

The Democracy Rainbow: Every Voice Adds a Color

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE 2026 SEOUL

The **IYTT's 8th International Youth Conference** presents 12 proposals to promote democracy and invigorate youth participation.

This time, we gathered in Seoul. Twenty-four of us, from twelve countries and three continents, each carrying a different relationship to the city we met in. We came together to ask a simple but uncomfortable question: is democracy actually working?

None of us agreed on much walking in. We grew up under different governments, different freedoms, different silences. But we shared one worry — that democracy rarely collapses all at once. It fades quietly, when people stop believing their voice reaches past their own front door. So for four days, we chose curiosity over certainty, listening over talking past each other, and the discomfort of being challenged over the ease of being agreed with.

We didn't come here for easy answers. We came to think honestly, and to leave with something truer than what we walked in with — twenty-four different lives, one shared attempt to figure out what democracy still owes us, and what we still owe it.

FROM YOUTH VOICES TO DEMOCRATIC ACTION

8TH IYTT YOUTH CONFERENCE



What happens when we stop feeling that democracy belongs to us? Democracy doesn't collapse in a single day. It fades over time when people are disconnected from the real conversation outside the power corridors. Democracy erodes when people stop believing that their voices matter beyond their own front door. We are 24 young people who believe democracy must begin with curiosity and participation: the willingness to ask, to listen, and to act. When that curiosity fades, so does participation and trust, leaving only exclusion. Our ideas work to transform our everyday encounters into spaces where listening is real and the consequences are visible. The goal is challenging but clear, to revive democracy's most basic pulse of belonging.

Somewhere along the way, we lost sight of what we owe each other. We've traded convenience for inefficiency, truth for misinformation, and connection for chatbots, building walls so high that all we see beyond them is hostility. Tearing them down isn't optional: caring and communicating are democracy's precondition, and fighting apathy is where that work begins. Every voice fills a color in democracy's rainbow, but when power concentrates in distant institutions, people fade into silence, feeling unseen. Reviving that spectrum means bringing every perspective back to the same table, turning reflection into dialogue and local collaboration — so democracy stays shaped by everyone it touches.

THEMES



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We worked on proposals surrounding four themes: **Desirable Spaces**, **Information**, **Otherness** and **Agency**.

DESIRABLE SPACES



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Desirable Spaces are physical spaces and infrastructure that create accessible, more casual opportunities for people to participate in civic life, making participation feel natural, engaging, and part of everyday life. The challenge is often not a lack of interest, but a lack of opportunities to participate in ways that feel natural and engaging.

MAPPING TOGETHER



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Anyone who, at some point, has tried to organize a meeting or event has found that spaces are too expensive, already booked, or simply difficult to find.

While this may seem like a small inconvenience, it can become a real barrier to civic participation. Information about public spaces is scattered across different platforms, making it unnecessarily difficult to find and access a place to gather.

The proposal **Mapping Together** brings this information to a centralized platform, where people can find available spaces, check their accessibility, and book them, all on the same site. This proposal aims to **connect existing resources** rather than building new infrastructure.

Ultimately, this proposal seeks to create **better access** to information, activate underutilized spaces, and strengthen local participation. This means treating physical space as equally important as mental space, creating environments that encourage connection, participation, and a sense of belonging.

PUBLIC CANVAS



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Even when people have access to physical public spaces, that doesn't necessarily mean they feel comfortable participating in democratic discussion. Civic conversations can feel too formal or intimidating, creating another barrier for people who may be interested but lack an approachable opportunity to engage.

Our proposal **Public Canvas** brings these conversations into **everyday public areas**, such as sidewalks or parks, through interactive artwork.

This proposal would involve local or emerging artists to create unfinished works around relevant issues, inviting passersby to complete them through stickers, tokens, or colors representing different perspectives. Their responses become part of the artwork, making community perspectives clearly visible.

Placed in public spaces through municipal collaboration and a consistent visual identity, these installations create **accessible, informal entry points to discussion**.

Through this proposal, Public Canvas encourages broader participation and provides people more opportunities to encounter perspectives they might not otherwise engage with.

MICRO-DOSING DEMOCRACY

CHALLENGES	PROPOSAL	IMPACTS
• Participation remains inaccessible • Already-engaged voices dominate • Apathy reinforces itself	HYPERLOCAL CIVIC MICRO-VOTING • One minute, QR-based micro-voting • Immediate feedback • Institutionalize accessible participation	• Enhance political self-efficacy • Increase representative participation • Strengthen democratic culture

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One reason for low-participation democracy is that local decision-making can feel time-consuming, inaccessible, and difficult to navigate. As a result, already-engaged voices can become overrepresented, while others remain underrepresented.

Our proposal **Micro-Dosing Democracy** makes participation **simple, local, and immediate**.

Municipalities identify small, feasible projects with a fixed budget, then place a QR code or paper questionnaire directly at the site where the decision needs to be made, allowing residents to give their input on the spot. For example, in a local park, we could ask, “We have x dollars to improve this space. Would you like us to plant more trees or build a shade?”

Even with questions this trivial, residents can choose in under a minute and immediately see how their vote contributes to the live community tally. That immediate feedback makes participation feel more tangible.

While the decisions themselves may be small, they give people an **initial gateway** to feel heard and see their participation create real change. Over time, this can build trust and make it simpler for citizens and governments to exchange ideas on more complex issues further down the line.

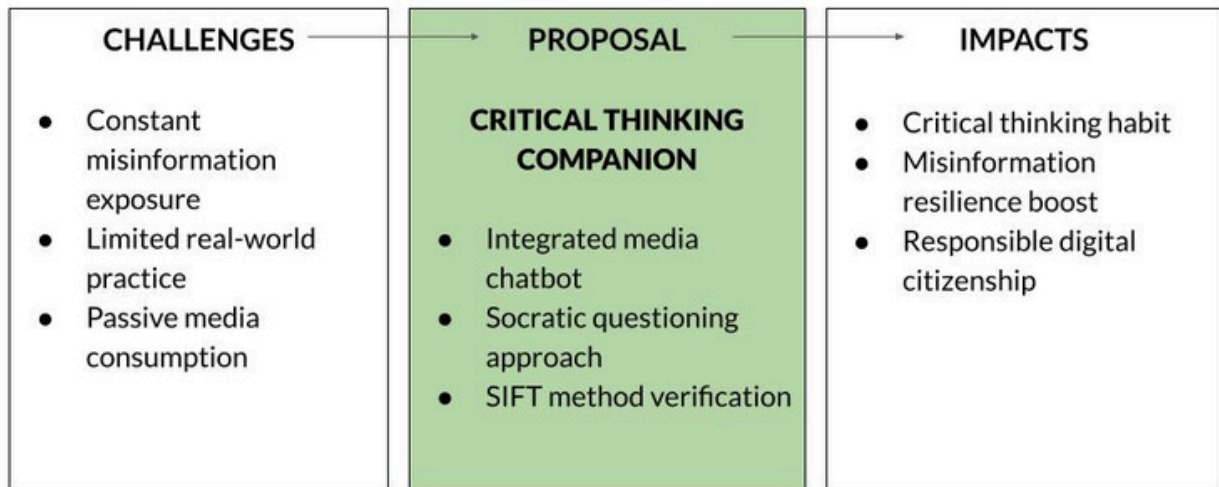
INFORMATION



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The second theme, **Information**, focuses on how we can better provide and consume information for democracy. Information is a critical part of democracy because it empowers citizens to make informed choices, participate in policymaking, and hold those in power accountable.

CRITICAL THINKING COMPANION

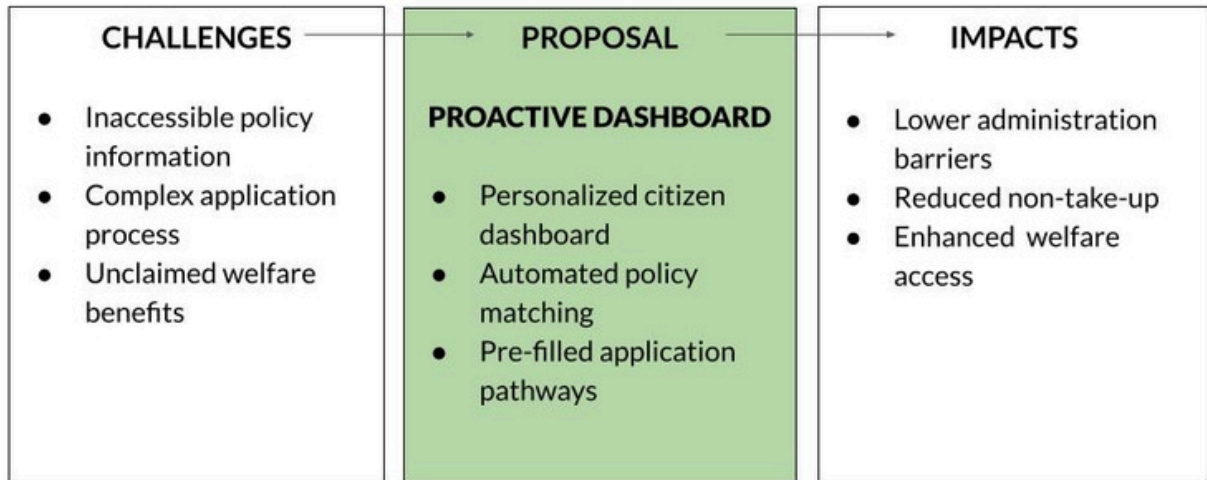


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As our generation is growing up in a social media-driven world, we are constantly exposed to misinformation. Young people need more opportunities to practice critical thinking in real-life situations rather than only learning in the classroom. Critical Thinking Companion is an integrated feature that works alongside users while they consume media, for example on Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. Our proposal, **Critical Thinking Companion**, works like a chatbot widget while scrolling through your feed.

Instead of simply telling users whether information is true or false, the companion encourages them to evaluate information independently. By posing critical questions such as “Who created this information?”, “What evidence supports this claim?”, or “What is the source of the information?” This helps users to employ the SIFT method. This stands for Stop, Investigate the Source, Find Trusted Coverage, and Trace claims back to the source. This companion can help users build the habit of thinking critically, become more resilient against misinformation, and develop into active citizens.

PROACTIVE DASHBOARD

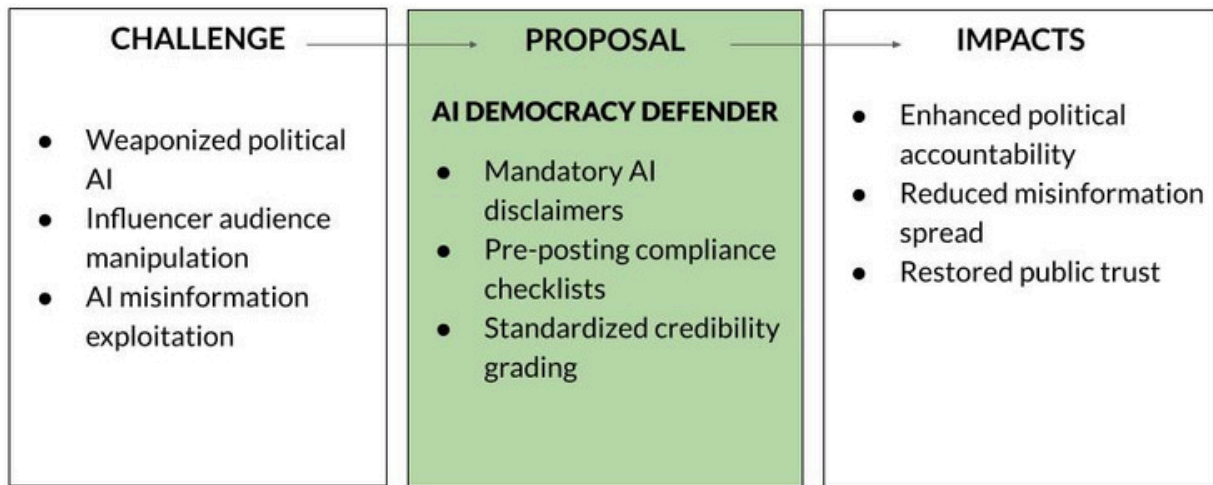


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Policy information is not always accessible to everyone, especially within the current application-based welfare system. This creates a significant non-take-up rate, leaving many eligible citizens unaware of or unable to access the benefits they are entitled to. Our proposal, **Proactive Dashboard**, functions as a **personalized platform** that provides individual-tailored policy information. This can be implemented within existing government websites.

Through streamlined notifications, the dashboard can identify eligible beneficiaries and connect them directly to relevant application portals, and it will reduce the confusion involved in accessing welfare programs. By making policy information more accessible, this dashboard can lower systemic barriers to political participation and help ensure that all citizens can access the social welfare benefits they are entitled to.

AI DEMOCRACY DEFENDER



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As AI becomes increasingly integrated into politics and social media, it creates new challenges of political manipulation. Politicians may weaponize AI for political activities, collaborate with influencers to reach wider audiences, and exploit AI to spread misleading information. Our proposal, **AI Democracy Defender**, is a system designed to promote transparency in an Independent fact-checking system, using publicly stated standards.

It would require politicians and influencers to complete an **AI ethics qualification** before posting AI-generated political content, provide clear disclaimers when AI is used, and complete a verification checklist. Platforms would also share alerts when AI-generated disinformation is confirmed. A standardized **AI credibility grading system** would be displayed on profile accounts, which rates the overall trustworthiness of the account's contents based on user evaluations. This defender system can **reduce disinformation** while protecting citizens.

AGENCY



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What if democracy begins with a simple, unsettling question: Why do we do things the way we do? We believe that **Agency** begins when we question and doubt existing ideas and beliefs. These doubts can grow into the conviction and hope that young people can lead change when necessary. Trauma, inequality, complexity, and learnt helplessness can make democracy feel distant, flawed, or even controlled by others (rather than by ourselves). In response, we present three proposals that transform doubt into a shared civic practice.

CHOOSING WHAT WE INHERIT



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Some habits are inherited so quietly that they begin to feel inevitable. Our proposal, **Keep-or-Toss**, confronts **inherited habits**. Choices framed by older generations. Generational traumas reproducing passivity. And the learnt helplessness left within us. Then, how does it sound? Four times a year, diverse residents gather around to answer four simple questions: What habits of civic participation do I have today? Do I like them? Are they helping me? Am I going to keep them?

Together, participants decide whether to keep their own habits or bring new ones. A hybrid format involving both online and offline participation includes people with limited mobility and offers engagement. By questioning inherited habits, the individual builds reflection, self-agency, and restores their capabilities for civic actions.

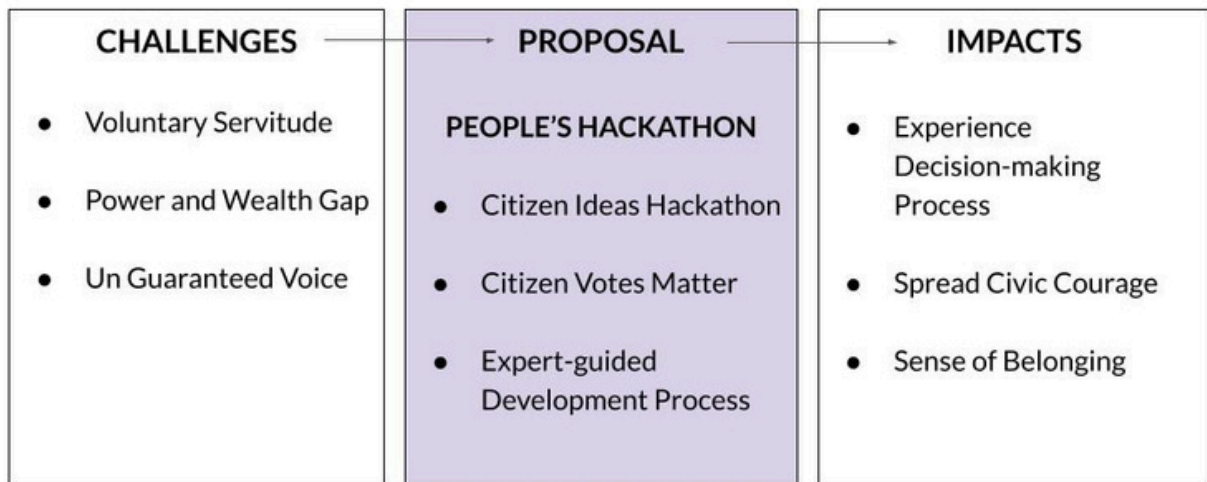
EXPERIENCING WHAT'S POSSIBLE



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Well, having capability is the foundation for knowing what is possible. But what if someone has never had the chance to explore what agency is? Another proposal, **Civic Potluck**, suggests a regional civic gathering where lacking taste of agency, inherited discouragement, and limited imagination are confronted, and democratic ideas are made tangible and understandable. These gatherings use **simple language, stories, and experience** to show how different political regimes shape daily life. Participants bring their stories to the table and explore the stories of others. The purpose is to present the possibilities to design your own governance, enhance civic participation, and renew political culture.

FROM VOICE TO ACTION



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Sometimes, the citizens are invited to speak and participate, but their voices do not really produce action. In this sense, we want to tackle the voluntary servitude where citizens grow used to their voices being unguaranteed. **People's Hackathon** breaks this by guaranteeing a change. Citizens identify a problem, develop a project with experts' support, and vote for the proposal they want implemented. **The result must be real.** The regional government implements the chosen project by a public deadline and reports progress transparently. With this civic hackathon, participants experience how a decision-making process works, gaining courage to actively participate and a sense of belonging to the community. The whole process reflects **the agency that I need, I want, and I must have.**

OTHERNESS



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Another theme is **Otherness**. Broadly, 'otherness' is defined by the quality or state of being perceived, felt, or treated as different from a dominant social norm or group. Sociopolitically, it refers to the state of not being able to actively participate in political, democratic discussions or exercise basic political rights. At its extreme, the concept could apply to anyone. In our case, we will primarily discuss minorities who have the right to vote but are unempowered, and those who literally don't have the right to vote.

COUNCIL OF THE DISENFRANCHISED



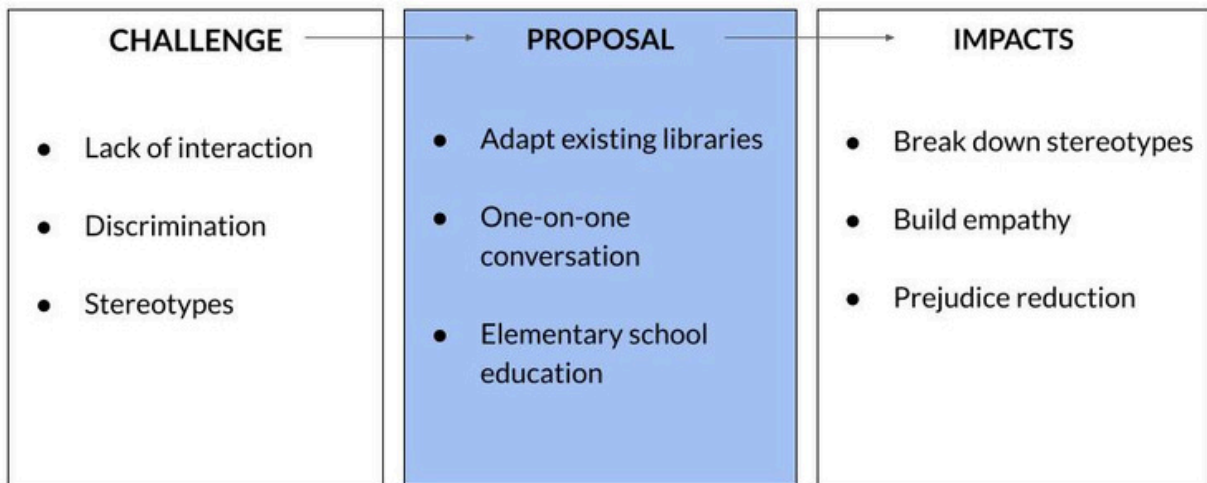
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Immigrants and undocumented workers can face workplace exploitation and discrimination because unstable visa status limits their ability to report abuses or access representation.

Thus, we suggest a new governmental committee, the **Council of the Disenfranchised**, that will provide free legal and visa assistance and represent immigrants' concerns to policymakers. The Council will consist of immigrant representatives, selected using a jury-style process to ensure diversity in nationality, age, gender, occupation, and immigration status. Representatives will serve six-month terms during which they will identify problem areas and propose and scrutinise relevant policies. The Council will also operate an independent reporting system for discrimination and abuse. Although initially focused on immigrants, this model can be expanded to other unempowered communities, allowing each of them to establish its own representative council.

This can strengthen political participation, solidarity, and institutional representation of the others.

HUMAN LIBRARY



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We think that the root cause of “otherness” is the lack of meaningful interaction between marginalized groups and the wider population. When people rarely interact with those who have different experiences, they may rely on stereotypes rather than personal understanding.

We thus propose the **Human Library**, adapting existing public libraries into permanent spaces for one-on-one conversations and workshops with paid “Human Books”, which is a metaphor for people from different backgrounds who share their stories. These sessions would be incorporated into elementary school education as well.

By creating regular opportunities for direct interaction, the program breaks down stereotypes, builds empathy, and reduces otherness across generations. This will also allow the others to have fulfilling interactions with the public.

DEMOCRACY WITHOUT BARRIERS FUND



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Our proposal **Democracy Without Barriers Fund** addresses the intersection of two challenges: first, people with disabilities often struggle to fully understand election candidates' proposals. Simultaneously, implementing disability-friendly features to the political materials can be burdensome to low-budget candidates.

Thus, we propose a state-mandated and controlled election campaign fund. It is a special-purpose, governmental funding system that financially supports candidates to implement disability-friendly accommodations to their campaign materials. This can range from sign language translation and subtitles for campaign videos to producing posters with braille.

We expect this proposal to release financial burdens from political candidates to foster inclusivity, which will then help people with disabilities understand political proposals better.

And with that, we come to the end of our proposals and the ideas shared throughout this conference. But the conversations around democracy, equality, and the role of young people do not end here. As Willie Stargell said, **“That is where the future lies. In the youth of today.”** We hope these ideas stay with you beyond these pages and inspire you to take part, speak up, and contribute in your own way. Thank you for taking the time to read our conference proceedings. The full conference report is now available on the official International Youth Think Tank (IYTT) website, where you can explore our discussions and proposals in greater detail. We hope you will stay connected with IYTT and continue being part of the conversation.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the **Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)** for graciously hosting the conference and providing an inspiring setting for our gathering. We are especially thankful to Dave H. Kim and Sohna Ngum at GGGI for their support, and to H.E. Ban Ki-moon and GGGI Director Sang Hyup Kim for their welcoming and closing remarks.

The conference was made possible through the generous grant to the IYTT from the **Stena A. Olsson Foundation** and grant administration by **Lindholmen Science Park**. We also extend our appreciation to **VALID**, the **Younan Movement**, and the **Embassy of Sweden** for their steady partnership and support.

We warmly thank all our special speakers, invited speakers, commenters, and facilitators for generously sharing their time, expertise, and perspectives throughout the conference. Their contributions helped make the conference an inclusive and meaningful space for all participants.

Finally, our special thanks go to Urban Strandberg, Director of IYTT, for bringing us together and setting the stage for the shared journey ahead, and to Project Coordinator Elena Vocale for her meticulous conference planning efforts. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this valuable gathering of 24 youth fellows.

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It is now possible to find more detailed descriptions of our proposals in the conference report which is published on our website

<https://iythinktank.com>

We invite you to join us in amplifying our proposals and building a future where every voice is represented and heard!

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