human condition.

— Confusion is amplified by the ambiguous role of public institutions; by the change theories of wealthy private individuals taking matters into their own hands through philanthropy; by misleading claims and disinformation; and by the growing resentment of the very many who see that it does not need to be this way.

— The climate movement is not helping. Each actor is convinced that their solution is best, unable to accept that there are many solutions out there. Disagreements are rife and the tension that builds between perfection and momentum, creates mistrust of alternative solutions and approaches. The discourse of reparations, loss and damage, ideologies of equity,

is opening up space for multiple hostages to fortune.

— There is growing fear, anger and uncertainty. That was always the case, but it is more intense and complicated that it has ever been, while the need for collective action has never been greater.

— It is in the midst of this confusion, that the climate, nature and pollution crisis grows and deepens. The underlying problem remains the inability to translate understanding of the impending scale of disaster into responsive policy.

— This makes a poly-crisis all but inevitable. Historically collective action and change has not happened before a crisis, but in its aftermath (look at examples in our recent past like Westphalia, Vienna, Versailles, or Breton Woods). How will we transform in crisis?

— Transformation can take on many forms. New types of governance

could arise, regenerative solutions could become mainstream; self-determination and small community solutions could lead us out of the crisis. But this will happen only if we are ready for the moments of breakdown and able to address the resulting collective trauma.

— Healing from that trauma could be through connection with nature and with each other and this could ignite a ripple effect. There will need to be an acceptance of the varied and different ways to articulate and execute action that meet the needs of small communities.

— We will see the emergence of small systems of influence. Even today, there are examples emerging in Australia, Brazil or Mexico, discovering healing and regeneration on smaller scales in the creation of policies that affect them. The key, though, will be to connect those small systems so they are not just learning within themselves but from one another.

LEARNING FROM ONE CRISIS TO FACE THE NEXT

COVID is beginning to show up in collective trauma as the impact of sending billions into lockdown emerges. This is teaching us important lessons for the climate crisis. We see different responses: people become numb, others turn to denial or cynicism. Others see things become possible that were not so before.

There is a need to heal, but COVID has not necessarily sparked the deep shift inward or a collective reckoning that many expected. In some cases, the public saw a benefit in 'doing their part', but in others it has triggered the contrary effect, causing the underpinning of an attachment to the economic self. People have experienced a loss of freedom and they are rebelling. If a response to the climate crisis is equated with this same sense of loss, people will not act.

THE OPPORTUNITY AND DANGER OF CATASTROPHE

Scientific evidence and global inaction point to an inevitable crisis for humanity. A forced transition will be our reality. And as the crisis deepens and becomes “the new normal” people will be looking for answers and they will be ready to move. This is a tremendous opportunity to offer a different narrative and regenerative solutions that can help to heal in small and large systems.

But there is a tremendous danger in this moment. Nationalist, populists and extreme movements use exactly these moments to capitalise on collective confusion and fear, giving simple solutions to complex issues. These are moments in which violence and anger arise. Is the climate movement ready to offer alternatives? Can we provide counter messaging at scale and do we have the resources?

EIT Climate-KIC is Europe's leading climate innovation agency and community, supporting places and industries bridge the gap between climate commitments and current reality.

This is one of ten insights derived from a series of conversations hosted by EIT Climate-KIC. Thinkers and practitioners from multiple disciplines discussed emerging trends, challenges, possibilities and implications for climate actions.

“COVID gave people a glimpse of what it means when access to life is taken away. People have had a taste of that, and they don't want it.”

“As we go on destroying and depleting the physical world, we are creating an enticing, beautiful virtual world. It is becoming increasingly attractive to live in that world.”

“Greta has the attention of the entire world and doesn't know what to do with it. She has not been able to shift to leading new proposals.”

“As the crisis deepens, people will be looking for answers – and those who are ready to give answers are the ones that will win.”



LEADING THE READINESS CONVERSATION

Transformation follows crisis, as people open up to act. Regenerative solutions need to be ready, incorporated through education and training. To be ready for transformation, we must lead difficult conversations around our preparedness with solutions. How could organisations create the spaces for those complex conversations, gathering unlikely collaborators and especially uniting the hard sciences with the social movements. We all have to acknowledge this moment and be ready with counter messages at an unprecedented scale.

BECOMING KNOWLEDGE STEWARDS

Learning, sharing and curating information and knowledge using simple and accessible narratives will be fundamental to the transformation after the crisis – in the moments of truth. Who could become a knowledge steward, making transformation accessible and useable for a range of different actors. But above all, how can knowledge inspire action? Being a curator of knowledge implies working in collaboration through collective leadership to make it actionable.