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SELF
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UTOPIA

EVERYDAY UTOPIAS

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EVERYDAY UTOPIAS

An activity guide for keeping hope alive

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INTRODUCTION

“If we want change, losing hope is not an option. Because hope, however fragile, is the only thing that drives us to keep fighting, to keep believing that, one day, our collective actions will change lives.” Aridane Ávila

What can young people do in a world that seems to be crumbling and offering us nothing? If we've already been told there's only one way to do things, why do we even try to change them?

Self and Utopia was an Erasmus+ project, framed within the KA152 youth mobility initiatives. It was born as an attempt to answer these questions. Perhaps with others, perhaps with ourselves. It's a statement that places hope and action at the heart of building the societies in which we would like to live.

It was a project carried out between November 3rd and 10th on Razo beach in Carballo, where 26 young people from Romania, Turkey, Portugal, Spain, and Georgia lived together for a week to stop thinking of utopia as something distant and bring it into our daily lives, our everyday actions, the small things we would like to change. It was an opportunity to rethink the society in which we live, and to give ourselves the chance to imagine better societies, where our actions and talents are also a fundamental part of the change we want to see.

UTO WHAT?

First of all, what is utopia?

The word comes from the Greek οὐ (“no”) and τόπος (“place”) and literally means “no-place.” It was first coined by Thomas More, an English jurist, philosopher, theologian, and writer. It was the name he gave to an imaginary island near the Greek coast. A new world, recently discovered, at the height of European colonization, where everything was perfect according to More's vision.

However, before him, several people had imagined the ideal world: Plato, with *The Republic*; Saint Augustine with *The City of God*; Mesoamerican mythologies that imagined perfect worlds where gods and humans lived together in peace; Buddhism with the *Shmabal*, among many others.

Since then, we haven't stopped imagining paradises—just worlds that are more ecological, tolerant, anti-colonial, and compassionate, with community and science at their core.

The problem is that dystopia often seems to win the battle.

WHY DO WE LOVE DYSTOPIA SO MUCH?

Although we all want to live in a utopia, most of the time it seems much easier to imagine dystopias. From *Brave New World* and *1984* to *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, we constantly imagine catastrophic worlds that show us the worst side of civilization, and it even seems easier to think about living in 12 districts where we play until we kill each other to think about working only 36 hours a week without the world ending.

There are 4 main keys to understanding why this happens:

Anthropology: Imagining negative scenarios is adaptive; it responds to the survival of our species.

Psychology: According to the availability bias, it can be explained that, knowing about wars, crises, pandemics, and the like, it is easier to imagine a dystopian world than one for which we have no reference points.

History: Historically, our achievements have been fragile. We see many examples of collapses, crises, etc., while victories seem to be more unstable.

Disaster productions: Culturally, it is more common for stories to be created within dystopias, which generate more drama and narrative tension, leaving us with few references to utopias.

CAPITALIST REALISM

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Capitalism” *

The feeling that the world is going to end, that we can do nothing, and that capitalism (however disastrous) is the best thing that could happen has been described by Mark Fisher as “Capitalist Realism.” Basically, it is a theory that posits that the only way society can function is through capitalism. This also occurs in a scenario where several things converge:

- It has become omnipresent: capitalism has become so much a part of our culture that even dystopias occur within it, not beyond it.
- It has colonized minds and culture: it is no longer just an economic system, but a system that dominates all aspects of life. Even well-being and mental health have been capitalized.
- Depoliticization: When alternatives to capitalism sound utopian, “naive,” or impossible, we fall into the trap of thinking that “that’s just the way things are,” and we resign ourselves to them continuing as they are, failing to consider that it is a consequence of politics.
- False alternatives: Many anti-capitalist narratives that foreground human, ecological, or community values are ultimately absorbed by capitalism through forms of green, social, or pinkwashing, distorting these movements without addressing the underlying problem.

Here everything seems possible—except the end of capitalism.

*It is attributed to Mark Fisher, although it is said that he took it from Fredric Jameson, but it basically sums up the current feeling.

THERE IS STILL HOPE

Everyone tells us it's impossible to change the world, or to end capitalism, yet, just under 200 years ago, the idea that monarchies could end seemed impossible. Today, most of western countries live in democracy.

It seems we are an island in the middle of a sea of realists. But our numbers are growing. You don't need to live in a hippie commune to believe in hope. It's enough to be a citizen living in a building in a European capital with an average salary to do something for change.

Ernest Bloch says that utopian thinking is simply thinking "things could be better."

Today, imagination alone, is already an act of rebellion, but let's explore what else we can do.

The key to utopian thinking is that it is a political act; it implies awareness, responsibility, and action from ourselves.



FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

Easy steps to keep moving inspite
caos

1 Identify what worries you the most and how it makes you feel.

2 Identify your superpower

3 Choose only one problem

4 Look for inspo

5 Commit to an action

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

1

Identify what worries you the most and how it makes you feel

Chances are, we've all felt fear, frustration, anger, and a host of other uncomfortable emotions when we talk about the current state of the world. From the climate crisis to youth unemployment, unwanted loneliness, and the housing bubble. A Buddhist or yoga retreat is useless if, when we emerge, the world is just as it was before.

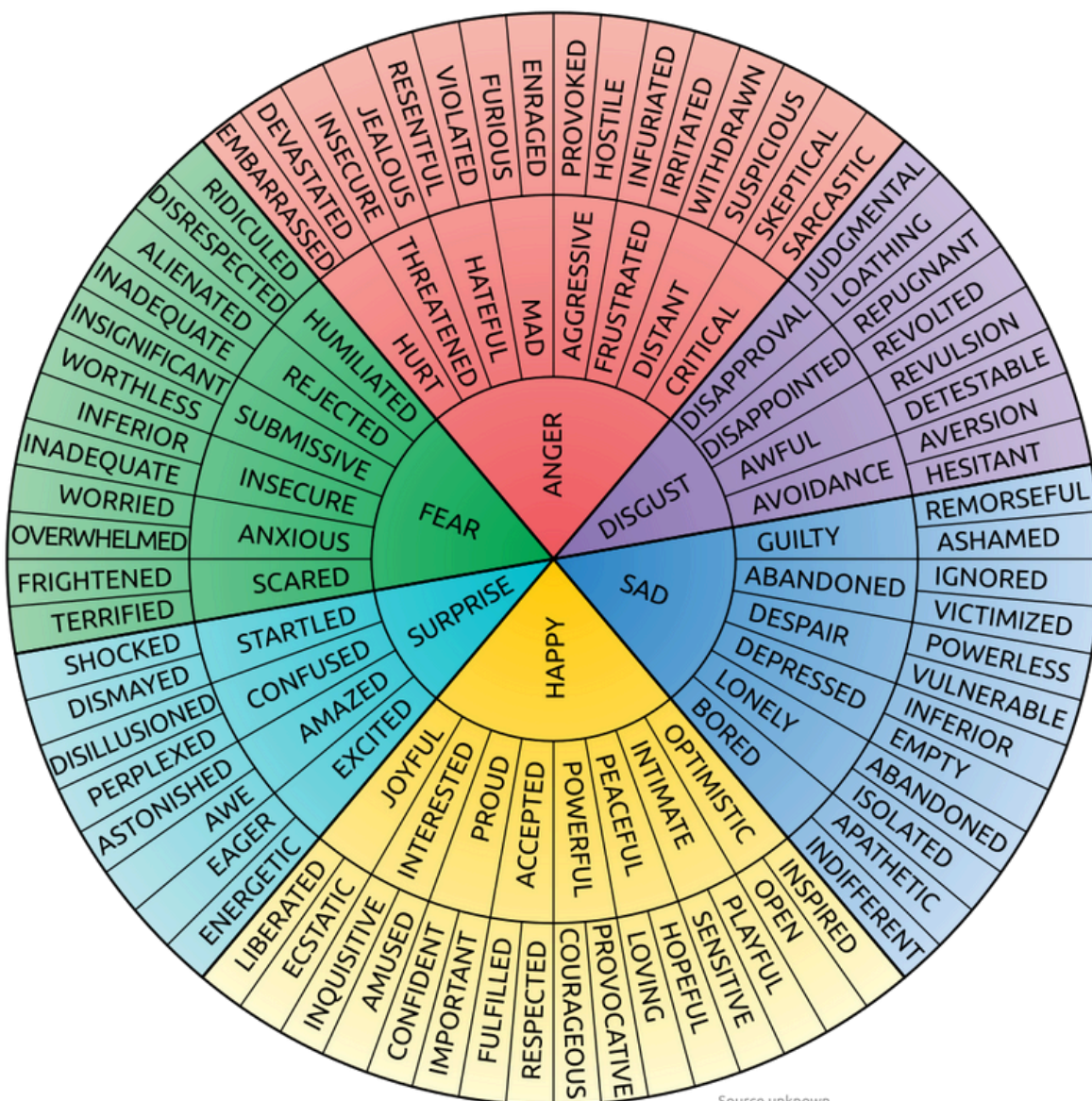
Don't hide them, deny them, or try to change them. Sometimes, these uncomfortable emotions are precisely the impetus we need to take action, to do something more, to take that final step toward that small change that pulls us out of our comfort zone but aligns us with what we believe could be a better world.

You can make a list of things you'd like to change, sad news stories, or scenarios that worry you.

At Self and Utopia, we created a guided meditation that can help you accept what you're feeling. You can also use the emotions wheel below to identify where you are in your emotional journey.

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

Identify what worries you the most and how it makes you feel



FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

2 Identify your superpower

The fact that everything depends on the system, that there's a younger person than us achieving astronomical success while we're still struggling to finish our master's degree or land our first job, can be frustrating. So much so that it makes us feel like maybe we're not good at anything. (Or at least not good enough).

But at **Self and Utopia**, we're convinced that everyone is good at something: listening to our friends, cooking, communicating, giving the best hugs, writing reports, cleaning the house... You don't need to be the best, or even receive an award for it. It's enough to know ourselves and know that there are things we're definitely good at.

It can even be something that at some point seemed like a weakness. For example, if you're very idealistic and insist that your work has a purpose, it can be frustrating when companies don't share your concerns, but you can turn that into a superpower that drives you to find a job that's a better fit for you, or that makes you seek out or create alternatives yourself.

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

2 Identify your superpower

You might draw, write, color, paint... or create anything you feel represents your superpower (they can be more than one)

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

3

Choose only one problem

We all want to end world hunger, stop wars, prevent housing speculation, keep our cities from flooding due to climate change, and ensure that no one is driven to suicide by cyberbullying. Paradoxically, this very desire for everything to change at once leads to paralysis. If the problems are so big, distant, and numerous, it's easier to feel powerless and overwhelmed. We end up doing nothing because everything seems lost.

No. We can do much more than we think. We just have to organize our actions. So, to begin (you can choose more later), from the list you made of things that bother you, choose just one on which you will take **concrete action**.

You can choose it according to several criteria:

- How significant your impact can be.
- Whether you study or work in an area where you can do something about it.
- How close it is to you.
- Whether there is a connection that brings you especially closer to that issue.

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

3

Choose only one problem

What really matters here isn't the extravagance of the action, nor the number of people you reach. **What truly matters is that you know there's something, however small, you can do.** Even if it's just sharing information on social media (you're already raising awareness). Or if it's buying from the local market, you're actively supporting local businesses.

A small change can be the catalyst for many others, but the important thing is that you choose that problem where you can put your initial energy.



FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

4

Look for inspo

Taking action, breaking the rules, and doing things differently from what we've been told to consider ideal is often complex.

We might feel alone, or even feel crazy. That's why seeking inspiration, companionship, and support is essential.

Once you take the first step, you'll realize that there are many more people who think like you; people who want things to be different and who act to make it so.

Big changes begin with small steps, and knowing that someone else is doing things can motivate you to do something.

Here are a couple of examples from the Self and Utopia team:

- **Alba and Robin** disagreed with the way art is managed, so they created [Barrufe Visual](#), an art collective designed for people, with the premise that we can all make art.
- **Alejandra** (who is a migrant) felt that migration stories didn't represent her reality, so she decided to create a podcast on the subject (Migrantes Anónimas).
- **Javier** disagrees with conventional social networks, so he deleted his instagram account, and is now in the "fediverse" (a decentralized alternative to Meta, X and TikTok).

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

5

Commit to an action

Here comes the most complex part: taking action. This requires energy, time, and sometimes even money. It will usually require effort. That's why it's best to commit to a simple action that makes sense to you and that you feel you can maintain for a while (*even if the world doesn't change*). It's important to commit to the process, not the result.

If you're concerned about urban mobility, you can commit to making at least one trip a week by public transport or bicycle (it doesn't have to be every single one).

If you're concerned about local businesses, you can start doing some of your shopping at local shops instead of corporate chains.

Perhaps you're a nutritionist concerned about fatphobia and dedicate yourself to sharing accurate and verified information on social media, in addition to teaching at the university. Despite it being a global problem, you take action within your means. (**Like Dr. Denisse Kohn**, in Chile).

FROM PARALYSIS TO ACTION

5

Commit to an action

Every action counts. Sometimes we can do smaller things that only impact our family. For example, if you're worried about the division of household chores, at Christmas you can take over from the person who usually makes dinner, or babysit your friends' children for a day. You can go meatless once a week, donate blood, volunteer at a local organization, donate to an NGO you believe in, sign up for service-learning at your university, promote your friends' businesses on social media...

Or, you can think very big. Like them:

- **Norah Marego**, an engineer who brought solar energy to several villages in Kenya isolated from the national power grid. (Perhaps her superpower is engineering, and she solved a problem close to home, in her own country).
- **Ramón Méndez Galaín**, a physicist who spearheaded the renewable energy transition project in Uruguay. Today, 99% of the country's energy is renewable.
- **Sumant Kumar**, an Indian farmer who, with the SRI system, with 70% less methane emissions and 50% less water, broke the record for the highest rice production in India.

EVERYDAY INSPO

You´re not the only one who wants to change the world

Netflix bought Warner, Gaza is for sale to millionaires, Trump wants to take Greenland, global temperatures continue to rise...

But there are also many people changing history, like them:

- **Linus Torvalds:** he created a free and open-source operating system (Linux).
- **Tim Berners-Lee:** who created Solid (a platform for using third-party applications, but where you have control over your data).
- **David Isay:** he created Story Corps, an independent, non-profit project that shares stories of Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life.
- **Artelixo:** an anonymous collective that began by denouncing an illegal garbage dump and is now an art festival using recycled materials in Redondela.
- **Father Godfrey Nzamujo,** a Nigerian-American priest who in 1980 created a self-sustaining farm that reuses all its waste. It currently receives more than 20,000 visitors a year.
- **Angela Cuevas,** a Colombian lawyer who created Nashira, a self-managed eco-village run by women to provide housing for single mothers who did not have a home.

MORE INSPO

We already said that hope is a skill that needs to be practiced every day.

When the initial enthusiasm of this toolkit wears off, or if you're so excited that you want to read everything about utopia, here are some resources that might be useful:

- **Project Drawdown** (a platform where you can find scientifically proven solutions to problems related to climate change).
- **Transition Network:** a website with resources to help your community become a transition group and drive the change it wants to see.
- **Hope:** a 6-episode Spanish series about current and real solutions to the climate crisis. (It is in spanish)
- **Everyday Utopias: What 2,000 Years of Experiments Can Teach Us About Living Well:** a book about utopias throughout history.
- **Activists of Love:** a book to rethink hate speech and how love can be revolutionary. (It is in Spanish).

YOU´RE THE ONLY ONE MISSING

According to Erica Chenoweth, it only takes 3.5% of a country's (or city's) population to be committed and actively working to generate real change.

Utopia is not something we wait for to happen, it is something that happens with every thought, with every person, with every action we take.

Let´s be part of that 3,5%



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Toolkit

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Partner organizations:

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