

UTOPIAN IMAGINATION IN ACTIVISM

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MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

MASTER THESIS

UTOPIAN IMAGINATION IN ACTIVISM

Making the case for social
dreaming in change from the grassroots.

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Abstract

Social, economic, and environmental inequalities are becoming ever starker. Unrest grips certain areas of the world incidentally, but no structured and promising movement beyond neoliberal capitalism is on the horizon. The status quo is consolidated as the only alternative. Grassroots activists working towards better worlds are often put in their place for being utopian, thus unrealistic. Therefore, much of today's activism is rooted in an anti-stance working towards little reforms to prevent the worst. Is there any hope? This research aims to uncover whether or not utopian imagination (UI) could be one option leading in a new direction and subsequently how this imagination could be fostered. After reviewing and analysing the existing literature, a qualitative survey with activists was conducted. The findings suggest that while conceptions of a better world motivate and inform activism they are often hidden and rarely fostered or used in a structured way. Activists mostly see a high value and many benefits in UI. Only a few manageable negative side-effects were discovered. A multitude of tools for fostering UI was compiled from the findings. It became clear, however, that beyond fostering the imagination there is the need for a framework to translate visions into actions and transformation. Prefiguration, story-telling, and popular education are promising concepts and open the space for further research.



Illustration 1: A Wordle of the 80 most used words in the thesis without 'respondent'.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full
CDRA	Community Development Resource Association
EU	European Union
GJM	Global Justice Movement
IROS	Imaginary Reconstitution Of Society
LDT	Liberal Democratic Theory
RI	Radical imagination
SECC	The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee
T.A.B.O.O.	There are Billions of Options
TAMA	There are many alternatives
TAZ	Temporary Autonomous Zones
TINA	There is no alternative
UI	Utopian imagination
zine	A self-published booklet, derived from magazine

1 Introduction: There is no alternative?

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand. (Albert Einstein)

There is no alternative. TINA. This narrative coined by Thatcher has permeated the fabric of western society throughout, including those who see themselves as members of social movements in general, and the alter-globalisation or global justice movement specifically. At the same time, neoliberal capitalism has survived its heaviest crisis and emerged even stronger, despite all the efforts activists have put into affecting change. Is neoliberalism just too intelligent and too powerful for any resistance to be successful or is there a need to revise activist strategies and tactics? What could be done to achieve a better world?

Reinsborough (2010, p. 70) says "people will only go someplace they have already been in their mind". This shows the importance of continual imagination towards a new narrative, a new vision for a post-capitalist order in a collective process. The aim of this research is to explore utopian imagination as one method to make changes more likely, and to provide movement actors with any learning gained. By doing so it will hopefully contribute to the ability of movement actors to incorporate utopian imagination into their practices and add towards a narrative of 'There are many alternatives (TAMA)' or, as Dorothea Smartt puts it, "There are Billions of Options (T.A.B.O.O.)" (cited in Reinsborough, 2010, p. 74).

There is extensive research already in the field of utopian studies, mostly regarding the study of literature forms of expression of utopia. However, many writers do make comments about the power of utopia to change the world. Yet, others criticise utopian projects for their dangers. Little can be found on the actual impact that utopian thinking, let alone utopian practices, can have on the success of campaigns and movements. Firstly, there is the need to investigate what activists as those who work towards change from the grassroots think about utopian imagination. And secondly there is the need to explore how utopia as a method can be fostered in activist circles.

Therefore, this research sets out to explore the following questions:

- 1. To what extent does utopian imagination play a role in activism?*
- 2. What is the state of utopian imagination in activism?*
- 3. Is utopian imagination beneficial or detrimental for activism?*
- 4. How could utopian imagination be fostered?*

These questions were explored by conducting qualitative surveys with activists as well

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as a literature review. Before setting out to explain the structure of the thesis, further consideration of the background of this research project is needed.

We live in a time heavily influenced by the concepts of Thatcher's 'There is no alternative' and by Fukuyama's 'The end of history'. Thatcher used the expression often to devalue any proposed alternatives to her line of neoliberalism, binding it with a necessitarian view (Munck, 2003, p. 495; Robinson, n.d.). Fukuyama saw the end of history when the Soviet Union collapsed, with liberal democracy and capitalism left as the only political and economic system (Fukuyama, 2013, p. 31; Mueller, 2014, p. 35). These two ideas have arguably influenced not only the political agendas in many countries, but also transnational institutions such as the EU (Wahl, 2012, p. 192). It closes down our minds to merely thinking along that what is, finding it harder and harder to imagine that what could be. This narrative has also influenced the way activists do activism, leading to mostly resistance based, reactionary approaches to activism, often using the same tactics now as then without thinking about any alternatives.

Today, those ideas can still be noticed in every-day politics, in the arguments and reasons that are brought forward to justify certain policies, enclosing the minds in a certain territory. In German politics, for example, solutions are often presented as 'alternativlos'¹, as under the pressures of technocratic 'Sachzwang'² (Nachtwey, 2013, p. 240). This shows a tendency to see technology or materialistic needs as the agents of change as if there was only one certain solution because of how the system needs to function³. Rather than trying to find and discuss multiple solutions, the proposals and thoughts stay within the realm and logic of neoliberalism. For example, things need to be done to achieve growth, but the question whether growth is even needed is not taken into serious consideration (Victor, 2010, p. 370). This shows that there are unspoken limits and boundaries imposed on the way we see things, and the way we think about things. Often enough, the mathematical orthodox neoliberal calculations make sense if viewed from the inside of their own logics.

Capitalism is (in) crisis, and one way to frame this is as a *crisis of reproduction*, which has significant effects on everyone, and doubly so on activists. Not only is the capitalist system itself in crisis but it also generates the crisis of reproduction which manifests as the influence through multiple forms of exploitation from “patriarchal, homophobic, [to] white supremacists” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 94). Reproduction in this sense means how the social realm is being continually crafted by our acts or idleness.

1 German: without alternative

2 German: inherent necessity

3 This is reflected in the writings of Marcuse (1969, pp. 9, 35): “Utopian possibilities are inherent in the technical and technological forces of advanced capitalism and socialism. [...] The imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the radical reconstruction of experience.”

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Activists can be seen as people who try to reproduce the social realm in a different way, trying to establish new iterative structures that manifest wished-for values such as “solidarity, compassion, equality, and empowerment” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 94). In doing so, activists often are affected by the second aspect of the crisis of reproduction, in the sense of how the general crisis affects the ability of activists and movements to reproduce themselves (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 95).

Activists and social movements are actors who try to imagine and create social change in the world they live in, as well as building zones within which participants can directly live in an alternative social construct. Most activists' actions are motivated by the rejection of how a certain aspect of life is at the moment, or by protecting a current state from a change that might lead to an even worse situation. Therefore they try to exert influence on “policy, institutional and organizational systems, or cultural norms” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 8), especially for those who do believe that the problems are rooted in the foundation of the system. In the last forty years, it has become more important for many activists to create the wished for social norms and values in the here and now, mainly in their internal processes, an aspiration called *prefiguration* (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, pp. 9–11). So, for activists, it is not only about changing the external environment, but also the way how this is done, forming small enclaves of change.

Movements often sacrifice internal anti-oppression work towards short term political and technocratic gains. For Bishop (2002, p. 42), the oppression within social movements is the result of *power over*, and therefore needs movements to work on it within themselves, in addition to challenging it in society. This is based on the idea that time is scarce, and that this scarce resource needs to be optimally distributed (Walia & Smith, 2013, pp. 173–202). Bishop draws attention to the need for hope, thrill, and bliss in the work of activists (Bishop, 2002, pp. 148–9). In order to start to (re)produce movements that incorporate anti-oppression Haiven and Khasnabish call for a departure from “scarcity and sacrifice” to embracing abundance and difference (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 205). By doing so, movements can leave behind previous conditioning and build structures that empower “solidarity and autonomy” within new systems of cooperation (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, pp. 205–206). This shows the importance of creating space and time for the imagination and for thinking about potential ways to achieve that which is imagined.

Understanding the benefit of the hiatus between success and failure helps to re-frame experiences and open spaces for utopian thinking. Understanding the concept of what is successful or not as inherently framed by a neoliberal logic leads to questioning whether and how failures could actually be “sites of rupture and possibility” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 123). Introducing not-success, and not-failure, the authors break the usual binary of evaluating social movements, resulting in the idea of four synthesis

states: collective potential, gains, culture, and burn out (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 126,127). The collective potential can be seen as the space where wishful, utopian thinking takes place that animates and directs the actions of the movement participants (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 130).

In the following chapter this research will be placed in context by exploring what it could mean for activist research that is itself a project of prefiguration, creating insurrectionary knowledge in solidarity and with relevance to activists. This is followed by a short description of the methodology of the research. The next chapter comprises a literature review, starting with relevant theoretical concepts and followed by an exploration of the disadvantages and potential advantages of utopianism. After this review, the findings of the survey are presented. Subsequently, the findings will be analysed exploring the implications for theory and practice of utopian imagination. The paper then ends with a conclusion and outlook for further research and action.

2 Prefiguring activist research

“Be realistic. Demand the impossible!” (Wallslogan, Paris, 1968, cited in Moylan, 1986, p. 15)

Being the project of an activist-researcher, this research tries to challenge power and knowledge as it is usually re-produced in academia, producing information that is of value to “struggles for collective liberation”, and tries to countermand “oppression and exploitation” as well as hierarchies (Luchies, 2015, p. 524). In order to do that, Luchies (2015, p. 524) proposes ethics of *relevance*, *anti-oppression*, and *prefiguration* which this thesis aspires to follow. As the identity of the author of this thesis is more located within the activist than within the researcher new dynamics emerge and give their interest significance and relevance. The ethics of anti-oppression demand to ask questions such as “who owns it? whose interest does it serve? who will benefit from it?” (Luchies, 2015, p. 530). While the author will benefit from the research as such with the award of a degree, the wider benefit lies in advancing the theory and practice of social movements towards hopefully higher chances of making change happen. Further, results will be made accessible to movement actors. Prefiguration lastly brings the above two ethics together in a frame to prefigure research in the now as we want it to be in the future, with values of horizontality, “openness and indeterminacy” (Luchies, 2015, p. 533). This shifts the focus away from understanding movements towards imaginative activism that contributes to radical imagination (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012, p. 411) and social change.

As with any research, this thesis needs to be placed within its basic ontological beliefs. How does the researcher assume the world to be and how does this influences the research? Locating it within a postmodern ontology helps to further question power and knowledge, contesting what truth and reality really are. Closely interlinked with

participatory approaches, transformation happens through interaction. How people think about things becomes highly relevant when reality is “co-created by mind” and by the environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 102; Lincoln & Guba, 2005, p. 195). The imagination of what is, but even more so the imagination of what could be, can play a big part in making the wishes come true. This suggests that those forms of activism which are mostly concerned with countering the perceived negative aspects in society might be reproducing exactly those aspects which they set out to oppose.

Based on the ontological world view the epistemology follows with how the researcher thinks about the subject matter and how the research is assumed to be able to report on a truth, to generate valid knowledge. According to Heron & Reason (1997), there are four aspects of knowledge in a postmodern frame: “experimental, presentational, propositional, and practical” (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 103). This thesis concerns itself with the propositional form of knowledge. Rather than attempting to use statistical tools to generate a valid truth the aim is to propose why and in which ways it is relevant to concern ourselves as activists with the conscious re-production of society and all its aspects using utopian imagination. This doesn't devalue other approaches to activism or to a conscious re-production of social circumstances.

2.1 Methodology

The following section briefly explains the methodological aspects of the research, commenting on the literature review that was conducted as well as on the qualitative survey that was sent to activists. Reasons for the choice of methods and analysis will be given as well as their limitations and difficulties mentioned. Lastly, it will be explained how the findings will be fed back to activists.

An intensive literature review was chosen as a way to gain insight into the theoretic discussions of the merits and problems of a utopian approach. The focus was on learning lessons for practising utopian imagination, learning about the benefits as well as the potential shortfalls and dangers of a utopian method for achieving change. However, most of the literature is based on and revolving around utopia in fiction and not so much around applied utopian processes or projects. The review thus needed to be combined with consultation of activists to bring literature theory and experience of those working towards change together.

Therefore, an online qualitative-survey was designed and distributed using a data and privacy conscious open source provider⁴. This questionnaire focused on the research questions while leaving space for any other thoughts people wanted to share. The survey was solely conducted in English even though some non-native speakers were invited to participate in the survey.

⁴ The open source platform used was LimeSurvey (available at <http://www.limesurvey.com>) using their hosting platform LimeService (available at <https://www.limeservice.com/en/>).

Methodology

The method of an online survey was chosen for its accessibility without geographical limitations, as well as for its time-saving aspects. It also allows people to really contribute anonymously which may lift any inhibitions activists might have about criticising their movements and groups or about sharing their deepest beliefs and thoughts around activism. The survey was designed and advertised in a way that activists would feel little aversion to completing it. Therefore, no demographic questions such as age or location of residence were included.

The survey was sent to two activist friends for testing⁵. The revised form of the questionnaire was then sent out in personal emails to 27 activist friends spread over Europe and partly followed up with face-to-face conversations. Additionally, it was sent out to the Galway Grassroots email list (about 50 subscribers), an email list of about 20 anarchists in Ireland, and to an anarchist activist email list centred in Europe with a few situated beyond all over the world (about 400 subscribers, many of which represent groups with an unknown number of members). Additionally, survey respondents were asked to forward the invitation for the survey to email lists and/or activist friends of theirs (a snowballing approach). In the two weeks that the survey was available, 38 people visited it, 21 of them leaving complete responses, 8 people leaving incomplete responses and 9 leaving no responses at all.⁶

The survey responses were analysed using a thematic analysis following an approach adopted by Savin-Baden & Major (2013, pp. 439–440). After a deep familiarization with the data, initial themes were named and responses grouped under them and later refined to produce a structured report. The emerging themes were compared with those the literature had suggested. Due to the limitations of the project this one-shot survey can be seen as one step of an iterative process, laying the foundation for further research.

Certain limitations and difficulties emerged from the research design that was chosen for this study. In alignment with the ontology and epistemology, no certain 'truth' could and wanted to be found. Further, the scope of replies could be limited. Even though it was sent out to lists with an attempt at snowballing, the activist friends were more likely to reply and could be biased pro utopian imagination. As the selection was not random there is the likelihood that some strata of activists are completely missing. The findings cannot be generalised to a higher level but do indeed provide insight into what activists think which has some theoretical universality. A slight difficulty emerged in regards to the anonymity of respondents: the researcher knew who the respondent was in some cases. However, all the ideas and tools that were collected in the process provide a valuable resource for activists to experiment, learn, and research into practices of UI

⁵ Some of the respondents were used as well and are accordingly labelled.

⁶ The answers of respondents are given using the ID the survey software assigned to them. No meta-data on the respondents was collected.

and continually improve them.

The findings will be reported and discussed in the respective sections. In addition to reporting the results in this thesis it is planned to compile the answers, especially those around tools into a resource for activists and then distribute them publicly⁷. This ensures that the research is not only movement-relevant but also gives back knowledge to those who helped generate it.

3 Learning from utopian studies

“Things are too urgent now to be giving up on our imagination”. (Morris cited in Giroux, 2014, p. 105)

Before going into the arguments against utopianism, central concepts that are used in this project are introduced: utopian thinking, utopia and ideology, utopia as method, and radical imagination, which will be combined into utopian imagination as understood in this research.

3.1 What is utopian imagination (UI)?

Utopia⁸ in this research is understood as a rough idea of how things could be better in the future, something that gives direction, and mobilises to action. It is not a perfect ideal world that needs to come into being exactly as it has been conceived. At its core is the desire for change (Levitas, 2010, pp. 208–9, 221). While utopia could be positive or negative (eutopian or dystopian), it is rooted in a rejection of the current situation and the will to improve things leading to “social dreaming”. Utopia is seen as an exercise of the mind, a process of trying out and leaning into possible and impossible alternatives. This helps to see that utopia will never come into being as it has been envisioned but stays a dynamic process of small steps with ever-changing horizons and directions (Sargisson, 2007, pp. 26, 30–32, 36). For, as Sargent puts it: with an aim in mind it is so much easier to get near to it (Sargent, 2007, p. 303).

Realizing that one's utopia can well be another's dystopia, the distinction between utopia and ideology becomes relevant. Drawing from Mannheim (1979) and Levitas (2007a, p. 289), the distinction becomes clear: ideology has the purpose to keep things the way they are while utopia attempts to change it (Isaksson, 2014, p. 120). One could see neoliberalism as a form of utopia that has become dominant and any attempts to further this former utopia is now an ideological project (Levitas, 2010, pp. 217–8). If utopian projects are rather fixed on a “set of moral principles” (Sargent, 2007, p. 307), if they are not open for change, they can easily turn into an ideology and hinder change by

⁷ The location of this information was communicated to participants in the invitation to the survey.

⁸ In the west, the word was first used by Thomas More in his book 'Utopia' written 1516 (1966).

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eliminating the multiplicity of possibilities (Sargent, 2007, p. 296,208, 214). Therefore, utopian thinking should be committed to “openness, movement, and surprise” and reject any attempts at (en)closing and limiting, especially the minds (Jacobs, 2007, p. 228).

Levitas (2007b) sees utopia as a method for social science as well as for actual transformation, including two aspects: the *analytical* and the *constructive*. The constructive mode is more relevant for activism, as it is concerned with building a new “architecture”, with changing the status quo and with finding out how to get there (Levitas, 2007b, pp. 47–49). Calling it the Imaginary Reconstitution Of Society (IROS), a process that is concerned with actual, potential, and wished for states of the society, propelled by the wish for a better life, Levitas sees utopia as “fragmentary, partial, elusive, and episodic” (Levitas, 2007b, pp. 47, 53–4). The method calls for fostering desire and exploration beyond the present conditioning leading to an experimental goal and potential ways how to get there. This goal is more seen as a starting point of a longer “discussion” (Levitas, 2007b, pp. 55, 64–5). As Bloch puts it, the aim is to go from “wishful thinking to will-full action” (cited in Levitas, 2007b, p. 53).

Radical imagination (RI)⁹ as a concept is something people do together to dream of and build worlds they want to see. While the imagination under neoliberalism is limited to the personal, social theorists still see it as a central for radical social change. Radical imagination as an iterative process based on collective work is always changing and something that cannot be “grasp[ed], measur[ed] or defin[ed]” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, pp. iii, xxviii; Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012, p. 411). The radical imagination is therefore something that is done together in groups and collectives, drawing both from the ability to imagine how things could be as well as from a filtering of present situations. The concept understands radical as departing from the very roots of the system. This means questioning and changing the very basics informed by an analysis that the current crisis is caused by basic strains and inequalities (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, pp. 4–5). The radical imagination is especially fruitful in circumstances when and where “tensions and conflicts” are brought into the open and cultivated through the differences of actors and ideas (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, pp. 7–8).

As there are many common aspects with radical imagination and utopianism, for the purpose of this research the concepts were combined into the concept of utopian imagination:

Utopian Imagination is something we *do* together, envisioning and working towards a better future that is radically, from its roots, different to the present. Utopian Imagination grows by bringing conflicts and differences into the open, leading to

9 To read more on radical imagination, look at these: RI in the global justice movement (Strasinger, 2010), in relation to narrative power (Reinsborough, 2010), neoliberalisms' war against it (Giroux, 2014), RI in the age of austerity (Khasnabish, 2014), in Social Work (Barnetz, 2015), anarchism (Antliff, 2010), and violence (Breton, 2011).

What is utopian imagination (UI)?

multiple, rough, and fussy ideas of how things could be better. It serves to give direction, inspire, and mobilise to action. It can be seen as a dynamic process of small steps, of trying out and leaning into with constant re-evaluation of values, horizons, and directions.¹⁰

Prefigurative politics or prefiguration is a useful concept for understanding why movement actors do things the way they do. It means removing the “temporal distinction” between the means and the ends (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p. 2). The concept means to act already now in the way in which the future is envisioned. So rather than putting the aims off in the far future and doing things in any way to achieve them, the future is attempted to be pulled into the now. Mostly, the concept refers to the process of organisation and action within the alter-globalisation movement. Concretely that leads, for example, to decision making by consensus and horizontal organisational structures (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p. 2). Prefigurative politics used to be seen as something that is different from strategy but Maeckelbergh (2011, p. 2) argues that in the alter-globalisation movement prefiguration has become the strategy especially in the wake of “no singular goal, adversary, or identity”. While recently the focus was mainly on process, Boggs (n.d.) argues that in the past prefigurative politics were also oriented towards institution building and to establish “collective popular structures” (Boggs, n.d.).

3.2 Utopia is a dangerous undertaking!

This section looks at author's who have voiced critique about the utopian method such as Popper, Schapiro, Fukuyama, Marx, Arendt, and Dahrendorf, counterbalancing them with rebuttals that have been made in defence of utopianism and drawing conclusions to inform a utopian activist practice. After a short overview of anti-utopian critique, the following will be examined: popular understanding, distraction from urgent work, diversion of transformative energy, perfectionism, closure, and ideological fixation, as well as authoritarianism. It will become clear that the argument mainly is based on a hidden utopian project for (neo)liberalism.

In Sargent's extensive discussion of anti-utopian and utopian thought, he quotes Kateb's (1963, pp. 220–1) summary of the anti-utopian critique: utopia is only achievable through force and sustaining it needs an “oppressive political regime” that is enforcing a consensus of harmful ideals and thus potentially excluding other, better ideals (Sargent, 1982, p. 578). This leads to the wide-spread equation of “utopianism with force, violence, [and] totalitarianism”, because someone is bound to dislike it or because flawed humans might not fit the blueprint. Sargent argues that this view is based on

¹⁰ This definition was compiled by the author and used in the survey.

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experiences of fascism and communism and the fear that “equality will rob us of freedom and individuality” (Sargent, 1982, pp. 568–9, 576). Sargent claims on the contrary that utopianism may well provide an antidote to totalitarian tendencies (Sargent, 1982, p. 575).

Popular understandings of the concept of utopia are anti-utopian and ideologically situated in conservatism. As Levitas (2007b, p. 50) points out, it is often understood as “impractical dreaming, perfect, [and] impossible”. A look in popular online dictionaries further reveals its conservative nature: “a perfect society in which everyone works well with each other and is happy”, “perfect and faultless”¹¹, “advocating impractically ideal [...] schemes”¹², “impractical or unrealistic”, or an “ardent but impractical political or social reformer”¹³. Often enough, the word is used for anyone or any idea that is proposing alternatives to how things have always been and how things are at the moment, refuting possibilities of change or protecting the position and status of those in power. It is also important to note that it usually refers to one single dreamer with their utopian vision. Activists are often confronted with this word when they fight for the betterment of certain aspects even if they are very minor in nature. This research aims to reclaim the word utopian, promote a new, positive understanding of it, and use it boldly to promote ideas and emphasise that change is possible.

Even though Marxism has elements of a utopian dream, some of the marxist writings would understand utopia as the opposite of real political work. They see utopian thought and writing as a diversion from the task of worker's organization and overthrowing the ruling class. They claim that any utopian project would take away too much or all energy from working towards real change, channelling it into pointless dreams (Arendt, 1998; Fitting, 2007, p. 253; Sargisson, 2007, p. 30). While it might be true that dreaming alone would or could lead to inertia and reliance on a third power to implement changes, I argue that any energy invested in dreaming will in fact energize the practice of working towards change. Dreaming can support real efforts with hope and direction, strengthen the will, and support through difficult times and setbacks. Rather than seeing utopian practice as something different, or even opposite, from real practice, they can be seen as belonging together, supporting and informing each other in a symbiotic way.

Some critiques of utopianism argue that the attempt to establish a utopian project will “temper or repress the transformative energy” (Moylan, 2007, p. 214) that was helping along the way to its establishment. This risk has been recognized by utopian thinkers as well and is due to the potential of “closure and control” arising when revolutionary energy gets invested in a certain project. As specific institutions get set up, other alternatives seem out of place for the time being. Moylan therefore argues that while

11 Cambridge English Dictionary

12 Merriam-Webster

13 Dictionary.com

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“utopian transformation is a *dangerous* act” (emphasis original), this cannot mean abandoning the attempt of working towards real change (Moylan, 2007, pp. 214–15). Sargent sees the *utopian energy* as something that is limited and that could be spoiled in other projects that are not strictly or at all utopian. He sees the utopian energy also as something that is cyclic in nature and often given rise by non-utopian projects (Sargent, 2007, pp. 309–10). For activists, two things are therefore important. Firstly, awareness of what the utopian energy is currently being directed at. And secondly, awareness of the risks of closure and control, making sure that in the pursuit of real utopian change is still possible.

Utopia is criticised for being perfectionist and thus ideologically fixed leading to a static society and a forced end of change. Among the most vocal critics of utopian thought is Karl Popper who sees utopia as a “dangerous quest for perfection [that is] contrary to human nature”, and therefore needs to be implemented by force (Popper as quoted in Levitas, 2007b, p. 50). Popper argues that utopia wants to establish a new society based on an “ideal [...] blueprint of society as a whole” for which a strong and small elite is needed and will result in a “dictatorship” (Popper, 1966, p. 159). That leads to the “fear that utopia means the end of history and politics”. As a society gets locked into this static condition the rulers need to suppress any potential dissent (Sargisson, 2007, p. 27). This fear is interesting in light of the capitalist proclamation of *the end of history* through Fukuyama (2013), or Thatcher's TINA¹⁴ (Wegner, 2007, p. 125), which makes it more seem like the critics fear forfeiting their version of the established end of history. However, Moylan is right in voicing that closure and power hierarchies can be a problem (Moylan, 2007, p. 214), of which utopian activists should be aware. Activists can make clear that the ideas they have are one way to make things better and that at a later time even better things can be imagined that are at present outside of our imagination, keeping utopia open to dissent, change, and improvement¹⁵.

Dahrendorf (1958), in his work that is mostly based on a critique of literature utopias, defines utopian societies without change and conflict and thus without past or future, a stability which is created through a forced value consensus. His critique mainly rests on the conclusion that those characteristics do not exist in any real society he can observe (Dahrendorf, 1958, pp. 115–119). According to Schapiro (1972), utopianism cares only about the ends and adopts any means with an idea of collectivity that merges individuals into the whole with no regard to individuality (Schapiro, 1972, p. 387). Goodwin argues that an ideal belief does not automatically mean that those holding the belief will also take action or even try to impose their beliefs on others (Goodwin, 1980, p. 395). The argument of coercion is often enough brought forward against those proposing

14 There Is No Alternative (TINA)

15 This mind-set is especially clear in LeGuins 'The Dispossessed', where even in the established Utopia; utopian thinking is highly needed (Le Guin, 1974).

Utopia is a dangerous undertaking!

alternatives by the current establishment who claim that their values and ideals are “ideologically neutral” (Goodwin, 1980, p. 394).

Sargent points out that Popper is not really arguing against utopianism but rather against the fact that there are “people [...] willing to impose their beliefs” (Sargent, 1982, p. 570). Paden's thorough critique of Popper's anti-utopianism leads to the claim that Popper, rather than refuting utopianism, has actually produced a “sound epistemological” and “utopian argument justifying the framework institutions and values of liberal society” (Paden, 2000, pp. 409, 421). While Popper does not agree to changes in what he considers *open societies*, he does advocate transforming *closed societies* by radical means according to his blueprint of the ideal open society (Paden, 2000, p. 418). Goodwin argues that most of the critique brought forward against the utopian method can actually be redirected against the Liberal Democratic Theory (LDT). Thinking of it as an already achieved blueprint¹⁶, the LDT “dwells on systems maintenance, equilibrium, planning and interventionism” (Goodwin, 1980, p. 400). It tries to establish a consensus that cannot be challenged by masking ideals as normality. Technocrats are making all the adjustments that maintain the status-quo, leading to those so thoroughly criticised aspects of utopia with neoliberal ingredients (Goodwin, 1980, p. 400).

To sum up, what can be learned from the anti-utopian view? Working towards an activist utopianism and reclaiming the word utopian in a positive sense can lead to using dreams to energize practices. Making sure energy is directed accurately and avoiding closure and control keeps any project open to dissent, change, and adaptation. In addition, the word 'liberal' in a true sense can be reclaimed, anchoring utopia as a liberal endeavour. In opposition to the model of 'homo oeconomicus' (see Williams, 1999) the idea of 'homo cooperativus' (see Kropotkin, 2012) could be promoted.

3.3 Embracing utopia as the last ray of hope

“Hope” was not immediately obvious on the agenda of everyday life as we entered the new millennium. (Grossman, 2006)

After having looked at, learned from, and exposed the neoliberal anti-utopian position, it is time to turn to those writers who write and think positively about utopianism. Most of those views go back to the original writings of Bloch (1959) and Polak (1973). Starting with calls for utopia, subsequently the origins of utopianism in Bloch's writings, functions of utopia, hopes, dreams and visions, the raising of consciousness, and agency are examined. Further, the role of translating utopianism into transformation

16 Levitas speaks of the neoconservative, neoliberal utopia (2010, p. 217).

Embracing utopia as the last ray of hope

as well as its role in relation to resistance activism is discussed.

Departing from the understanding that the current absence of imagination has been deliberately constructed (Moylan, 1986, p. 9; Strasinger, 2010a, p. 98), many authors call for utopian and radical imagination: “we must choose utopia” (Sargent, 2007, p. 306), meaning to choose it as a method to work towards radical change (Sargent, 2007, pp. 308, 305). It is needed for spreading positive visions for social transformation (Strasinger, 2010a, p. 101). It can be used to overcome the suppression of the imagination by capitalism and mass media (Marcuse, 1969, p. 17). “We should be, without hesitation or embarrassment, utopians”, demands Geras (2000) and claims that it is the only and last resort that will get us out of the mess we are in.

A lot of the functions of utopianism can be traced back to the ontology of Ernst Bloch: “we are already what we are not-yet” (Bloch cited in Gunn, 1987, p. 4). The projection of a hoped for future brings into being and manifests the utopian that was already present in us and in our possibilities (Gunn, 1987, p. 5). This is followed by the idea that conjuring the future in our minds actually has influence on how the future will be as if it were “magnetically pulled” (Polak, 1973, cited in Sargent, 1982, p. 574). Sargent (1982) rightly classifies this assertion as impossible to proof or disproof. This claim is very closely related to the idea of Law of Attraction¹⁷ which has become more popular¹⁸ on the personal level in forms of self-help books. Combining the ideas of Polak and Bloch seems to suggest that this will work on the collective level as well increasing the likelihood of achieving what is wanted in social struggles.

More concretely, the utopian imagination functions to enable possibilities (McManus, 2007, p. 59) and shows a way to work toward social justice that doesn't rest on individualistic consumer-power ideas (Goodwin, 1980, p. 400). It further shows an alternative and inspires people to put effort into social struggles (Sargent, 1982, p. 575). It offers new perspectives (Geras, 2000) and propels people into a better future (Moylan, 1986, pp. 15–16), setting the foundation for revolution (Marcuse, 1969, p. 22). Within utopian imagination rests a “transformative and critical power” (Levitas, 2007b, p. 54) that can be used not only to “catalyze” change (Sargisson, 2007, p. 39) but also to critique the present and to offer ways for coping with the status quo (Levitas, 2010, p. 208). With desire being essential for its working (Levitas, 2010, p. 209), it functions as a tool for thinking, for discussions, as well as for trying out and leaning into potential alternatives (Sargisson, 2007, p. 36). The imagination can show pathways for development, strengthen hope, and offer constant feedback for learning (Sargisson, 2007, pp. 41–42) without claiming to have “complete answers” (Giroux, 2014, p. 97)¹⁹.

17 One definition of the Law of Attraction: “I attract to my life whatever I give my attention, energy and focus to, whether positive or negative.” (Losier, 2012, p. 12)

18 See for example 'The secret' (Byrne, 2006). See also the film with the same name (<http://www.theseecret.tv>).

19 Giroux actually talks about politics, he doesn't use the 'utopian' rhetoric, but basically refers to a

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Hope, dreams and visions are both central requirements as well as beneficiaries of utopian imagination. Sargent (1982, p. 581) claims that hope is necessary for every positive social change. Looking at a definition of hope it could be called an “appetite, with an expectation of attaining” (Hobbes cited in Gunn, 1987, p. 6). While hope could be misused and redirected through ideology to serve the aspirations of the elites it is the factor that can break free from it and prevent its misuse (Sargent, 2006, p. 11). As an active tool hope strengthens people's will as well as needing people who actively create that which is to come (Bloch, n.d.). Learning to use dreams and daydreams as a way to express as well as to foster hope that can be channelled into utopian projects is an essential part of utopian imagination. As Gunn (1987, p. 2) puts it: “our dreaming anticipates and foretells”. Vision, more concrete and tangible than a dream, is a further necessary component for moves towards positive change. Not only can it function as a tool to keep activists going in their work despite setbacks (Albert & Hahnel paraphrased in Moylan, 1986, p. 198), it can also motivate and inspire people to become active and to set ambitious goals working towards them with vigour (Grossman, 2006).

A further central aspect is to raise awareness and a consciousness that grows from the grassroots. Geras (2000) claims that social change is not possible without “new forms of social consciousness” emerging (Geras, 2000). As Zikode (2006) of the shack dwellers movement in South Africa stresses, it is time to trust in our own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, as rooted in our experiences and as directed to the changes we want to see. Alternatives to the status quo will not emerge from the top down to the poor but will come from the meetings, discussions, and ideas that people have in their local communities. There is the need for open structures that allow everyone to “speak and think together” (Zikode, 2006).

In order to turn a utopian drive into real steps towards social change, agency and empowerment need to be taken into consideration. Agency can be seen as the understanding and capacity to act in an environment with the belief to have the power to change things. As Levitas (2010) argues, to get from the dreaming stage to the vision stage it is necessary to put hope into “an agency of transformation (Levitas, 2010, p. 231). Grossman (2006) asks: “Are they [the people of the SECC²⁰] ever allowed to feel their own power as actors (...)?” Beyond facilitating processes of utopian imagination there is the need to help people to see their own individual as well as collective power and to understand that they have agency in influencing their own lives as well as in changing the social world around them.

Some importance needs to be put on the need of transforming the utopian thoughts into utopian actions, into actually transforming the social matter in the general direction of utopia. As Sargent (1982) argues, one of the potential downsides of utopianism is

utopian method of democratic politics.

20 The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC), a new social movement of South Africa, is fighting for service (electricity, water) connections for the poor (Grossman, 2006).

exactly the fact that the transformation away from the status quo gets forgotten and all the “practical difficulties” of the change ignored (Sargent, 1982, pp. 580, 583). That should not mean reducing the utopian strivings to the possible or realistic but concerning oneself with potential pathways as well. A strong concept around that is prefiguration. By transforming ideals into means, the achievable can be tested on small scale and can be continuously adapted. That learning can be transferred to other aspects which cannot be turned into means.

It could be argued that activism based purely on resisting present ills of the status quo actually contributes to the further existence of those oppressive ills. Therefore, in order to break free from being in a perpetual cycle of oppression, activists can use utopian thinking to change the rules of the game. Constantly resisting against aspects of the status quo perpetuates the roles of “oppressor and oppressed” (Gloria Anzaldua cited in Strasinger, 2010a, p. 92). This means changing the idea of resistance as reaction to present ills into the idea that resistance as a “thoughtful, complex, devious, [and] insightful response” (Maria Lugones cited in Strasinger, 2010a, p. 92). The understanding emerges that to become agents of revolutionary change there is the need to change the thinking towards being “radically imaginative”, i.e. to think about how we want things to be (Strasinger, 2010a, p. 92). A good example is the reclaim the streets protests²¹ who aim at “resisting at the same time as proposing” (William Etundi cited in Strasinger, 2010a, p. 94) an idea that is more elaborated in the concept of dual power (Crow, 2014).

To conclude, utopianism is seen as necessary for change in the given circumstances. Utopianism can be used to pull the future into the here-and-now with our thoughts and dreams. It can further function to show alternatives and show direction for achieving change. Hopes, dreams, and visions are central aspects for motivation and for inspiration. Utopianism can serve to raise consciousness and empower people, supporting the necessary step to move from imagination to transformation. Utopianism further can be used as a tool to avoid accidentally perpetuating current oppressive structures. Marcuse (1969) asks what people will do in a free society, and presents the answer of a young black girl: “For the first time in our life, we shall be free to think about what we are going to do” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 63).

4 Findings

“We must do and think the impossible.” (Derrida cited in Giroux, 2014, p. 105)

Participants were asked to provide three words to describe the world they are trying to

21 “Reclaim the Streets (RTS) began as creative activist group in London, but its tactics, blending party and protest, soon spread around the world. Merging the direct action of Britain’s anti-road building movement and the carnivalesque nature of the counter-cultural rave scene, RTS became a catalyst for the global anti-capitalist movements of the late ’90s.” (Jordan, n.d.). See also British Library (n.d.): <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/counterculture/disruption/reclaim/reclaimthestreets.html>

Findings

create through their activism. These were processed²² and a tagcloud was produced using Wordle²³ as an unscientific method that nicely illustrates a snapshot of the most common values expressed by participants²⁴.



Illustration 2: Wordle of values

In the following, the findings of the survey are reported in accordance to the questions that were asked and structured along the themes that emerged as well as those anticipated through the literature review.²⁵

4.1 The state of UI in activism

It appears that the question on the state of utopian imagination was too vague, as people talked about other aspects that partly fit better in the later questions as well as about the state of activism in general. People also offered their views on utopian imagination, what it means to them, what it's about, what requirements for it they see, how they see it manifest, what dangers need paid attention to, and how the process works.

22 Some words have been combined, as they can be seen as holding similar meaning: free-dom, just-ice, equal-ity, peace-ful

23 <http://www.wordle.net/create>

24 Two annotations that were removed in the processing:

“free (in all senses of that word...)” (Respondent 1 (tester))

“Freetogether (i.e. free, but not in the individualist, consumerist sense, rather in a more collective together sense of free)” (Respondent 33)

25 Divergence from common spelling was left in the original form.

The state of UI in activism

Some respondents offered their own understanding of what utopian imagination means to them, what power they attribute to it, and why it is necessary:

UI is the power to live different 'despite', and to wish and act to bring this more into presence in the future. (Respondent 40)

Imagine something else is a fundamental source to change the world. (Respondent 19)

I believe that it's a useful and important concept that can support us to develop critical, intersectional and prefigurative approaches. (Respondent 44)

It is the basis of our actions. [...] I think real emancipatory change is not possible if we don't dare to envision the "ideal". if you don't dare to dream you can't take actions that focus on big change. [...] political activists and groups should have that as a basis (Respondent 25)

Respondents further stated that “it is necessary to refer to utopias” (Respondent 20), that it is needed to “foster the changes” (Respondent 5), that it “provides the basis to be active together” (Respondent 36) and that it is “essential to achieve radical change [...]”. If we don't have a collective vision of what we want how can we act to achieve it? Otherwise its just change for the sake of change.” (Respondent 41)

These quotes suggest that people see the fundamental value of UI while having varying understandings of what exactly it is and how it is beneficial.

The utopian imagination can then serve as a point of rupture and indeed rapture in suddenly opening up new spaces and new possibilities. (Respondent 39)

Respondent 21 sees sharing one's ideals as “inspiration for better alternatives an/or colleagues to cooperate with” that “definitely ... would be beneficial for activists” and Respondent 40 the power to “make possible”.

Two respondents specifically mentioned some requirements for the use of UI:

Nevertheless, when there is a time and place where people can unfold their creativity without too much repression, there's still a lot possible! (Respondent 24)

But I find it also difficult to start to use it in a different way, because as it is sth [something] that's done together, more people need to be open for this approach and need to "believe" in it to put some energy to try out sth new. (Respondent 9)

Three of the respondents stated ways they see the utopian imagination manifesting in their experience:

Occasionally it can emerge and when it does its presence can be felt in the atmosphere in the room. I also see evidence of it in some activist writings. (Respondent 39)

Utopian Imagination lives in the variety of way of lifes and lifestyles that are

visible. (Respondent 40)

It's not just in what we do and what actions we take, but also in how we do it.
(Respondent 25)

These quotes suggest that people can feel UI when it is present and that it is embodied in their very lives and actions.

The responses suggest that people are understanding the utopian imagination as a process, as “questioning ... goes hand in hand with creating an image of how it could be different” (Respondent 25). Some respondents make clear that they do not see the imagined goal as fixed: “The imagined reality can change and shift as people learn with and from one another” (Respondent 26) and “the big picture is ... a gestalt that changes as the small steps and stages are passed such that it is a living, breathing process that is involved” (Respondent 39). Respondent 38 states that “our values are definitely being re-evaluated and challenged regularly” and in the opinion of Respondent 41 utopian imagination can only be “achieved by participation, collectively”. Respondent 26 makes clear that “with the building blocks of achieving small changes, we constantly try to get closer to our imagined goal”. Further stating that “[t]he community and friendships in activism can, in my experience, make the utopian imagination more radical as people motivate each other and together realise that a different world is possible.” (Respondent 26)

Some respondents put their statements on the state of the utopian imagination in the context of what they think the state of activism in general is. According to Respondent 43, activists “lack hope”, “work on auto-pilot” and “can't imagine a different reality”. Respondent 23 adds that activists are afraid to mention, let alone act on, their ideals:

“Imaginations might seem very far out from what is today, so people don't dare go act out with it a lot” (Respondent 23).

The life of activists in light of frequent failures and repression can be emotionally demanding and even put an end to an activist career. For example, activists may find themselves in

despair [...] particularly since many of the changes struggled for are profound, long-term and transformational. The activist ideals of empowerment, collectivity, rights, social and environmental justice are counter-hegemonic in a culture based on individualism, consumerism, and self interest that it takes effort to avoid being co-opted or colonised by neo-liberalism's allure and false promises. So burn-out, retreat and giving in can and do become realities. (Respondent 39)

As much as activists want to leave the current system behind there is the problem of “simultaneous rejection and dependence on structures that have come to be known as harmful” (Respondent 22) and the “[use of] tools of the now working system”²⁶

26 Have a look at: “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” Lorde (2003)

The state of UI in activism

(Respondent 28). Furthermore, “activism will never solve the problems it claims to attempt to solve, but essentially depends on for fuel” (Respondent 33).

Some respondents describe a situation of activism at the moment as being reactive manifesting in an anti-stance:

I have the impression that many activists are very concentrated on what is wrong about the status quo and what to do against that. (Respondent 15)

More energy goes into opposing the wrongs than goes into envisioning a better future. (Respondent 15)

In the last years we constantly were forced more to defend then to extend our possibilities. (Respondent 24)

A few of the activists also mentioned that there is a need to focus on what they want:

If there is talk about difference, it is more phrased like how things should! be (that implies a reproach) not how they could be (which would focus on potential). (Respondent 22)

[UI can] remind ourselves there's something worth fighting for, acting towards something and not just as response. (Respondent 43)

Respondent 26 mentions that they are “aware that worldwide groups are networking that share a utopian imagination” and that non-activists also “often imagine a utopian future”. Respondent 9 mentions that “people aren't aware of its potential to create a change”.

The ideas behind the concept have become increasingly important in the groups and movements in which I am active (Respondent 44)

Looking at the extent of use of utopian imagination in activism, many respondents did make clear that they can only talk about the utopian imagination in their limited experience of activism. One person reported too much imagination in “the ultra radical left, or anarchism” (Respondent 6) and two people stated that they were quite happy with its extent at the moment and that it exists widely:

My impression is that utopian imagination is quite widespread in the activist groups I'm involved in and not really any more limited than it probably should/must be. (Respondent 8)

Utopian imagination plays a big role in the activism I have part taken in and experienced so far. (Respondent 26)

Three respondents acknowledge the existence of utopian imagination but state that it is enveloped in silence:

http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf

The state of UI in activism

Although i believe that mist activists have their idea of how things should be better [...] people's different utopias aren't discussed so much. (Respondent 15)

Well, it is mostly there, but not openly spoken about. (Respondent 23)

In my experience it's often just implicit, we don't talk about it much but it is there and it is the basis of our actions. (Respondent 25)

Eight persons stated that there is little utopian imagination. For example:

Limited! Activism has either been hijacked through the government funding of NGOs or limited in a narrow window of political possibility, even in the left. (Respondent 18)

Not much present. (Respondent 20)

It's low in my opinion. (Respondent 28)

Five people stated that there is little imagination connected with the need for more. For example:

I think it could be used much more. (Respondent 9)

Unfortunately not widespread yet (Respondent 21)

I think there could be more about UI in activism. (Respondent 24)

Respondent 39 further states that “spaces to use it ... are being rapidly closed down”, without being clear who acts and what those spaces are.

4.2 Benefits of UI for activism

The respondents reported a wide array of ways how UI can benefit activism. From bringing people into activism through emotional support and giving direction, the findings suggest that people see it as a worthwhile endeavour.

Some influence on potential activists was mentioned: it can serve in “getting people politically active and engaged” (Respondent 8), it can “arouse” (Respondent 18), it can “broaden horizons and highlight how constructed and normalised a lot of the organisation of life on this planet is” (Respondent 22) as well as “enlighten [and] inspire” (Respondent 40).

Some respondents stress that there are certain emotional benefits related to utopian imagination. It can support “psychological satisfaction” (Respondent 5), it can “give social and spiritual strength ... to change world, first in our minds and hearts ... [and] allow us to continue to think that we will make it, it is possible” (Respondent 19). Respondent 24 states that it “trains the brain to imagine a time after revolution :-)”. It can further “create desire” (Respondent 9) and give “energy” (Respondents 17, 23) and

Benefits of UI for activism

“motivation” (Respondent 17).

Four respondents see UI playing a big role in motivating and driving activism: it is the “main driving force and main motivator for activism” (Respondent 26), it can “remind ourselves there's something worth fighting for” (Respondent 43), and it “can make us believe that it is actually possible on a big scale, too” (Respondent 25). Respondent 39 shows interest in “how it can play a role in keeping the sparks that originally drove one into activism not just glowing but also bursting into flame.” Two respondents stress the importance of hope and of dreaming: “it can bring hope” (Respondent 43) and that “if we don't dream about it, it won't get reality. it's like che guevaras quote 'Let's be realistic, demand the impossible'. try to get 150% and you will get 100%.” (Respondent 24).

UI seems to play a role in the deconstruction of the material world. It can help to “question the framework and serve to use time/ energy to construct something else” (Respondent 22), it could help to overcome “limitations in our minds that sth [something] can't be done” (Respondent 9), it can help to “give an idea, to compare the reality with” (Respondent 23), as well as creating a “new frame of reference within which to operate, based in values which have a universal meaning” (Respondent 18)

Some responses show that the concept of prefigurative politics is part of their activism:

By developing new ways of being, working, living and organising together, activists can create spaces from which to advance alternative imaginations in political discourse and physical space. (Respondent 44)

Three respondents mention that UI is not only about a goal, but also about the means: “it help to try things out, to change them in practice, creating pockets of change within society from time to time” (Respondent 23). Respondent 25 points out that UI also manifest “in how we do it - in the way we treat eachother, we talk to eachother, we live together... creating the utopia we envision for the world in our own small contexts”. Respondent 22 adds that it could empower people if visions “were enriched by concrete little steps”.

Eight respondents stress the function of UI to give struggles a goal and direction (Respondents 5, 8, 9, 18, 21, 25, 33, 41). For example:

It can be very powerful when there's a bigger amount of people imagining the same or a similar future [...] because then, there's so much energy created to pursue this aim that it is more likely to become true. (Respondent 9)

Utopian imagination could help provide the goal or the "for" part as juxtaposed to the "anti" part of activism. [...] While utopian imagination can help focus on DIRECTION, it too doesn't necessarily focus on the "PROCESS". Process is as important as goal in many cases. (Respondent 33)

Two respondents mention the influence of UI on creativity: it “promotes lateral and

creative thinking” (Respondent 8) and it can help to “find more creative levers for change” (Respondent 15).

4.3 Dogmatic details or clear focus?

Regarding the level of detail of a utopian project, there are varying voices to be heard: On the one hand, Respondent 5 claims that “the more detailed are the visions of such a utopian mind games, the better!”, Respondent 9 that “the more detailed you imagine sth [something], the more real it becomes and it gets easier to find ways to realize it” and Respondent 21 that “others may agree with you and help you get towards your goal faster as it's more explicit”. Respondent 38 sees the need for a clear image, because a too open and flexible conception could “sometimes confuse and de-focus the group in its aims”. However, on the other hand, Respondent 8 warns of too much detail as “it seems to stop being all that useful and just become points of contention”, and Respondent 23 advises “not to become dogmatic on 'how things have to be', but to stay open and tolerant”.

4.4 Detrimental effects of UI on activism

One respondent rejects utopianism, as they understand it, in principle. Speaking about the “ultra radical left, or anarchism”, Respondent 6 thinks of utopian imagination as ideologically closed:

Utopian thinking dominates to a point of blindness and inertia. There is a constant reiteration of how we want the world to be [...], whilst ignoring how the world currently is and [...] an avoidance of tactical and strategic thinking, and a 'if you don't agree with our style of thinking and philosophy almost instantly, go fuck yourself.' [...] It is [...] mostly concerned with its own egotistical survival and [...] it fails to account for real, tangeable, material inequalities that people face. [...] The focus should be on short term gains that we can actually achieve rather than blind, repetitive rhetoric that never amounts to anything. [...] the means must be strategically considered in terms of *how society works now* rather than how we want it to work in the future [...]. (Respondent 6)

Other respondents, while being not fully opposed to the idea of utopianism in activism, do see the need to focus on transformation and strategic thinking.

The aim of imagining, for me, should always be to make more clear how I/we might work towards actually achieving our imagined futures. (Respondent 44)

Respondent 9 stresses the importance establishing a “link to connect [...] [thoughts and reality] and to use it to go forward”. Respondent 19 sees the detriment when “utopia becomes something only theoretical”, requiring little steps and the need that “words [...] become facts, even if they seem small” (Respondent 19). This point is also made by Respondent 28: “Detrimental would be only when, we stay in the theoretical part, and never go step further to the practical one”. Respondent 33 further mentions the “risk

Detrimental effects of UI on activism

of leaving a gap between the goal and the present state. The goal may become clear, but imagining must be combined with hard work, and trial and error.” Lastly, Respondent 40 warns of the risk of “not be[ing] strategic enough to recognize the forces working against you”.

Some respondents offered their opinions on potential dangers or problems with utopian imagination: Respondent 17 sees the risk that “stronger voices can dominate the direction of a vision” and Respondent 36 worries that “the 'real' aim might remain in background” if there is too much focus on UI as a process. Respondent 38 states that “bringing conflicts and differences into the open ... occurs (mostly by accident) and can have positive and negative effects”, without going into detail what those might be. Respondent 5 warns that it might be dangerous to “compare it [the image] too rough with what we live in; and expect it to change to radically and on a big scale [...]. Such things lead to burn-out and seeing no meaning in activism.” Respondent 9 sees the “danger to see things too easy and when aims are not reached as fast as desired, the disappointment may lead to a loss of energy or despair”. Respondent 21 sees the risk that “some activists may divert from your own envisioned utopia so they may cooperate and divert your own attention”.

Another detriment that came up was the potential to distract from more important work:

Making the case for utopian thinking is a good thing to do I think, but it should be as grounded in reality as possible and any such efforts should emphasise the greater importance of actual activism work. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 8 warns that “it gives us something to argue over that's really not all THAT important, and so can take focus away from more urgent or critical work.”

A few respondents were wondering how to turn UI into action:

I find the concept quite difficult to engage with. I can see its relevance but I am unclear how it could be 'operationalised' systemically in my activism. The definition is comprehensive but so broad that I wonder what my activism would look like if it was really guided by an approach of utopian imagination. (Respondent 44)

Some of the respondents already ventured some ideas on the question of application, reported in table 1.

Table 1: Tips for the application of UI

Tips for application of UI	
Application	“One of the sticking points could be the translation of imaginings that emerge into actions that engage, energise and transform.” (Respondent 39)
	“Keeping a kind of two-focused approach can help with this the big picture is held while at the same time the small steps and gains along the way are worked with and where possible celebrated.” (Respondent 39)

	"I would find it beneficial to have a framework to help me integrate utopian imagination better into my work." (Respondent 44)
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4.5 Tools to foster UI

Even though the question was not asking for the barriers but just using them as a point to depart, many respondents did list what they thought are barriers to utopian thinking, with some only listing barriers and no ideas on how to overcome them, some people explicitly expressing hopelessness. However, it seems that some respondents were thinking more broadly about the barriers that prevent success of activism in general, or aspects that make activist groups and movements less inclusive. These findings are reported in the appendix as they are informing the practice only slightly.

In the table 2, all the tools that were suggested are listed and categorized as a start of a toolbox. These will be shared with activists in general and made publicly available. In table 3, tips for practice as given by the participants are recorded.

Table 2: Tools to foster the utopian imagination

Tools to foster UI	
Type	Suggestion
Artistic & Fun	Read science fiction as inspiration (Respondent 1 (tester))
	Use creative, soulful, intuitive methods (e.g. SoulCollage) ²⁷ (Respondent 17)
	Use ritual-like practices (shamanic or wicca, or...) (i.e. starhawk.org – combines activism and ritual ²⁸) (Respondent 17)
	Use more utopian art: music, poems, crafts, movie, sketch, show, etc : "We're all big children, and it's widely known, that You learn the fastest when You're having fun at the same time." (Respondent 28)
	"The [Galway grassroots] zine ²⁹ provides a space for alternative ideas to be discusses and shared. The physical printing and distribution of the zine in the city is an important 'intervention' in the city space, opening up space for these alternatives through chance encounters" (Respondent 44)
Books & Literature: visions, eutopias, dystopias	Book "bolo'bolo" ³⁰ (Respondent 23)
	Venus project ³¹ (Respondent 8)

27 "SoulCollage is a process for accessing your intuition and creating an incredible deck of cards with deep personal meaning that will help you with life's questions and transitions."
(<http://www.soulcollage.com/>)

28 Earth Activism: "In this workshop, we'll use ritual, meditation, guided journeys, dance and song to connect with the deep wellsprings of inspiration that the earth offers us. We'll explore the internal and social barriers that keep us from stepping into our full power. And we'll work with tools and insights that can help us become more effective co-creators of the new world we must bring to birth."
<http://starhawk.org/event/earth-activism-weekend-workshop-kressberg-germany/>

29 <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/tag/zine/>

30 http://sfbay-anarchists.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/bb_3.pdf

31 "The Venus Project proposes an alternative vision of what the future can be if we apply what we already know in order to achieve a sustainable new world civilization. It calls for a straightforward

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	<p>“Have a booklist of utopian and dystopian books/films for sharing. ask everyone for suggestions” (Respondent 17)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fiction: '1984' (Orwell, 1949), 'Animal Farm' (Orwell, 1945), 'Brave New World' (Huxley, 1932), 'Woman on the Edge of Time' (Piercy, 1976), 'Oryx and Crake Trilogy' (Atwood, 2003, 2009, 2013) 2. Non-fiction: Starhawk³², 'The Great Turning'³³ (Joanne Macy) <p>Look at authors: Eduardo Galeano, Gustavo Esteva: video 'social movement and hope'³⁴ (Respondent 19)</p> <p>Look at writings from activist perspective of Westoby³⁵, McIntosh and Jensen, in Solnit and Griffiths (Respondent 39)</p> <p>Writings not from activist perspective who “mange to be open to possibility and share that through their writings e.g. Macfarlane, Jamie, Maitland writing about landscape, poetry and silence among other things.” (Respondent 39)</p> <p>Look at “fourfold process of transformation” (Matthew Fox³⁶)³⁷ (Respondent 39)</p>
Intersectionality	<p>“the linking of issues” (Respondent 3 (tester))</p> <p>“combining issues to have more people with similar ways of thinking together. like having a camp” (Respondent 28)</p>
Children ³⁸	<p>“Work with children” (Respondent 1 (tester))</p> <p>“Addressing young people, especially children who still have the natural ability of thinking radically. Their [UI] [...] can be preserved by working with them, learning from them and with them” (Respondent 3 (tester))</p>
Meetings	<p>“Meetings that are dedicated to just imagine together with others what we want the world to be like, being open to new action ideas” (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“Practicing UI will improve the method” (Respondent 21)</p> <p>“introduce the concept to more people and meet to practise it, brainstorm ideas and actually implement them” (Respondent 22)</p> <p>“It needs an open mind to think of a different world. And such an openness needs places and times for people to creatively think, of what could be</p>

redesign of our culture in which the age-old inadequacies of war, poverty, hunger, debt and unnecessary human suffering are viewed not only as avoidable, but as totally unacceptable.” - <https://www.thevenusproject.com/>

32 Starhawk: see writings on the website, i.e. 'The City of Refuge' (<http://starhawk.org/writing/books/city-of-refuge>)

33 “The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.” (<http://www.joannamacy.net/thegreatturning.html>)

34 Can't find the video.... other one: Esteva, Video: 2006 Oaxaca Police killings, democracy now: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMMo23neIOo>

35 <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=2PXSnhHsAAAAJ&hl=en>

36 Matthew Fox is a “Dominican priest” (see also for details and critique) (<http://www.dialogueireland.org/dicontent/resources/dciarchive/zheresyhope.html>)

37 “Matthew Fox speaks about of the Via Positiva needing the Via Negatiain order to access the Via Creativa which leads to the Via Transformativa and back into the cycle once more.” (Respondent 39)

38 Some ideas could potentially be found in Ginwright (2008).

Tools to foster UI

	<p>different, what they could live like if things would be different.” (Respondent 23)</p> <p>Discussing “ideas of how things could be better [...] might be a helpful start for discussing the strategies to get there.” (Respondent 15)</p> <p>“I think the most important is that people come together and have time to imagine and brainstorm things. You will never get as much ideas and dreams in an online platform or chat or whatever, as with some people sitting together on a bonfire or spending a weekend together.” (Respondent 24)</p> <p>“important too to have fun, get together, build community, potluck shared dinners, musicmaking etc” (Respondent 17)</p> <p>“Working in dialogue, to question, explore and create meaning together. This could be as informal as having chats over tea or a formal organised workshop (Respondent 44)</p> <p>“I link the idea of utopian imagination to Paulo Freire's idea of conscientisation³⁹: supporting individuals and groups to develop an analysis that challenges the hegemonic 'common sense' of elites. In this sense, popular education approaches and methods could be seen as fostering a utopian imagination.” (Respondent 44)</p>
Retreats	<p>“Taking long breaks from capitalist society, being given an opportunity to be, think, reflect” (Respondent 1 (tester))</p> <p>“So places where people get together and do something in a different way can create such an atmosphere, even if it is only temporarily. Places where people try to live different ways over a longer period (like communes, ...) also can help to foster imagination” (Respondent 23)</p>
Inspiration	<p>“Being open to new action ideas, inform yourself about struggles and methods of other activists” (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“Taking the time to share utopian ideas, thereby inspire each other, thereby become more inspiring for others. This leads to positive feedback by seeing people become more open to ones ideas...” (Respondent 15)</p> <p>“Learning more about what happened in Spain in the thirties⁴⁰, and what is happening in Kobane and other parts in Kurdistan/Syria⁴¹ at present in the midst of all the violence..to spread that info and be inspired.” (Respondent 17)</p> <p>Home weeks⁴² of CDRA (Community Development Resource</p>

39 See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TioH-t9FWMU> and <http://www.freire.org/component/easytagcloud/118-module/conscientization/>

40 Spain in the 30s: The Respondent most likely refers to Spain's Revolutionary Anarchist Movement. See <http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/spain-rev.html>, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-porter-spain-model-for-anarchist-organizing> and <https://libcom.org/history/1868-1936-anarchism-in-spain>

41 See for example <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/andrewnflood/resources-rojava-revolution-kurdistan-syria>, <http://anarchistnews.org/tags/kobane> and <http://www.submedia.tv/stimulator/2015/02/21/anarchy-rojava-libertarian-revolution-middle-east/>

42 “During home weeks the focus of the organisation is on itself and what is happening within it. Everyone is involved in this process no matter what their job description is. In this way they engage with not only what is emergent but also with what is being hidden the shadow side of things.” (Respondent 39)

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	<p>Association)⁴³ in Cape Town (Respondent 39)</p> <p>“First nations communities in Canada that through a process of utopian imagination that emerged from the grassroots the model of service delivery was abandoned and a new model is being experimented with that builds on traditional ways of doing things that work through the idea of interconnectedness⁴⁴.” (Respondent 39)</p> <p>“Spreading the ideas, solutions, initiatives, ways of struggling with different issues.” (Respondent 28)</p> <p>“And isn't maybe art another indicator for the presence of UI (for example utopian architects after french revolution⁴⁵, ideal workers city⁴⁶ etc.)?” (Respondent 24)</p>
Individual	<p>“Apply this imagination [...] also just for your own life, starting with small goals that are easier to achieve and that make you trust in that way of trying to change the world, focus on one goal at a time to not overload yourself”. (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“I think a few lead questions would help, also maybe just little inspirations how to creatively escape the pre-fabricated cage of a mind within which I think, could help. Like, day-dreaming while you ride your bike downhill to imagine how you really want things to be. No compromise.” (Respondent 22)</p>

Table 3: Tips for practice of UI

Tips for practice of UI	
Tips for practice	“Making the case for its usefulness” (Respondent 8)
	“Developing the habit of not confusing radical imagination with unrealistic expectations and welcome it as something positive among activist”. (Respondent 22)
	“Anything that promotes positive (but realistic) thinking.” (Respondent 15)
	“A new frame of reference within which to operate, based in values ⁴⁷ which have a universal meaning, as opposed to tied to ideology”. (Respondent 18)
	“Some questions that guide me to think about some of the ideas given in the definition of utopian imagination would be useful at a personal level, while a similar process could be made into a workshop for groups who want to envision the future they are working towards. I would find an intersectional approach that explores how we challenge and transform class, 'race' and

43 <http://www.cdra.org.za/>

44 Some information on interconnectedness: <http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/interconnect.html> and https://secure.cihi.ca/free_products/mentally_healthy_communities_aboriginal_perspectives_e.pdf

45 Unclear what exactly is meant. Possibly see <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2013/09/08/architecture-in-revolutionary-times/> and Vidler (1991).

46 Could refer to <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/13/story-cities-21-adriano-olivetti-ivrea-italy-typewriter-factory-human-city> or to Menier Chocolate in Noisiel, France (established in 1825): <https://wiley-vch.e-bookshelf.de/products/reading-epub/product-id/577084/title/Redeveloping%2BIndustrial%2BSites.html>

47 An interesting organisation in this context is Common Cause Foundation: <http://valuesandframes.org/>

Tools to foster UI

	gender issues in the way we work crucial to any discussion of utopian imagination.” (Respondent 44)
	“Opposing the ideas and policies of Thatcher and of Reagan/Nixon and their modern day equivalents: May and Trump, by every possible means.” (Respondent 41)
	“Learn systems thinking” (Respondent 40)
	“Reinforcing feedback loops” (Respondent 40)
	“More networking with others who think the same in order to find the right way”. (Respondent 36)
	“I like the idea of "head/heart/hand" which I use to make sure I'm mixing up methods in the workshop between intellectual work, emotional work and physical moving about/creating work. I also find that paired discussions and small group work can be really important in supporting those who are less confident to speak in plenary groups to be able to contribute.” (Respondent 44)
	“Important to root utopian imagination in popular education (Freire, Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors ⁴⁸) and in narrative storytelling approaches (Centre for Story Based Strategy ⁴⁹).” (Respondent 44)

5 Discussion

*When you told me about the spark
I said it was a firefly
She said it was a rocket,
gone astray from the fireworks at the funfair
and someone murmured
from behind a dark corner
it was just the glowing eyes of a cosmic leopard,
staggering across our skies tonight
and as the blackberries ripened
at the side of the national road
and the smell of gasoline filled our nostrils*

*the answer touched down
softly on the black asphalt
neither of us understood
its language*

And left. (Respondent 22)

This research project began with one central concern in mind: how can activism become more successful? Following one possible lead, an investigation into the potential of

48 “Games for Actors and Non-Actors is the classic and best-selling book by the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal. It sets out the principles and practice of Boal’s revolutionary method, showing how theatre can be used to transform and liberate everyone – actors and non-actors alike!”
Download the book here:

https://geraldkeaney.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/augusto_boal_games_for_actors_and_non-actorsbookfi-org.pdf

49 <http://www.storybasedstrategy.org/>

Discussion

positive thinking in the form of utopian imagination was conducted. The research centred on the main question; to what extent does UI play a role in activism? To gain insights into that role, the subsequent questions on the state of UI in activism and on potential benefits and disadvantages of UI for activism were posed to a sample of activists. Based on the hypothesis that there could be benefits, further effort was put into uncovering how UI could be fostered. From the survey responses emerged the need to also look into how UI could translate into practice.

The high participation in the survey indicates interest and enthusiasm for utopianism in activism. Most people were not familiar with the term UI but could relate to the concept with their thoughts and experiences. However, some people had the popular understanding of utopian strongly in their minds, leading to a confusion of terms or a rejection of the definition provided in the survey.

5.1 Crisis of activist imagination – an opportunity

Believing in the strength and power of UI in combination with concrete ways to practice it has impact. The findings suggest that there is a general sense of the importance of envisioning the future. This does in many ways correspond to the literature reviewed in this project. In both, general statements can be found that see it as a worthwhile endeavour to embark upon. In addition, more concrete ways in which UI contributes to activist practices are mentioned and reported below in the chapter on benefits. However, all of this remains on the level of a 'feeling' as it is difficult to measure any effect that UI might have. In light of post-modern ontologies such a proof is not necessary. As all activists are committed to change in the world, it does seem a worthwhile effort to look at this fundamental source that might help to create that change.

There is the need to create time and space for the practice of UI. Informed by the barriers⁵⁰ and requirements stated there is the need to spread interest and acceptance in and of the value of UI to be able to transfer time from other aspects of activism that are perceived as more urgent. It is clear that the concept of UI was already known after hearing that people have experienced it in their activist lives, in their actions, and in their means. It can be argued that there is at least some fertile ground on which more organised and strategic ways of practising UI can be sown.

The description of UI as a process by some of the respondents reflects that there are similarities with the latest definitions of utopianism. The idea of a fixed blueprint does seem absurd as the images people hold in their heads are often based on values informed by rejection of present evils. The details of how those values might manifest in the future is not thought about too much. People are committed to learn as they go. As this can lead to difficulties in finding concrete little steps to get there it becomes important to look at the connections between imagination and transformation. The

50 See the appendix for a list of the barriers that were mentioned.

Crisis of activist imagination – an opportunity

findings point in the direction of prefiguration and the importance of connections of friendships in those prefigurative endeavours.

Looking at how the respondents talk about the current state of affairs in activism leaves a bleak picture. Activists seem to be stuck losing a defensive battle that leads to inadvertently spending energy for the further consolidation of the status quo. This might be influenced by a biased selection of the participants as well as by how the question was framed. However, activists are in many ways influenced by their social and material environment. There are so many evils to be observed at the moment and there is so much urgent need to fight against those evils. Activists seem to fight from a defensive standpoint investing hope in the limited tools that the system offers. While the existence of those problems seem to offer some form of driving energy, a lot of that energy goes into the improvement of the present order. These findings reflect what was mentioned in the literature review about being stuck in resistance and lack of imagination. What then, can be done to lead activists out of those dark places of hopelessness, helplessness, despair, and burn-out? What can be done to re-configure or dismantle the “auto-pilot” Respondent 23 speaks about? Turning resistance into a response, prefiguration, emphasis on the sustainability of activism⁵¹, and a model of dual power⁵² could be pointing in a good direction.

Imagination is in crisis within activist circles. Looking at the extent of the imaginations as reported in the findings indicates that UI doesn't play a big role within the experience of most of the respondents. This further strengthens the assumption that there is a crisis of imagination not only within the wider society, but also within activist circles. This lack of imagination points the way towards the need to facilitate processes of UI to increase its use as a valuable endeavour. As there is evidence for the hidden presence of UI in activist practices and even in activist networks, it is also important to evaluate those and see what can be done to transform them. How can the silence around UI be lifted? Further, the limited detrimental effects need to be transformed to improve the practice. As UI itself is a process that works with perpetual and cyclic improvements, the same needs to be applied to activist practices of UI and how they relate to and inform other activist practices.

To sum up, activists think that UI is important for changing the world. While a fertile ground for UI exists in activist contexts there is the need for more place and time to foster it. UI is a worthwhile process that can be experienced in spaces of prefiguration and community. There seems to be value in UI to leave behind habitual, purely resistance based activism towards building new strategies of change in activism. The

51 See this zine on sustainable activism: <http://cre-act.net/sustainable-activism/sustainable-activism/> or this web-resource: <http://knowyourix.org/dealing-with/dealing-with-activist-burn-out-and-self-care/>

52 See also <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/scott-crow-anarchy-and-the-common-ground-collective> and <http://www.fifthestate.org/archive/390-fall-2013/mutual-aid-times-crisis-ecological-economic-political/>

extent to which UI is practised in activist circles at the moment justifies efforts in introducing and improving the process more widely.

5.2 The many benefits for activism

UI has the power to pull people into activism. The findings suggest that it can raise consciousness and awareness in a way that is more sustainable than the motivation based on rejection of present ills. This adds the additional potential, but also challenge, on how to engage people in and expose to practices of UI who are not yet activists.

UI is beneficial for motivation and hope. The findings reflect the statements of the utopian writers in many ways. It seems to supply motivation and energy that drives activists as well as create and strengthen desires and the hope that positive change is indeed possible. This can support and be supported by optimism and positive thinking.

UI can make activism more sustainable and enduring. As described earlier, the resistance based activism runs the high risk of burn-out and a frequent turn-over rate that makes activist circles very volatile, often enough leading to iteration of processes and to limited knowledge transfers. Some respondents see the role of UI in keeping people going through a more long term involvement and development. This keeps individuals active over long periods of time and thus allows movements and groups to evolve, learn, and grow over longer time periods. This leads again to put emphasis on sustainable activism and activist self-care, in which UI seems to play some role.

Activists can use dreams and imagination to reconstruct the physical world. Dreaming did not take as prominent a position as the literature would have suggested. However, the ideas of dreaming and hope might be so fundamental that respondents don't explicitly mention them. Dreams and UI seems to play a role in the deconstruction of both the material world and the limitations in the mind. It can help to raise consciousness, start to challenge everything, and build the world anew starting in our minds. Emphasis on our thoughts and our (day-) dreams can help to pull the future into being with the power of our imaginations. In 'real' dreams at night, our mind is able to construct whole worlds with their own rules, assumptions, and functioning. The idea is that the mind also has a profound impact on the 'material' world that goes beyond what can be observed as evidence.

The idea of prefiguration is the probably most concrete way forward for an activist practice of UI. What aspects of our utopian image can we actually start with in the here and now? Not only do these efforts at realising utopia provide vital lessons for learning but they also offer small steps people can do. This builds on the idea that after all society is the sum of all our small, individual, and collective actions. The findings suggest that there is big value in creating Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) as described by Bey (1991, 1993). They provide spaces for experimentation and learning as well as bases for spreading new ideas and concepts. The ideas of TAZ and

The many benefits for activism

prefiguration are closely interlinked. The hope is that they will become more permanent and grow in size and number. Thus a new world, or better many worlds, can be created within the existing one.

UI can give activism direction. As many activists seem to be stuck in resistance and anti-stances of involvement, the utopian imagination can help create a positive pole as a balance. When fighting against one ill after another, the direction can get lost. UI can serve as a tool to help activists align their actions with their visions and goals. This opens the chance for fighting against the worst present ills while making sure that strategies and tactics have the potential to go beyond resistance. For many respondents, the function of UI as giving direction to their activism seems to be a very important one.

The impact of UI on creativity is a new theme that has emerged from the findings. The use of creativity as one of the ways to foster the imagination and one of the main manifestations of it was mentioned in the literature. However, it was not clear that the process of UI would also lead to more creativity. This creativity is highly needed in activism to find new ways of doing activism and new strategies and tactics that make the hoped for changes easier to achieve. Thinking outside the box in terms of what is possible but more so outside the toolbox of activism therefore emerges as a further benefit.

The idea of agency didn't really come up in the survey. Do activists believe that only 'the powerful' have agency? This non-appearance suggests that activists already see themselves as agents of change or else they wouldn't be activists. If the same survey was done with new activists or people who are politically aware and interested but not active yet, the point might have come up more specifically. However, it could also mean that it is difficult to admit that one is being active while not believing in their own power. Is much of the activism actually limited by a disbelief in agency leading to the stuck state of activism as some respondents have described? What power then lies within UI to help people believe in their own ability to influence things? I do think that UI has the power to help people realise that they have the ultimate agency to change and not technology, the economy, or the elites.

In sum, UI has a big array of benefits on activism and activists. It can bring people into activism, support optimism and positive thinking, motivate people to keep going and prevent burn-out. It can further help in de-constructing the social order, impact the construction of the material world, point activists towards prefigurative politics, give direction through focusing on what one wants, and support creativity.

5.3 Dogmatic details or clear focus?

The level of detail is one of the points that are contested even within the few respondents who mentioned this aspect. It seems to be easier to rally behind concrete visions but these might also be controversial and exclusive or even dogmatic. The claim

of Respondent 9 that the chances of achieving a vision increase the more people are rallied behind a certain vision is interesting. How detailed would a vision have to be for that effect to work? I think the way forward with this notion is an easy approach to blueprints: while drafting them could be helpful, openness and adaptability are key ingredients. Additionally, the focus could shift away from the material aspects towards values and even more towards the feelings that people wish to experience. While there might be a big variety in actual social conditions that could lead to a certain feeling, it might be easier to find a consensus on the variety of feelings that people want to experience. The question of detail still remains unclear and requires further research and investigation.

5.4 Limited detrimental effects

The anti-utopian opinion of Respondent 6 does give good insight in the presently dominant understanding of utopian as well as in the recurring reform vs. revolution debate. While I would agree that there are certain covert restrictions on thoughts and actions in anarchist circles, this might heavily be due to a lack of imagination and to predominately resistance based tactics. At the same time the efforts that many anarchists put into projects of prefiguration do show that there are many forms of anarchism and the the experience of those circles can vary highly. I would also agree that many of the strategies and tactics should be informed by the present state of things. But that doesn't mean to be ignorant of where one wants to go in the long run or to only select those tactics that are offered by the system. This leads towards a revolution through the everyday act, be it by prefiguration or in challenging and subverting existing tactics.⁵³

The view expressed by Respondent 6 additionally helps to understand that utopian images do need to be translated into strategies and tactics for transformation.

UI and transformation need to be linked. The argument for focusing on transformation as part of utopian practice was made by a few respondents. The danger of staying in the place of pure theoretical even if artistic conceptions of utopia relates to the criticism of utopianism as mentioned in the literature review. That means nothing more than acknowledging the realities of the present moment as they are necessarily the point of departure for any transformation. Seeing UI and transformation as two ideas that are closely interlinked in a strategic concept helps to use the power that is ascribed to UI in those processes of transformation and might make them more successful.

The risks of dominant voices, communication, secret agendas, and being overly self-critical need to be considered. Looking at the risks within a process of UI provides some helpful points for improving the practice. Attention needs to be paid to who is contributing how much to visions that a group is setting themselves to avoid reproducing patterns of dominance within activist groups. How much of the aims and

⁵³ Such as holding a protest march, but not announcing, or even begging for permission, where the law might ask for it

visions should be communicated outward when embarking on transformation? What about the risk that some people might scheme secretly to achieve their own visions and use or subvert processes of UI that activist groups embark on? Lastly, it seems to be important to go easy on oneself. There is the risk of constant disappointment that might lead to despair and burn-out. All the energy created through UI in the first place could be lost if there is limited acceptance of seeming failure as part of success. This calls for sustainability within UI and activism to keep the energy going.⁵⁴

UI is valuable and actual work. There was little evidence for the idea that activism would be distracted from its real purpose if at all or too involved with UI. However, is real activist work more important than UI? UI in the form of prefiguration plays a major part in the work of anarchist activists at the moment and also spreads increasingly into other organisations and networks who would be hesitant to call themselves anarchist. Thinking of UI as work might help to legitimise time and space that is spend on it. If people were to think of it as something as valuable as, let's say, holding a protest speech, the process might actually be used more often.

Ideology was of no special concern to most of the respondents. This means that they don't think about their utopian visions as fixed projects that need to be dogmatically pursued.

All of the detriments can either be discarded or used as a valuable opportunity for learning and creating best practice UI. The process of imagining needs to be interlinked with transformation, free from oppression, transparent, and sustainable. Prefiguration is one way to show the value of UI as actual work.

5.5 Learning from the barriers

Looking at the barriers (see appendix) is a helpful exercise as it provides information on how to create and sustain practices of UI. Of all of them, time is the trickiest one as it seems so severely limited. In the absence of a basic income, activists are always pulled away from activism by the need to provide for their living which ties into the second big barrier, money. Both of them are not specific to UI, but to activism in general.

UI can help to see differences positively. There are probably as many motivations for people to be activists as there are activists. This can lead to divergent opinions on why or how to apply UI. If someone is in activism primarily for its ties and friendships with like-minded people, they might be opposed to practices that uncover differences. There also seem to be increasing disagreements within activism up to the point of division. UI could play a role in approaching those differences in a new light and see them as something positive and something that improves practices. This is already the case within the Global Justice Movement (GJM) were it is understood “as a resource and a

⁵⁴ See this zine on sustainable activism: <http://cre-act.net/sustainable-activism/sustainable-activism/> or this web-resource: <http://knowyourix.org/dealing-with/dealing-with-activist-burn-out-and-self-care/>

value at the same time” (Teske and Tetreault as cited in Strasinger, 2010b, p. 88).

Activist self-care and sustainable activism are needed. The limitations on the individual level through conditioning by and coping with the status quo are quite severe. Being content with the present situation is indeed important for mental health. Finding the balance between criticising and gratefulness can be a tricky endeavour. How could UI play a role in providing the space for these very personal and subjective but also highly political processes in a collective manner? Could activists see crisis as an opportunity for change, as the original Greek meaning suggests?⁵⁵

How to resolve all those barriers? As the status quo is heavily limiting, it is important to engage in utopian practices and show their value. Thus critical reflection may lead to valuable learning and more thoughtful action. How can a little protest speech that is often only heard by people who are already committed to the cause be seen as more important than long term and strategic thinking informed by radical and utopian imagination? It would free up space to think and break up rusty structures and collective habits. However, simply offering UI as a tool to resolve the barriers that people identified towards UI is not helping. This nut needs to be cracked in novel ways, but how?

To sum up: the status quo in all its aspects is a big barrier and asks for creative and radical UI to overcome them. Cracking this nut goes beyond the potential of this research project. The most valuable lesson that can be learned is to approach differences as well as moments of crisis in a new light of opportunities for positive change.

5.6 A first collection of tools

A full collection of all the tools people have suggested in the survey can be found in table 2 on page 29 in the findings chapter. People, for example, suggested looking at utopian (science) fiction writing, to immerse oneself in any form of utopian cultural production, to make use of rituals, and to make use of reflective spaces of self-publishing, such as zines. Further a few authors were suggested that have commented and written about utopia. The importance of intersectionality was also mentioned. Connecting causes and seeing the similarities and synergies will directly influence the successfulness of movements and could also be used to foster UI through mutual learning processes. Additionally, a lot can be learned from people and movements who are already making their steps towards concrete utopias.

Meetings and workshops were a further tool that was suggested. This emphasises that UI needs to be a collective process and not something people do at home on their own. That supports the learning and the spontaneous ideas that can only emerge when creative minds share common space. As a longer form of meetings, fully retreating from

⁵⁵ “Latinized form of Greek krisis 'turning point in a disease' (used as such by Hippocrates and Galen)” (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=crisis)

society was suggested as a way to break the conditioning and open spaces for creative insights and novel ideas. Much can be learned from and with children who are not as socially conditioned yet and ideas on how to prevent conditioning become important.

A quick look in the literature does bring up similar aspects: based on Solomon, Bloch and Marcuse, Levitas (2007a, pp. 291–295) mentions a variety of artistic expressions that support and prefigure a better world: visual art, music, performing, and acting. Sargisson (2007, p. 26) adds political theory, lived experiments, medicine, and architecture. Moylan (2007, pp. 198–200) appends with the importance of utopian literature for the imagination and as basis for radical activism and politics.

Lucid dreaming⁵⁶ can be used to harvest the power of dreams. Dreaming and day-dreaming came up both in the literature as well as in the findings. While dreaming is a mostly individual thing, sharing and exploring the dreams together can lead to great effects. Therefore, having regular meetings where people learn and share about lucid dreaming emerges as another tool.

Focus needs to be put on why UI can be useful when introducing those tools. It needs to be understood as differing from a pointless exercise of thinking about impossible things. Promoting positive thinking and some leading questions were suggested as well. Further suggestions were systems thinking, networking, popular education, and story-telling.

However, none of all the above tools will yield many results if no effort is put into building belief in agency and empowering people. This aspect goes beyond the scope of this research project.

5.7 Finally, some answers

1. To what extent does utopian imagination play a role in activism?

UI plays a limited role in activism at the moment. Where it exists, it is hidden as a basic understanding that is not openly, let alone methodologically addressed. Activists see the importance of visioning processes. The wish for things to change positively forms the basis for many activists and provides fertile ground but rarely informs strategies and tactics.

2. What is the state of utopian imagination in activism?

UI is in crisis, with sparks of hope. Creativity and imagination is limited in the context of strong hegemonic conditioning through the status quo and habitual, mainly resistance based activism. Activists identified the lack of space and time as major barriers. However, prefiguration is increasingly practised and shows a path out of the crisis.

56 “Lucid dreaming means dreaming while knowing that you are dreaming. [...] Lucidity is not synonymous with dream control. [...] However, becoming lucid in a dream is likely to increase the extent to which you can deliberately influence the course of events.”
(<http://www.lucidity.com/LucidDreamingFAQ2.html#LD>)

3. Is utopian imagination beneficial or detrimental for activism?

UI can have many benefits on activism and on achieving positive change. After thorough consideration of the few detriments, valuable learning can complement the many benefits such as bringing people into activism, keeping people going, and giving direction. UI can lead to more sustainable activism, support new and creative strategies and tactics, and help to re-construct the world in thoughts and action.

4. How could utopian imagination be fostered?

UI can be fostered with a wide array of tools and methods reaching from exposure to utopian literature through intersectionality and working with children to formal and informal meetings and workshops. Retreats from the status quo, systems thinking, and popular education can help break the conditioning. Getting inspired by other movements opens thought horizons. It is necessary to promote the usefulness of UI as an important and collective endeavour to facilitate the introduction of those tools.

5.8 Implications for the books

The understanding of utopia as a process was found as expected. Looking at the results more broadly in light of the theory discussed in the literature review, it becomes clear that the definitions and thoughts about what utopianism is are very much in line with what activists think about it. This might, though, be influenced by the definition given in the survey. Further research into the understanding of what utopian imagination means to activists would need to be formulated more openly. The replies by some of the respondents confirm that prefigurative politics is a concept that is used and practised without necessarily referring to the term itself. The responding activists confirmed the idea that activism is rooted in resistance and emphasised the need to go beyond the anti-stance. One response (Respondent 9) sounded like they are supportive of the magnetic attraction and sees the power in doing that collectively.

None of the respondents saw any real danger in practising UI, refuting a warning that is even made by advocates of utopianism. In terms of the potential shortcomings, the idea that utopian imagination is a distraction from real activist work did come up, confirming the theory. However, it is interesting that none of the respondents spoke about the possibility of their utopia being someone else's dystopia. This could mean that activists assume that there are fundamental values that are widely shared or that the sample was not diverse enough. The idea that utopia needs or leads to perfection didn't come up, showing that this is an outdated conception of utopianism.

5.9 Implications for the streets

The findings show that there is the need to practice UI in activist contexts. The expected benefits make it worthwhile. The toolbox collected through this research project can be

Implications for the streets

a good starting point for activist self-research, workshops⁵⁷, and further development of the concept as well as the practice. However, it became clear that fostering utopian imagination alone is not enough. Some respondents were rightly wondering how to systematically turn UI into a practical approach for action.

At the outset of this study, I understood tools primarily as activities and methods that can be used to bring people into spaces of utopian and radical imagination. Now it is clear that a second understanding of tools is necessary: how can activists use UI in practical ways to inform their activism? How can the missing link between imagination and transformation be build? This leads to a research question that offers potential for further research:

How can utopian imagination be practised by activists?

First leads point in the direction of prefiguration^{58,59}, dual power⁶⁰, intersectionality, popular education, and narrative story-telling⁶¹. Some of the respondents already ventured some ideas on the question of application as reported in table 1 on page 28.

What could such a framework look like? What does this mean for overall activist strategy? How can small steps of activist work be kept in orientation towards long term goals? And how could those actions be designed in a way that they support sustainability in activism?

An initial research brought up three books that could be used as a point of departure for researching this important aspect of practising utopian imagination:

- 'From anticipation to action' (Michel Godet, 1994)⁶²
- 'Creating Futures' (Michel Godet, 2006)⁶³

57 During the process of writing this thesis, I hosted two workshop on radical imagination. The outlines of those workshops can be found in the Appendix and can serve as a further resource.

58 According to Antliff (2010), one precondition for utopian and radical imagination is an anarchist version of prefigurative democracy and “political federation” (Antliff, 2010, p. 61), as methods of self-governance.

59 A lot was written about prefiguration in wake of the alter-globalisation movement, such as prefiguration and emotion (Brown & Pickerill, 2009), prefigurative politics in Tahrir Square (Sande, 2013), prefiguration in interpretation collectives (Baker, 2013), prefiguration and actualization (Murray, 2014), in relation to state engagement (Petray, 2012), and rethinking prefiguration (Yates, 2015), to name a few. Check Boggs (n.d.) for the concept of prefigurative communism.

60 Dual Power: “resisting while building counter institutions” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/scott-crow-anarchy-and-the-common-ground-collective.pdf>)
See also a short video interview: <http://www.submedia.tv/stimulator/2016/02/17/dual-power/> & <http://www.scottcrow.org/#/interview-video-on-dual-power-transitions/>

61 Selbin (2009) writes about the role of story in achieving change. As stories can be used to tell tales from the future, they can give direction, warn, motivate and make things seem possible, affecting the ideological as well as material world. Stories can empower and connect people to work towards change together (Selbin, 2009, pp. 3, 16, 189).

62 <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/ouvrages/from-anticipation.pdf>

63 <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/ouvrages/creatingfutures2006.pdf>

- 'Sociology of the Future' (Bell & Wau, 1971)

Lastly, activists could use the power of the mind that the Law of Attraction promises. The assertion of Polak (1973)⁶⁴ that imagination will lead to the future being magnetically pulled into the now is worth further consideration. There is reason to suspect that the elites of today, organised in social networks called secret societies, use this idea methodologically and constantly to achieve what they want or more so to keep things the way they already are.⁶⁵ They use the power to imagine together which gives more strength. Activists could systematically use the information provided in Law of Attraction resources to create the world that they want to counterbalance and eventually overbalance the mind efforts of the elites.

5.10 Direction for further research

This research provides important and valuable first insights into the power of utopian imagination for activism. What next? Many questions that need to be addressed come to mind:

How can imagination be translated into transformation? What conditions would actually lead to activists engaging in processes of UI? Are there any concrete and successful movements, campaigns, or projects based on UI? What can be learned from intentional communities and autonomous zones around the world? How can a balance be achieved between building autonomous zones while at the same time having a wider influence beyond? Will practising utopian imagination actually make activism more successful?

Most pressing, further research into the matter of finding concrete ways of how people can transform the power and benefits of utopian imagination into real change are needed and offer exciting discoveries. For example, a group, campaign, or movement⁶⁶ with a positive vision that is interested in experimenting with the tools and concepts could be the basis for a long-term intensive case study aiding activist self-research. This would offer the opportunity to see how thoughts are translated into action and what impact this has on the group of activists, their well-being, the sustainability of the cause, as well as any concrete successes in relation to the vision.

Additionally, as suggested by Respondent 24, an historical materialist research angle into utopian imagination could further inform the theory and practice. Under what conditions does UI flourish? Is it involvement in practices of UI a privilege? How can

64 Download the book here: <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/memoire/the-image-of-the-future.pdf>

65 This audio-course is allegedly based on information from secret societies: <https://archive.org/details/YourWishIsYourCommandCompleteCDAlbum>. In the audio course, this new, more publicly accessible, network was mentioned: Global Information Network (<https://ginevolve.com/>)

66 One interesting project is 'Equilibrismus e.V.' which tries to consult with small island states to establish their ideas. They aim at "a complete change of paradigm in regard to ecological and social issues", presenting "new concepts instead of reforms" (Equilibrismus e.V., n.d.). See their website for further information: <https://www.equilibrismus.org/en/>.

this privilege be shared in solidarity? How can the many different worlds that people envision connect with each other in harmony and solidarity?

6 Conclusion: There are many alternatives!

I am hopeful for the state of utopian imagination, even on this island! (Respondent 44)

This research set out to find a way to make activism more successful. After describing the situation that most activists find themselves in and stating the research questions that serve as pointers towards finding a possible solution, the research project was placed in the context of anti-oppression, prefiguration, and movement relevance. The following literature review offered crucial insights into the state of knowledge in utopian studies at the moment and provided useful lessons for utopian imagination as an activist practice. The findings from a qualitative survey conducted with over 21 activists were presented and subsequently analysed.

The research showed that the state of utopian imagination in activism is mostly bleak. But there are also aspects of it hidden in activists' lives and organising. Many activists see valuable uses in utopian imagination for their activism and for achieving change, and the detriments are light if practices are designed carefully with the risks in mind. The research provided a big collection of ideas on how imagination can be fostered in activist circles to reap the benefits of UI as an approach in activism. However, fostering the radical and utopian imagination alone can only be the first step in an activist strategy based on utopianism: there is the need to link the imagination with action and transformation.

The findings of this project legitimize the use of time for utopian imagination as part of activist practice as well as giving an array of ideas to start from. They form an important step in translating the idea of utopia from literature and other art-forms into a strategy of achieving fundamental change that can be applied by activists on the ground. Such an activist strategy based on utopian imagination could start with prefigurative internal processes of horizontality, inclusion, and empowerment. Messages and communication could focus on positive framing and alternative institutions could be created. Further, emotional spaces could be mutually supportive and power and resources redistributed. These are first starting points for groups and movements to experiment with and develop further.

The crisis of neoliberalism offers an opportunity for activists to create, live, and spread their alternative visions of the world. Projects such as the Kurdish liberation in Kobane, the unemployed workers movement in Argentina, as well as the autonomous zone of the Zapatistas in Chiapas all show that cracks in the system can be occupied with alternatives. The impact of austerity measures in Greece made way for the raise of

Conclusion: There are many alternatives!

solidarity economics. The Mondragon collective based in the Basque area shows that different forms of production and reproduction are possible. The situation looks bleak but offers so many chances and opportunities that need to be imagined and created.

There is no alternative to exploring the many alternatives. It is high time for activists to leave pure resistance once and for all behind. Enough fighting for small little reforms that strengthen the system! Let's start to build in the cracks that the status quo leaves behind. There are many alternatives! Let's get active and start creating them, first in our minds and dreams – and then in the 'real' world.

7 Appendixes

7.1 Survey questions

The definition was presented in the welcome page of the survey as well as in two questions.

Utopian Imagination is something we *do* together, envisioning and working towards a better future that is radically, from its roots, different to the present. Utopian Imagination grows by bringing conflicts and differences into the open, leading to multiple, rough, and fussy ideas of how things could be better. It serves to give direction, inspire, and mobilise to action. It can be seen as a dynamic process of small steps, of trying out and leaning into, with constant re-evaluation of values, horizons and directions.

Question 0:	To warm up: What three words would you use to describe the world you are trying to create through your activism?
Help:	Be creative, there is no right or wrong!

Question 1:	What do you think about the state of utopian imagination in activism?
Help:	Is it widespread? Is it limited? Is it used at all? + Definition

Question 2:	In what ways could utopian imagination be beneficial and / or detrimental for activism in general?
Help:	Feel free to take a strong position! + Definition

Question 3:	Think about the barriers for utopian imagination in your activism. What tools and methods could be developed and used to overcome those barriers and foster the utopian imagination?
Help:	Any ideas are helpful, no need to be detailed or complete! <i>The answers to this question will be compiled in a resource for all to use.</i>

Question:	Almost finished. Use this box for any comments, thoughts, or suggestions. Thanks!
Help:	

7.2 Survey invitation

Dear friend and activist,

in an attempt to improve activist strategies and tactics, I am working on a research-project at the moment, which explores whether or not we need (more) utopian imagination [1] in activism, if it is beneficial or detrimental, and how this could be implemented in our practices.

What do you think about the state of utopian thinking? Is it an helpful concept? And how could we include visioning, radical imagination, or utopian thinking, into our groups and movements?

I am dedicating my time working on the thesis with the aim to create a resource for all to use who are interested in changing the world starting with radical and utopian visions.

If you can dedicate a few minutes to contribute to this collective process, I'd be very much obliged. Please follow the link below to fill out the short survey. The information will be used in the thesis as part of my studies in MA Public Advocacy and Activism in Galway, potentially in an academic paper [2], and will additionally be compiled into a resource that will be made publicly available by the end of September '16.

Link to **survey**: <http://radical-utopia.limequery.org/929574?lang=en>

The **resource** will be made available here [3]:

<https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/fostering-radical-imagination/>

Please answer the survey as soon as possible, the latest until July 31, 2016 (you know, these deadlines...).

Thank you very much,

Data security and privacy notice: The data you submit is anonymous, and I chose an open-source survey provider located under strict privacy laws, who will keep the information out of corporate hands.

Read more: <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/2016/04/12/zine-1-prefigurative-activism-radical-imagination/>

Contact: ggn-utopia@riseup.net

[1] Some definition will be given at the start of the survey.

[2] The information will be handled not only in accordance to standard ethical considerations of academic research, but also according to activist-research ethics of movement relevance, anti-oppression, and prefiguration (see Luchies 'Towards an Insurrectionary Power/ Knowledge').

[3] You could subscribe to the blog's rss, to get notified when it's ready:
<https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/feed/>

7.3 General activist strategy

Appendix: General activist strategy	
Respondent 40	“Give time by taking care of each other”
	“Build autonomous operating groups”
	“Donating to the direct groups a la effective altruism”
	“Build funds”
	“Build knowledge, resources for activism”
	“Convince the skeptic ones closer to you, fight the powerful far from you”
	“Seek allies among the powerful”
	“Frame around issues you have trouble winning their minds and hearts with”
Respondent 41	“Working collectively to educate and inform in small groups in communities and workplaces using community development principles.”
	“Actively opposing poverty and discrimination.”

7.4 Barriers for UI

Appendix: Barriers for UI	
Space, time, and money	Lack of time. (Respondent 17)
	There is tension between action and reflection, as simple as it both demands time. (Respondent 40)
	Time constraints and the juggling of personal resources (money, food, other obligations) lead to compromises and maybe a lower level of radicality. (Respondent 22)
	Financial problems are a barrier. Lack of space and time is a barrier. (Respondent 24)
	Other than the barriers for utopian imagination that can't be overcome (biological and historical) I guess the only other barrier I can think of is that people don't see any value in utopian thinking. (Respondent 8)
	Status quo. (Respondent 33)
Differences	Lack of time lack of clarity, different motivations why people are in activism. (Respondent 17)
	Unfortunately I see more and more divisions all over in the anarchist/activist society. (Respondent 28)
Personal level	Most people somehow arrange with the situation as it is (which is important to feel good, I guess, but it can also lead to some laziness). (Respondent 9)
	The biggest limitation are the limitations we accept internally and challenging them is an internal process that might be very subjective and depends on different parameters. (Respondent 22)
	We have been conditioned so deeply, so long in repressive ways of being, patriarchy, capitalism/now neoliberalism. we lost connection to ourselves, to rest

Barriers for UI

	of nature etc. to have faith in what may emerge in crisis if we are very aware. (Respondent 17)
Status quo	Repression is a barrier. Hegemonic Education and Socialisation is a barrier. (Respondent 24)
	Exactly the lack of alternatives reinforces a feeling of helplessness. (Respondent 22)
	Desperation (Respondent 43)
	Maggie Thatcher once said "there is no alternative". That point of view is what is so restrictive - like Gramsci's "hegemony" as refined by Chomsky. Its a state of thinking that purports that what we have is the only possibility, that its just "common sense". (Respondent 41)
	I think that the ravages of austerity/neo-liberalism have badly damaged utopian imagination in Ireland. (Respondent 41)
	The emphasis on evidence-based practice with evidence derived not from practice but from other sources discourages the use of the imagination ordinary, extraordinary or radical. (Respondent 39)
	However, I feel that there is a deeply seated distrust towards concrete steps towards improvement. (Respondent 22)
Urgency	It is often put in the defensive corner by (the perception of) more immediate, higher prioritized needs. (Respondent 40)
	Having urgent issues that are discussed or need to be dealt with (Respondent 9)
Other	When working on a specific topic it can be more difficult to envision radical change in society as a whole. (Respondent 38)
	The hegemonic discourses which activists operate within and enact" as well as by the lack of deep systemic analysis and exposure to radical ideas, approaches and alternatives." (Respondent 44)
	The same and quite fixed structures in political groups that don't allow much free thinking space together; the use of similar methods; the factor that people might think differently from "mainstream" society but still in shaped ways and routines. (Respondent 9)

7.5 Radical Imagination Workshop #1

Radical Imagination Workshop, WeCreate Wed 18th May 8-10pm

Goal: Create a space of dialogue and possibility, sparking the radical imagination towards a radically different future with focus on sustainability and the EcoVillage.

Materials needed:

- Paper & colour pens, different kinds
- Flipchart paper and colour markers
- Audio tape recorder (digital)
- Laptop & beamer to show future news video (2:01 min)
- Speakers

[Total time: 100 min!]

Radical Imagination Workshop #1

5 min Welcome & intro

10 min: Introduction:

5 min What 'is' radical imagination:

- based on The Radical Imagination Project (Haiven, Khasnabish)
- radical (lat. Radix: roots): change from roots, fundamental, systemic, unconventional
- imagination: forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present
- capacity to project how world might be
- something we do together (not something one individual 'has')
- grows through overlap, conflict, contradiction, communication
- around stories, images, practices, beliefs, values, relationships, ideas, institutions

5 min Connecting 1916 with radical imagination

30 min: Part I: Imagining the ideal

5 min: Intro to Part I

2 min: show future news from wedeclare.ie:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/FCHgWTYafeE>

- **It's about the process, not an outcome, no need to finish**
- As basis for later discussion
- Alone or in pairs
- think about your ideal society, local or global, in 2050
- How does the 'world' now feel like, smell like, look like? How do we interact with others and with our surroundings? What values are important?
- Start creating a short story, a drawing, a little poem, a short radio news item, or a poster, front page of newspaper (headings)

20 min **to start create**

5 min **to share** with the group

40 min: Part II: Radical imagination & the EcoVillage

5 min: radical you (short round OR open round)

- What does radical mean to you?
- Do you think imagination is important to achieve goals?

Radical Imagination Workshop #1

35 min: radical we: Discussion

- What is radical / imaginative / revolutionary about the EcoVillage?
- Where / How could the project be more radical / imaginative / revolutionary?

15 min: where do we go from here?

How can the radical imagination be fostered in the future (in the EcoVillage)?

END

7.6 Radical Imagination Workshop #2

Radical Imagination Workshop, Summer-Camp Fri 1st July 3-6pm

Goal: The goal of the workshop is to introduce utopian thinking and radical imagination as an activist process and enthuse people to incorporate it in their work within their groups.

Overall goal of the process is to improve activism, make it more creative and successful, be better in achieving what we want, by giving it direction and by inspiring change!

Materials needed:

- Paper & colour pens, different kinds
- (Flipchart) paper and colour markers
- bluetag or similar
- tape for names!
- Camera to archive stuff
- space in common area to showcase results

[Total time: 160 (180) min!]

15 min Welcome & introduction round

who am I, what's the workshop (it's in development process), aims of the workshop

(proposed outcomes, learnings to take home with

explore why utopian thinking / RI is important

overcome fears and difficulties around imagining alternatives, about

using artistic methods,

discover what you want

get inspired by other people's imagination

learn a process on how to foster the RI

a stronger sense of hope, understanding that there are many alternatives

)

Radical Imagination Workshop #2

who are they, why did they come, what do they expect?

15 min: **Introduction:**

10 min: **radical you** (short round) – put answers on mind-maps

- What does radical mean to you?
- What does imagination mean to you?
- Is imagination important for activism?

5 min **What 'is' radical imagination: (only add if missing)**

- based on The Radical Imagination Project (Haiven, Khasnabish)
- radical (lat. Radix: roots): change from roots, fundamental, systemic, unconventional
- imagination: forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present
- capacity to project how world might be
- something we do together (not something one individual 'has')
- grows through overlap, conflict, contradiction, communication
- around stories, images, practices, beliefs, values, relationships, ideas, institutions

30 min: **Values in ideal world**

Which values do we want to see in your ideal world? (Recognize how that is influenced by what we don't want)

5 min: intro and set-up

/ groups of max 4 people – each gets flipcharts and markers

Draw a rough map of a planet
place on it in writing or images/sketches the positive values existing in
this utopian world. Only positive. Recognize what you don't want, use
it as direction giving, to formulate positive wish.

20 min: for the exercise

5 min: sharing

Every group: 3 values → noted down on a flipchart → put worlds on wall

60 min: **Imagining the ideal** (take break at half time. Announce after 25 min over)

5 min: **Set up and intro**

people sit at tables, with paper and colours ready

Alone (2 min)

- Ask to close eyes. Then think about the values. **Then: How does the**

Radical Imagination Workshop #2

'world' now feel like, smell like, look like? What can you hear? Ask to put anything down on paper. A colour, anything abstract, be free!

Alone or in pairs:

- Now imagine aspects of your ideal society that you are most interested in, local, regional, or global, in 2116, drawing from values from previous step
- *How do we interact with others and with our surroundings? What does activity look like? How do we live? How do we eat? Envisage strategies and tactics, what does activism look like?*
- Start by creating
 - a short story (ie 'a perfect day in my life'),
 - a drawing (ie 'my perfect neighbourhood'),
 - a little poem, a poster,
 - ...
- **It's about the process, not an outcome, no need to finish**

25 min: sharing results from previous step (creations & process)

10 min: ask for few volunteers to present what was created (10 min)
Offer to make a little exhibition for the duration of the camp in some common area, if people want that.

15 min: (go around in a circle) **Insights about/ through process**
comments on what it made people think of, any insights, inspiration, new thoughts, revelations, feelings etc they had, be they personal or on topic.

15 min: Conclusion & feedback (quality of workshop)

10 min: feedback (written) Ask to go around, and to come back to circle when finished.

What was good?

What could be improved? What could be added?

What are you taking home / what did you learn?

5 min: Thanks & goodbye!

END

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