Youth Climate Activism and the Politics of Future Redistribution: Subjectivity Formation in Digital Publics

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Abstract. As the climate crisis deepens, the future can no longer be assumed as an inherited temporal continuum; it becomes a contested domain that requires deliberate governance and protection through collective negotiation. Youth, who are disproportionately exposed to long-term climate risks while remaining underrepresented in existing decision-making systems, are emerging as central actors in contemporary sustainability politics. This studyconceptualizes sustainability as a form of redistributive politics, arguing that climate change reflects structural asymmetries in the allocation of resources, exposure to risk, and authority to define the future across generations. Digital publics provide youth with an initial arena of political visibility in which private concerns are translated into shared problem recognition and collective mobilization. Through protest, policy negotiation, divestment initiatives, and community-based governance, young people develop the capacity to navigate institutional logics, articulate claims in public languages, and propose viable alternatives. Such practices demonstrate a recursive process of "acting to understand, and understanding to act," through which subjectivity is formed not prior to action but within it. The article contends that youth should not be positioned merely as future beneficiaries of sustainability policies, but as active co-architects of institutional arrangements that shape the conditions of the future itself.

Keywords: Youth Climate Activism; Sustainability Politics; Digital Publics; Intergenerational Justice; Subjectivity Formation.

1. Introduction

Once treated as a technical concern of science, climate change has evolved into a lived global condition that influences not only ecosystems but also economies, infrastructures, and intergenerational trajectories. Stern interprets the climate crisis as a structural consequence of a growth-driven economy that persistently offloads ecological burdens beyond its immediate beneficiaries. producing systemic asymmetries in the distribution of benefits and risks across social groups[1]. Under such conditions, the future is no longer a temporal resource naturally inherited across generations, but a scarce object requiring institutional protection. The reason youth respond most rapidly and intensely to climate issues is not rooted in emotion or moral inclination, but in their structural position within intergenerational time. As Soltau notes, climate risk is temporally extended, meaning that those with longer life expectancies will bear more direct consequences of ecological and existential disruptions caused by climate change[2]. Yet youth lack corresponding representation in existing decision-making institutions, producing a disjunction in which future impacts are immediate, while institutional participation remains deferred.

Meanwhile, digital media has created an emergent public space in which youth can practice political engagement in advance. As Martinez Sainz and Hanna demonstrate, young people form decentralized networks of "peer-to-peer learning and collective meaning-making" through sharing experiences and knowledge on social platforms (Martinez Sainz & Hanna, 2023). In this process, private anxiety is reorganised into public problem consciousness, enabling the formation of action-oriented political subjectivity.

The significance of youth climate activism therefore lies not merely in moral appeal, but in reorienting the social contract from intra-generational interest negotiation toward intergenerational future safeguarding. Young people act not merely as recipients of what the future offers, but as participants actively constructing the frameworks that determine its possibility[4]. Accordingly, This studyanalyzes youth climate activism through the lenses of redistributive politics and subjectivity

formation, examining how activism emerges in digital publics, how youth enter institutional negotiation, and how they participate in reconstructing the developmental frameworks of the future.

Existing research primarily focuses on three directions: the structural causes of the climate crisis, the social motivations of youth participation, and the organizational and learning functions of digital media. Regarding structural issues, Stern defines climate change as a deep-rooted failure of market economies to internalize ecological costs, arguing that the crisis concerns not only nature but the legitimacy of economic institutions themselves[1]. Soltau further emphasizes the structural coupling between climate change and sustainable development, asserting that any effective response must involve redefining resource use, technological pathways, and social distribution[2]. According to the IPCC, climate and development policies are structurally interdependent, with the primary challenge being their systemic reconfiguration rather than mere alignment[3].

In studies of youth climate activism, Fisher and Nasrin show that youth mobilization is not merely emotional protest, but a response to institutional inequality and uneven intergenerational risk exposure[4]. Noth and Tonzer find that the strongest predictor of youth climate action is not knowledge, but the coupled experience of rising perceived climate risk and declining institutional trust[5]. de Moor's research on European youth demonstrates that cross-national mobilization relies on shared conditions of exposure rather than centralized organizational leadership[8]. In digital publics, Martinez Sainz and Hanna conceptualize "peer-to-peer climate literacy" as a mechanism through which youth collectively produce knowledge and strategies. .Almeida characterizes this as a decentralized, replicable, and scalable structure enabling activism to circulate flexibly between local and global contexts[7].

Overall, while existing scholarship identifies the motivations and expressive pathways of youth activism, less attention has been paid to how youth generate governance capacities through action, and how activism is transformed into institutional participation. This studyaddresses this gap by arguing that the core significance of youth climate activism lies in the following recursive process: action produces subjectivity → subjectivity enables institutional entry → institutional engagement reshapes the conditions of future sustainability.

2. The Structural Emergence of Youth Climate Activism: From Future Anxiety to Political Subjectivity

2.1 Structural Characteristics of the Climate Crisis and Intergenerational Inequality

Since the beginning of the 21st century, climate change has no longer been understood merely as a technical issue of environmental science or ecological management, but as a structural problem deeply embedded in the global political-economic order. Greenhouse gas emissions are not accidental; rather, they are the cumulative result of a growth-oriented industrial model in which ecological costs have been systematically externalized. Climate change illustrates a structural flaw in contemporary economies, where short-term growth imperatives routinely displace ecological accountability onto future generations.[1]. In this sense, the climate crisis is not only an environmental crisis, but also an institutional one.

This gives rise to pronounced intergenerational inequality. The material benefits generated by carbon-intensive development have been disproportionately enjoyed by older populations, while the long-term risks, heightened livelihood vulnerability, and shrinking developmental horizons fall primarily upon youth and those yet to be born. Occupying the position of "the longest future exposure," young people become the direct bearers of climate consequences[2]. The IPCC further emphasizes that climate risk exhibits cumulative intergenerational effects, meaning that younger cohorts are statistically more likely to experience extreme climate events within their lifetime [3].

At the same time, young people occupy a structurally paradoxical position: they inherit a future increasingly eroded by climate change, yet are routinely characterized in public discourse as "not yet mature" and lacking political agency. However, in the context of climate crisis, the distribution of power and risk becomes reversed—those least embedded in existing institutions often discern the

approaching crisis more acutely Thus, youth engagement with climate politics does not stem from moral idealism but from a concrete recognition of the threat climate change poses to their own life prospects. In youth climate activism narratives, “anxiety” is no longer a psychological state, but a structural experience of losing one’s future guarantees—forming the basis for political subjectivity.

2.2 Sustainability as a New Social Contract and Political Agenda

Traditionally, “sustainable development” has been understood as a policy goal seeking balance between economic growth and environmental protection. However, as climate risks intensify, sustainability now transcends technical reform; it redefines temporal justice by reshaping how societies allocate resources, advantages, and risks across generations.. The IPCC emphasizes that climate governance and development policy are not separate domains but structurally interlinked: any response to climate change necessarily redefines the direction, speed, and objectives of social development[3]. Yet existing institutional frameworks remain oriented toward short-term economic cycles and present-demographic interests, largely excluding the rights of future generations. Youth therefore emerge on the global political stage not as voices waiting to mature, but as the subjects structurally excluded from the prevailing social contract.

As Fisher and Nasrin show in their analysis of youth climate strike networks, young people have used protest, public expression, and transnational coordination to reinsert “future rights” into the public agenda, transforming sustainability from a normative aspiration into a site of political contestation[4].Accordingly, sustainability today concerns the distribution of authority over future development trajectories, the allocation of responsibility for the costs generated by historical growth models, and the power to determine the terms under which the future can be collectively shaped. The fundamental significance of youth climate activism lies in reopening these political negotiations.

3. The Formation of Digital Publics: From Private Anxiety to Collective Action

3.1 Digital Space as a Site for the Formation of Youth Publicness

Contrary to traditional understandings that locate the public sphere in physical forums such as plazas, parliaments, or mass media institutions, the public sphere in the 21st century increasingly appears as a distributed space constituted through digital media. For young people, this space is not external to everyday life; rather, it is embedded within their daily practices. Contemporary youth form relationships, express emotions, engage in discussions, and share knowledge through digital platforms, and their political consciousness emerges through these processes. Research indicates that the use of digital media opens new avenues for youth engagement in politics, easing access to participation and encouraging young individuals to become proactive contributors rather than mere observers.This platform-based publicness is particularly salient in the context of climate issues.

However, digital publicness does not simply aggregate emotions; it makes private experiences visible and nameable. The experiences of “future contraction,” heightened ecological precarity, and “institutional disillusionment” that young people feel under the climate crisis are initially individualized anxieties. Yet, through repeated narration, sharing, and circulation online, these emotions are transformed into collectively recognizable political concerns. As many youth emphasize in climate discourse, they are not speaking from an abstract moral position, but from the standpoint of their own life trajectories and the threatened conditions of their future existence.Moreover, digital activism possesses an inherently pedagogical dimension. Studies show that youth are not merely receivers of information but producers of knowledge; through processes of “sharing—commenting—remixing,” they develop an understanding of the climate crisis while engaging in “peer-to-peer learning” within digital networks. Thus, youth learn through action, and in learning, they become political actors.In addition, the digital environment affords youth a form of dual citizenship: they inhabit both geographic communities and digital collectives. The latter enables them to transcend spatial, cultural, and institutional boundaries, generating transnational resonance within the climate

movement. This cross-regional emotional co-formation is a foundational condition for the rapid global diffusion of youth climate activism.

It is important to note that digital publics are not idealized spaces; they are also marked by algorithmic bias, information overload, and opinion polarization. Yet the key point is this: digital publicness enables youth to create political participation spaces before formal institutions recognize their political legitimacy.

3.2 Decentralized Mobilization and Replicable Action Logics

A defining characteristic of youth climate activism is its decentralized mode of mobilization. Unlike large-scale social movements that depend on formal organizational hierarchies, membership structures, and stable action planning, youth climate activism often spreads through low-threshold, replicable, and substitutable forms of engagement. For instance, the “Fridays for Future” strikes began with a single individual, yet the symbolic act of absence could be immediately reproduced by anyone, giving the movement a high degree of transmissibility.

Almeida points out that contemporary climate activism is characterized by plural and co-existing modalities—including protest, advocacy, lifestyle practices, and institutional participation—between which participants can fluidly shift[7]. Thus, youth activism should be understood not as a singular strategy but as a composable toolkit of action repertoires. At the same time, youth who participate in climate activism often exhibit lower levels of trust in existing institutions and corporate actors; their engagement is not driven solely by normative values but also by pragmatic assessments of institutional insufficiency. Studies show that youth who perceive higher climate risk and demonstrate lower trust in government or corporate governance are more likely to participate actively in climate mobilization [5]. In this sense, youth climate activism is better understood as a response to the limitations of present governance logics, rather than a simple rejection of authority.

In both digital and physical contexts, youth continuously engage in practices of making action visible. They construct narrative frames through social media communication; cultivate shared presence through public gatherings; generate public attention through symbolic acts; and enter institutional discussion spaces through policy advocacy and negotiation. For example, young activists in Europe have significantly expanded their visibility in public agendas through protest, policy pressure, and transnational coalition-building[8].

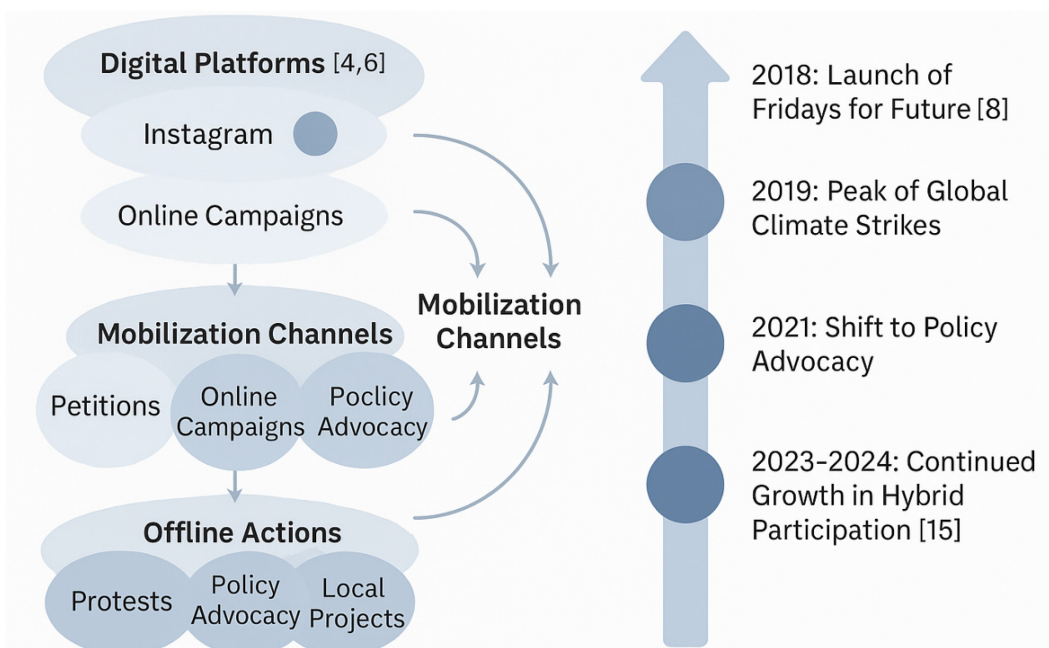

Figure 1. Structure of Digital Mobilization and Pathways of Youth Participation in Climate Activism (2015–2024)

Note: The diagram illustrates the evolution of youth climate activism from digital to hybrid participation. It highlights three interconnected layers — Digital Platforms, Mobilization Channels, and Offline Actions — with major global milestones such as the 2018 launch of Fridays for Future [8], the 2019 peak of global climate strikes, and the subsequent shift toward policy advocacy (2021–2024) [4, 6, 15].

In the Chinese context, youth increasingly assert themselves as climate actors rather than passive recipients of environmental crisis, shaping their identity through both international forums and domestic practice[10].Thus, youth climate activism is not driven by a single leader, centralized organization, or unified ideology. Instead, it emerges as a networked social movement grounded in shared future anxiety, collective exposure to climate risk, and digital-public connectivity. This form of mobilization not only reshapes the practices of political organization, but also the very processes through which political subjectivity is formed.

4. Sustainability as Redistributive Politics: Institutional Restructuring of the Future Through Youth Participation

4.1 Sustainable Development as a Process of Reconfiguring Future Economic Structures

Within traditional policy frameworks, sustainable development has often been defined as a technical balance between economic growth and ecological protection. However, once the cumulative effects of climate risk begin to influence energy supply systems, patterns of industrial production, urban infrastructures, and public finance structures, the question of sustainability no longer concerns environmental management alone. Rather, it speaks to the institutional configurations through which society organises production, distribution, and conditions of living in the future. Stern argues that climate change does not indicate environmental disorder within a single sector, but a structural imbalance produced by a growth-oriented economy that systematically externalizes environmental costs—an imbalance “sufficient to unsettle the very basis of modern economic legitimacy”[1]. Carbon emissions, therefore, are not merely technical variables but political outcomes reflecting how institutions distribute costs and benefits. Soltau further demonstrates that sustainability and development cannot be achieved through simple compromise, but require a redefinition of social priorities. The key to governance is not preserving the status quo, but acknowledging the finite nature of future ecological capacity and redesigning the scale and pace of growth accordingly[2].

On the level of resource distribution, climate change reveals not an environmental burden alone, but an intergenerational asymmetry between the beneficiaries and victims of the current development model. The wealth derived from carbon-based growth has primarily benefited groups occupying privileged positions within current social and economic hierarchies., while the long-term risks and diminishing life opportunities resulting from emissions and ecological degradation have been displaced onto youth and future generations. Stern notes that the modern growth regime maintains its returns precisely through externalizing environmental costs, thereby generating systemic inequalities in the distribution of risks and benefits[1]. The core question of sustainability is therefore not simply how to reduce harm, but how to redefine the rights to resource use, the boundaries of guaranteed life quality, and the authority to shape the future. As Soltau emphasizes, the consequences of climate crisis unfold over time; those with longer life expectancy will experience deeper ecological and existential effects[2]. Thus, debates over “resource distribution” are fundamentally debates over intergenerational redistribution: whether the future remains a shared public resource or becomes a depleted private inheritance. Youth climate activism is therefore not only an environmental movement, but a struggle over the continuity of social structures themselves.

The IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report similarly highlights the “structural overlap” between climate policy, development policy, and social governance, noting that any selection among them reshapes the distributional configuration of future resources [3]. In this sense, sustainability is a politics of future redistribution. Within this framework, youth emerge as central political actors not because they possess stronger moral commitments, but because they occupy a structurally specific

and irreplaceable position at the intersection of future risk exposure, extended life-course duration, and institutional underrepresentation. They directly experience the question of whether the future remains livable, rather than encountering climate change as abstract information.

4.2 Youth Political Participation in Just Transition: From Protest to Institutional Shaping

In the context of ongoing transformations in energy systems, industrial organization, and social structures, just transition has become a central concept. It asserts that the societal shift toward low-carbon and sustainable development must not transfer the costs of transition onto marginalized groups or future generations[12]. Youth movements have translated the notion of just transition from abstract policy language into tangible arenas of institutional practice.

4.2.1 From Protesters to Negotiators: The Rhineland Coal Region Case

In Germany's Rhineland region, lignite mining has long caused ecological damage and public health risks. Initially, youth activists engaged in mass land occupations and public demonstrations to prevent mine expansion. However, once local authorities initiated just-transition negotiations, youth organizations were formally granted seats on the transition commission, participating directly in decisions regarding mine-closure timelines, employment alternatives, and land restoration planning. Research shows that this marked a shift from youth as a "visible protest force" to youth as an "institutional stakeholder"[4]. Their demands were not for the immediate cessation of all industrial activities, but rather to co-design the concrete pathways through which society exits a high-carbon future.

4.2.2 Redesigning Capital Flows: The University Divestment Movement

The university divestment movement pushes university endowments to withdraw investments from fossil fuel companies, translating abstract climate ethics into material reallocation of financial capital[13]. Its systemic influence derives from the dual status of universities as both educational institutions and major financial actors. In this process, youth activists engage in agenda-setting, petitioning, public hearings, and alternative investment planning—demonstrating the learning-by-doing nature of activism[9]. The university thus becomes not only a site of knowledge acquisition, but a laboratory for sustainable governance.

4.2.3 Linking Lifestyle and Institutional Transformation: The Urbanization of Doughnut Economics

When Amsterdam adopted the "doughnut economics" framework—constraining economic activity within an ecological ceiling and a social foundation—youth organizations assumed collaborative roles in community research, participatory budgeting, and parliamentary hearing mobilization. This shows that youth are not merely symbolically "participating," but increasingly co-producing the institutional logics of future urban forms.

Across the past decade, youth pathways into institutional arenas have expanded significantly, shifting their role from protesters to participants in governance. As Trott emphasizes, the core of youth climate activism lies not in emotional mobilization, but in developing an understanding of institutional logics through action and refining strategies through practice—forming a recursive cycle of "acting to understand, and understanding to act"[9]. At the municipal level, youth reshape public resource allocation through participatory budgeting and community energy projects. In consultative governance, they translate climate concerns into policy language through engagement in transition commissions and public hearings. As Martinez Sainz and Hanna note, such institutional participation depends on "peer-to-peer learning," in which shared experience and collaborative interpretation generate political expression capacity (Martinez Sainz & Hanna, 2023). Within universities, divestment campaigns, curriculum reform, and sustainable campus planning reposition climate issues at the core of academic production. de Moor demonstrates that such institutional participation constitutes a struggle over who has the authority to define the direction of future development[8].

Thus, youth participation in institutions is not a passive adaptation to existing governance, but a practice of redefining the objects and purposes of collective decision-making. Its significance lies in using action to reproduce and reshape the institution itself—thereby cultivating the capacity to govern the future. Youth activism, therefore, follows a new logic: it is not merely an expression of standpoint, but a process of designing alternative models of how society should operate.

5. Action as Learning: The Development of Governance Capacity Through Practice

5.1 Knowledge is Generated Through Action: Youth Understanding Climate Politics in Practice

Understanding is generated and refined through active engagement, not as a preliminary condition but as a consequence of practice; rather, it is produced, shared, and validated through action. Whereas traditional education systems define knowledge as transmissible, measurable, and controlled by experts, youth climate activism demonstrates a different epistemology: understanding is not the end-point of learning, but the outcome of engagement. Trott's interviews with youth climate justice organizations in the United States show that young participants acquire two interconnected forms of knowledge through school strikes, demonstrations, policy consultations, and public education work: first, factual knowledge about the climate crisis; and second, operational knowledge regarding how social systems function, how influence is exercised, and how political pressure is built[9]. This knowledge is not acquired in formal classrooms, but emerges through task coordination, collaborative organizing, group deliberation, and public expression within the movement.

Youth do not wait for institutions to provide learning opportunities; they build their own learning mechanisms through action. Youth subjectivity is not formed in a single moment, but consolidated as young people repeatedly enter different governance arenas. Trott identifies a recursive process in youth climate activism, in which action generates understanding, and understanding retroactively reshapes action strategies, meaning that learning occurs not outside institutions, but within public participation and negotiation practices[9].

At the level of urban governance, youth engage in community energy initiatives, participatory budgeting, and low-carbon campus planning, shifting climate issues from abstract discourse to localized institutional negotiation and accumulating experience through interaction with municipal governments and community organizations. Within universities, divestment campaigns, curriculum reforms, and sustainable campus governance reorient both knowledge production and institutional structures. Martinez Sainz and Hanna argue that this process relies on "peer-to-peer learning" within youth networks, where understanding frameworks and action capacities are co-generated through sharing, discussion, and reinterpretation [6]. This enables youth to shift from concerned observers to actors capable of designing proposals and advancing reforms.

In international governance, youth participate in climate diplomacy through representation mechanisms, transnational alliances, and policy advocacy, seeking institutional recognition of their role in shaping the future. de Moor notes that youth engagement at the global level is not symbolic; rather, it constitutes a substantive intervention in the reconfiguration of responsibility for future-oriented policy agendas [8].Thus, the formation of youth political subjectivity is characterized by deep practical embeddedness: young people do not act because they already possess capacity—they gain capacity through acting. Through continuous interaction with institutions across public, educational, and international governance arenas, they develop understanding, strategic competence, and negotiation ability, thereby becoming actors situated within institutions rather than positioned outside them. Martinez Sainz and Hanna's analysis of "digital climate activism" further demonstrates that young people on social media do more than disseminate information; they develop understandings of power relations through discussion and construct decentralized networks of knowledge production through peer support[6]. This reveals a cyclical structure of action → learning → renewed action, through which political subjectivity is continually reinforced. Action does not

follow from prior knowledge; rather, action produces learning, and understanding is its result—not its prerequisite.

5.2 The Formation of Youth Subjectivity: From Powerlessness to Co-Creating the Future

The emergence of youth political subjectivity in climate activism does not originate from biological age, social identity, or moral disposition[14]. Rather, it develops through practice, as young people form a concrete sense of "I can influence structures." The shift from affected individuals, to activists, to co-governance actors is not the result of personal will alone, but the accumulation of political experience. This dynamic of experiential learning and agency formation is also observed in comparative studies of youth climate activism [15].

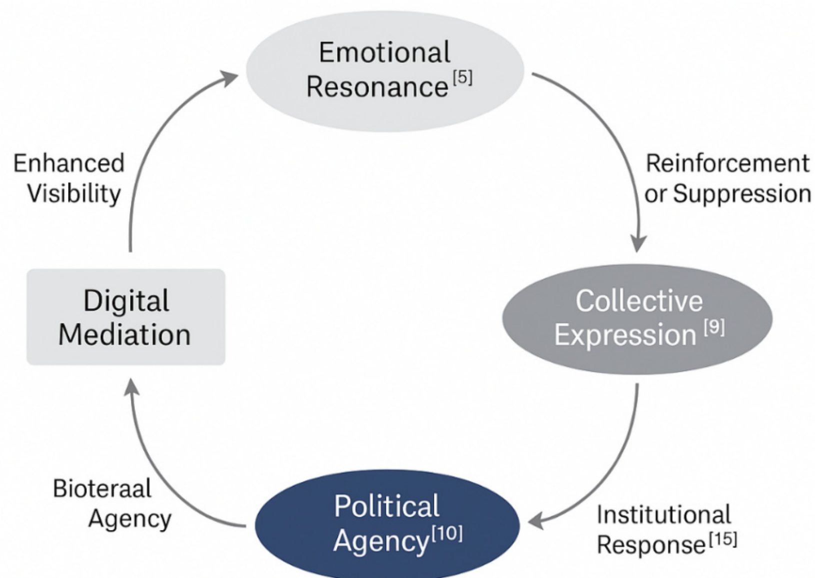

Figure 2. *The Mechanism of Youth Climate Subjectivity Formation in Digital and Physical Publics*

Note: The diagram visualizes the feedback mechanism through which emotional resonance, collective expression, and public recognition contribute to the political agency of youth. A positive feedback loop links emotional engagement and political action, mediated by digital visibility [5, 9, 10, 15]. Institutional responses may either reinforce or constrain this process depending on context.

5.2.1 Emotional Communities as the Foundation of Subjectivity Formation

Youth climate action often begins in feelings of anxiety, disappointment, or powerlessness. Yet collective action transforms these emotions into political capacity. Collective spaces are not sites for emotional release, but for re-signifying emotion into shared meanings. Noth and Tonzer show that among youth climate activists, the stronger the perception of climate risk, the higher the frequency of participation—and the higher the participation frequency, the stronger the belief in one's ability to influence institutions[5]. Emotion precedes consciousness, and the collective converts emotion into political understanding. As O'Brien et al. emphasize, such affective transformation is central to how youth convert emotional engagement into political capacity [15].

5.2.2 From Protesters to Governance Actors: Changing Youth Positions Within Institutions

The aim of climate activism is not to demonstrate youth enthusiasm, but to rewrite the question of who has the authority to determine future development pathways. Over the past decade, the channels through which youth enter institutional spaces have expanded significantly, shifting their role in public affairs from protesters to participants in governance. As Trott argues, the core of youth climate activism lies not in emotional mobilization, but in developing institutional understanding through practice, adjusting strategies through experience, and accumulating governance capability through the recursive cycle of action → understanding → further action [9].

At the municipal level, youth influence public resource allocation through participatory budgeting and community energy projects, moving climate issues from street protest to the procedural spaces where collective goods are distributed. Within formal negotiation and consultation mechanisms, youth translate their concerns into policy-recognizable language through participation in transition committees, advisory hearings, and policy consultations. Martinez Sainz and Hanna note that such institutional participation depends on "peer-to-peer learning," where shared experience and collaborative interpretation collectively generate political articulation capacity[6]. At the university level, youth drive divestment campaigns, curriculum restructuring, and sustainable campus governance, bringing climate concerns from public controversy into the core of academic production. de Moor demonstrates that such institutional participation constitutes a substantive struggle over who holds the authority to shape the future[8].

Thus, youth entry into institutional arenas is not passive adaptation to existing systems; it is an active process of redefining the objects and purposes of governance. The significance lies in participating in the reproduction of institutional arrangements through action, and in this process, becoming shapers of future governance capacity. Youth are not merely "participating in public affairs"—they are redefining what public affairs are about.

5.2.3 Restructuring Identity: Youth Are No Longer "Citizens of the Future"

Zhu Xufeng's discourse analysis of youth climate participation shows that young people increasingly reject being positioned as those who are represented by others, instead asserting themselves as actors, witnesses, and co-decision makers situated in the here-and-now[10]. Youth identity is therefore no longer grounded in age, but in capacity to act, shared knowledge, and responsibility for the future. Young people are increasingly recognized not as future citizens-in-waiting, but as current actors who exercise concrete decision-making capacity.

6. Conclusion

The rise of youth climate activism is not an incidental emotional response, but an integral component of the ongoing transformation of global political structures. As a consequence of the long-term dynamics of industrial modernity, the climate crisis has rendered the future no longer a naturally extendable temporal horizon, but a scarce resource requiring collective negotiation and institutional protection. Stern emphasizes that climate change reflects a deep systemic imbalance whose risks are distributed asymmetrically across generations. This means that youth are not merely those affected by the crisis; they are situated at the very center of how the problem is structured and experienced.

Supported by the emergence of digital publics, youth build coalitions through shared experiences and peer networks, transforming individual feelings of an uncertain future into public expression. In doing so, they shift climate change from an environmental issue to a question of social distribution and political legitimacy. Through protest, public communication, divestment campaigns, participatory governance, and policy negotiation, young people increasingly enter institutional spaces, generating understanding, refining strategy, and developing political judgment through practice.

Fundamentally, sustainability raises political questions concerning who governs future resources, how risks are apportioned, and where authority over development trajectories resides..The IPCC notes that climate governance and development governance structurally overlap, such that every decision regarding the future simultaneously reorganises social relations. Climate governance, therefore, is not an agenda that fits into existing institutions—it is a force that reorganises institutions themselves.

The subjectivity expressed in youth climate activism does not derive from age, but from the structural position youth occupy in relation to the future. Young people act not as passive recipients of the future but as participants who actively shape the institutional frameworks determining its realization. They do not wait for institutions to grant them voice; rather, they generate institutional participation capacity through action and thereby enter the public arena where the future is distributed, managed, and defined.

In this sense, youth climate activism is neither a moral appeal nor merely a form of social resistance. It is a driving force in the transition from a growth-centered political economy to a sustainability-centered mode of governance. The question youth activism poses is not “Do we care about climate change?” but rather“How shall we live together in the future we are already shaping?”

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