



IED Winter Academy 2019

Post-event report

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Context and goals

The focus of the Winter Academy 2019 was the issue of climate change. While environmentalism has been since the beginning one of the main pillars of the work of the Institute of European Democrats (IED), the urgency of addressing the climate crisis has taken a much bigger political dimension over the last few months. Following up on the research fellowships funded by the IED in 2019, which allowed young researchers to write 21 research papers on climate change¹, the goal of this Winter Academy was to give young activists the opportunity to reflect from various perspectives, as they will have to engage about this issue with their fellow citizens for years to come.

In order to focus more, and to stay within our core mission (the promotion of a democratic Europe), we narrowed the theme to "Climate Challenge for Democracy". The idea was to properly formulate and then to start answering the following questions:

- Are democracies unable to deal efficiently with climate change, an issue which is obvious for decades, and where too little progress is being made?
- Is there a risk of radicalisation of part of the youth, drifting out of the democratic mechanisms (and their necessary compromises) out of frustration with this lack of progress?
- How to build a democratic consensus, which would be efficient, but would also take into account the social costs of some measures as well as the geographical disparities in terms of awareness or impact?

The participants were young party activists from the national or regional parties which are members of the European Democratic Party (EDP). They are mostly young professionals, with a great diversity in terms of academic backgrounds and of where in Europe they grew up. Therefore, one of the goals of the Winter Academy was also to provide them with various practical tools, as well as insights on the current state of social sciences research around the impact on climate change on our societies.

¹<https://www.iedonline.eu/publications/2019/climate-crisis.php>

Summary of the sessions

Participants round table

The Winter Academy started with a round table of the participants, during which they were asked to introduce themselves and to describe in a few words which images came first to their mind when talking about climate change.

There was a **wide consensus that climate change is one of the major issues** faced by our societies, if not the single most pressing issue (according to most participants). The range of feelings went from worried but optimistic that the problem can be tackled, to deep fears that climate change could cause humanity to disappear within a few decades.

Especially striking was how **those coming from Mediterranean countries described the issue in a much more personal way**, systematically providing concrete examples of how the environment has changed recently, or of the predictable middle-term consequences on their region.

Another recurring theme was **the importance of knowledge**, and that such a complex issue requires a lot of pedagogy towards the citizens. Gabi Schmidt, vice-president of the IED and member of the Bavarian parliament, highlighted it as well during this session, pointing to new measures in Bavaria in order to teach children from primary school onwards how to deal responsibly with the environment.

Yann Wehring, French ambassador for the environment

Unfortunately, Yann Wehring was prevented to reach Brussels because of strikes of the French rail service, but we established a video-conference and we could benefit from his keynote speech followed by a lively questions and answers session.

First, he described **the scale and urgency of climate change**, providing evidence and examples which confirmed the feelings described previously by the participants. It is scientifically clear that this is not a situation about to happen, but the situation we are currently in, with heat waves now happening every year. The question is not whether we want to save the planet (which could anyhow recover after a few centuries), but whether we want to save humanity. Technology allows humanity to achieve wonderful things (for example this video conference), but could also destroy it.

Then, Yann Wehring insisted that it would be **a grave mistake to solely consider climate change and to forget about the other environmental issues** (especially biodiversity) as they are strongly intertwined. For example, palm oil demand increased because of biofuels, but led to the destruction of forests and of the great apes living in them.

With regard to democracy, he pointed out that when a government is very right-wing, its first actions are against the environment (for example, Donald Trump withdrawing from the Paris accord, or Jair Bolsonaro supporting deforestation in the Amazon). Reciprocally, it is clear that liberal democracies are the most engaged on the issue.

During the discussion that followed, we dug deeper into the issue of sovereignty: national governments are not any more the level where decisions are taken, but it is also **becoming more and more difficult to find a comprehensive global agreement**. It is therefore likely that groups of like-minded countries will have to move forward; and it is important to include Africa, “which is waiting for us”. As a participant asked whether environmentalism should be considered as essentially left-wing, Yann Wehring answered that it was not: there are differences between centre-left proposals (rather more rules) and centre-right proposals (rather more voluntary and market

based), but **the real debate is between radical action against climate change vs. a reformist approach.**

Finally, some participants raised the question whether it was too late to act and that climate change may already be irreversible. Yann Wehring admitted he was himself not entirely sure but that it was still worthwhile trying to act against climate change.

Mathieu Baudier, systems engineer

The purpose of this session was to provide participants with an overview of some key modern concepts in social science, some general and applied to the climate change issue, some specific to it. First, the principles of social choice theory were introduced, with a focus on the “**tragedy of the commons**”, **negative externalities**, and the fact that any climate action will create groups of “winners and losers” within societies. A few paradoxes and discrepancies between how some countries see themselves and the reality of their environmental impact were also raised, with a particular focus on the difference between **carbon produced / emitted vs. carbon consumed / imported.**

Then, the “**prisoner dilemma**” was presented, with climate change a perfect example on how the individual incentives of each actor (to free-ride on the efforts of others and continue polluting) lead to a disastrous global outcome (not serious climate action taken). Finally, the intrinsic limitations of preferences aggregation within a group and of voting systems were described.

For instance applied to the global Climate change negotiations within the COP, the repetition of negotiations allows the partners to learn from each others’ positions and eventually achieve an agreement on the long run. Therefore those COP negotiations may prove useful and efficient, despite the perception of media and public opinion.

This presentation² was certainly a bit too complex for some, and a bit too simplistic for others (especially those with a background in economics), but most of the concepts and examples were touched upon during other sessions, and it allowed to bring every one roughly on the same page on these analytical tools.

Jonathan Barnes, London School of Economics

Jonathan Barnes is researching a PhD after having worked for years in climate change finance. His field of study is climate justice and he is focussing on South-Africa, which exemplifies a lot of these challenges (coal intensive electricity production, middle-income country, strong inequalities, etc.). **His presentation³ was the core of this Winter Academy**, as all the issues that we were discussing could find their place within the framework of the current state of climate change research in social sciences, that he presented in a rigorous and accessible manner.

The core issue is change. **We are witnessing a paradigm shift**, whether we like it or not. It is only natural for people to be reluctant to change, but this change is already happening and is inevitable (as pointed out by Yann Wehring). But it is not yet clear where this paradigm shift will lead us. Could it lead to getting rid of democracy, as not working fast enough to address such an existential threat? Could it lead to the systematic pricing of negative externalities, at all the levels of trade?

But **climate change is intrinsically unfair**: those who contributed less to it (and did not much benefit from industrialisation) are those who suffer most from it (through desertification, higher ocean level, etc.). Parallel to this injustice of the impact of climate change, **climate justice also has**

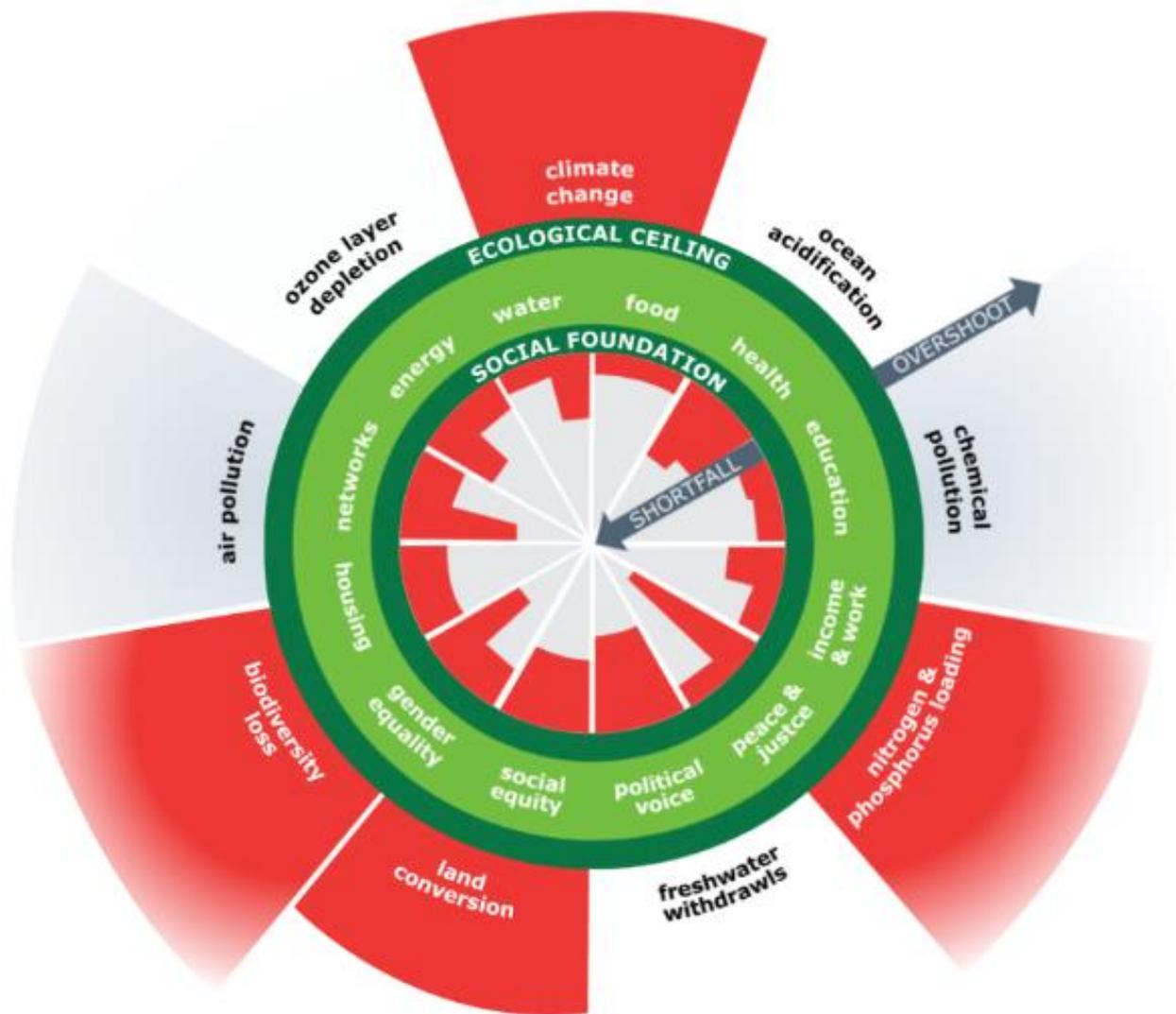
²<https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2019/WinterAcademy2019-GameTheory-Presentation-20191220.pdf>

³<https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2019/IED-Winter-Academy-Barnes.pdf>

to deal with the injustice of climate action, that is the policies which are being put in place in order to mitigate and possibly reverse it.

Procedures and processes are therefore key in order to achieve a climate policy that can be widely acceptable (as pointed out in conclusion of the previous session). Jonathan Barnes then developed the concept of **epistemic justice: we shall take into account the “view of the world” of many more people than just experts and politicians. Climate action, especially, should start with a conversation with those who will have to carry its consequences.** Electrical cars are a good example: a technical solution is put forward, which is not coming from a conversation about “which mobility do citizens want?”, and which additionally causes issues with the carbon intensity of its production as well as with polluting waste.

This tension between the complexity of the environmental issues and their impact on society can now be clearly and succinctly presented thanks to standard representations. The **planetary boundaries model** offers an overview of the environmental stress across various fields (climate change, ozone depletion, ocean acidification, etc.). It is **refined with the doughnut model, which integrates the social tensions going into the opposite direction.** The external circle of the doughnuts represents the ecological threshold, while the internal one represents the social threshold. A goal for our societies which is easy to explain, is that we need to change in order to live in the green zone within these two circles.



Finally, we discussed the commonalities between **green populism** and right- or left-wing populism⁴. While they look very different, they all have a common enemy which is neo-liberalism. Capitalism has gained too much power over the last decades and seems uncontrollable, hence such radical reactions. For example, in South-Africa, while there is an awareness with regard to climate change, the response to it and to coal mines has been completely derailed by discussions around employment. How we frame the problems is therefore central to the issue.

Mathilde Vandaele, IED research fellow

Mathilde Vandaele is one of the young fellows who has been granted a research fellowship by the IED in order come up with proposals to fight climate change. Her brilliant papers combined documented insights and a long-term vision of the deep changes that our societies will have to go through. We therefore asked her to summarize her findings and perspectives in a presentation⁶.

⁴Interestingly, populism was the main theme of the Winter Academy 2018.

⁵<https://www.iedonline.eu/publications/2019/climate-crisis/a-scenario-of-life-for-european-citizens-in-2030-vandaele>

⁶<https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2019/Presentation-Winter-Academy-Vandaele.pdf>

First, she listed some **misconceptions and myths around climate change**. Her generation is very much political and concerned by climate change (as was exemplified by the energy and attention of all participants to this Winter Academy); technology alone won't solve the problem; carbon capture is not ready; not all "little steps" are equal; etc.

Then, she detailed the scale and urgency of the issue, and presented **striking figures on the various impacts of the daily efforts that everyone can do** (flying is especially bad for carbon emission, as well as meat consumption). Finally, Mathilde Vandaele described a positive vision of life in the future around three pillars: **time instead of money, equality vs. freedom, basic security**.

The discussion that followed showed some rich debate. Some participants with an engineering background were more optimistic that solutions can also be found through innovation. Also, one participant from an island country pointed out that it would have much more impact for them to renounce flying planes completely.

Conclusion and perspectives

Overall the goals of this Winter Academy were reached. The participants left it with more knowledge about the climate change issue and how to act on it, as well as its impact on democracy. We wasted no time in advocating for climate action, since we obviously were all agreeing on this.

Just as Jonathan Barnes' session was a good pivot and synthesis of our discussions, he also provided an inspiring opening by remarking in his conclusion that **an environmentally-responsible world, where we fly less, eat better, constrain big corporation more, listen to citizens and workers, and rediscover nature, could actually be quite a nice world to live in**, beside the urgency of avoiding a catastrophe. That is probably how politicians should democratically "sell" climate action to citizens, but it implies to have a broader and coherent project for the society, the economy, innovation, international relations, etc. than just focussing on environmental issues as Green parties tend to do.

Practical recommendations

- *Knowledge is key to deal with the complexity of climate change. Produce an easy to digest **one page infographic** around the state of social science in this field (planetary boundaries, climate justice, doughnut, etc.) and practical steps at personal and community level. Plan similar academic sessions for our more senior members too.*
- *Create a dedicated focus group on climate change impact and adaptation in the **Mediterranean** and mid-Atlantic areas.*
- *Have an internal but independent assessment of the **carbon cost of IED events**.*