

# Keeping your head above water; constructive hope in times of climate change

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Young adults nowadays face complex issues such as biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change. How do they deal with these wicked problems in their lives? In the interdisciplinary European project Future Lives with Oceans and Water (FLOW) we study young generations' relations and engagement with water and oceans, their fears and hopes. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups with young adults (18-30 years old) participating in water-related pioneering initiatives in Germany, France, Portugal and The Netherlands, we gained insight in the delicate balance between despondency and meaningful action and the role of hope therein. We studied how these young people make use of several coping strategies (Chawla, 2020; Ojala 2015) in dealing with emotions around flooding, droughts and climate change.

We found all three forms of coping in the interviews, emotion-focused, problem-focused and meaning-focused strategies. By using the first strategy the young adults try to manage these emotions through distraction. They deliberately think about something else and avoid disturbing information. This form of coping is negatively associated with environmental action and leads to low subjective well-being. The second, the problem-focused strategy, leads to individual environmental action. However, because of the awareness that more collective action is needed to really make an impact this also leads to low wellbeing. Young adults who participated with peers in (local) collaborations found meaning in their action and believed they can make a difference together with others. This leads to 'constructive hope' (Chawla 2020; Ojala 2012). We show the relevance of constructive hope, the role of peers and collaboration towards meaningful action. Moreover, we share our findings on how young adults view their relationship with the previous generation, which ranges from intergenerational conflict and blame, to feelings of guilt, solidarity and the longing for intergenerational learning.

## References

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