

Image: Victor De Schwanbera / pixels.com

Youth-led People Power!



Can it show us the way to tackle the climate crisis?

“We can’t save the world by playing by the rules, because the rules have to be changed. Everything needs to change!”

Greta Thunberg, Ted Talks, Stockholm, November 2018.

Raw power generated when people come together with a singular aim, can be inspiring ... and that can apply to kids, perhaps even more so than adults.

Greta Thunberg, the 17-year-old from Sweden, who grew the idea of school strikes to highlight the impending disaster of climate change, has demonstrated just how effective People Power can be. If people of all ages respond with support, it’s possible, just

possible, that a germ of an idea developed by youth, could mushroom to infect the fossilized brains of today's adult leaders.

Unfortunately, at the top end of the age demographic we have egocentrics in charge, who either don't care for the next generation (including their own offspring), or think personal wealth bestows immunity from the catastrophic effects of climate change.

Image: mashable.com



Historian/Philosopher Yuval Noah Harari

The illuminating quote from Yuval Noah Harari: *“History began when humans invented gods and will end when humans become gods”*, sparks immediate thoughts of Donald Trump: he would take the meaning as literal, not metaphorical!

But Trump is just one example among many: the specimen that shines out from the star-studded crowd of leaders who are so brainwashed by the economic growth myth, so diverted by nationalism and so over-awed by their own self-importance, that they feel they have the divine right to deny the existence of climate change – a devastating phenomenon, that scientists the world over have known to exist for many decades.

Should we allow this incredible status quo to continue, where such a small minority of self-possessed people hold billions around them to ransom? If a clear-thinking alien downloaded to The Oval Office from another universe, s/he would say:

“What on Earth are you doing? You are continuing actions that will destroy the future of your children and the planet they live on. That, Mr President, is unbelievable!”



Image: [Markus Spiske / unsplash](https://unsplash.com)

Greta Thunberg has the clarity of mind to see our endangered world as if through the eyes of a clear-thinking alien, uncluttered by economics, or ego, birthplace or age. Greta represents youth: a section of our population often demeaned and forgotten, but one which has the potential to be a formidable force, that in, what appears to be, the absence of any other front-runner, might lead us all towards more sensible policies for a sustainable future.



Image: rollingstone.com

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Over the past 30 years my work has been to help educate young people about the importance of respecting environments and tackling climate change. In doing this, I have found that youth can take the baton and run with it, much faster than I could ever hope to do (both literally and metaphorically):

- In Australia, I recall a class of 10-year-olds developing a postcard campaign to alert schools along the length of the magnificent River Murray, to the fact that their local environment was being polluted by waste. Their valiant efforts led to meetings with industries and town councils. 10-year-olds! That was impressive.
- A decade or so later, in India, I saw Sugana, a trainee teacher, leading her class to inspire the school, by developing gardens in the upturned tops of discarded Mumbai buses, on the roof of their high-rise school building. Impossible, they said, to grow masses of vegetables and fruits in the middle of such a congested city. Problem solved by dogma-free, thinking outside-the-box young minds.
- More recently in Kenya, it was Tracey, a 12-year-old from a small village school, who spoke of actions on climate change, and captivated the minds of 10,000 school heads, at their annual conference. *“Which expensive private school does*

she come from?” they asked. But no, she was a young Maasai girl from Kajiado, a rural area south of Nairobi, decimated by drought. She was inspired to talk!

- Then just last year, a year six class in Chesham (UK) heard about Greta Thunberg and responded with 40 ways to introduce climate action - from growing veggie lunches to cutting energy use. The also said: *“We should have climate change talked about in lessons and a school conference to discuss our actions.”*

What Greta, and all those above are doing is throwing a lifeline to the world, from the island of youth. They're really saying *“Listen to us: the caretakers of Planet Earth, after you leave the room. There is a better way forward than the track you have been following. Please stand aside and let us show you the more appropriate path.”*



Image: us.jll.com

So yes, the good news is that

Greta Thunberg is an

amazing inspiration to her peers. The even better news is that there are many more like her, in every state of every country around the globe, and when they all become motivated and mobilized together, that has the potential to become an unstoppable force.



Image: oxfamireland.org

Which of course is exactly what our planet needs right now: an irresistible force that can overturn out-of-date and simply wrong thinking, that has been based, since WW2, on the false premise that a market-led economy is God of All Things. Eventually leaders will be forced to come to terms with the fact that the economy depends on the environment....

And what if there's no environment? Well, as the alien thought to herself:

“Can they really be that stupid?!”