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Youthful Visions: Navigating Faith and the Future

Insights from Portuguese Youth at the World Youth Day 2023

Abstract (English) – Youthful Visions: Navigating Faith and the Future. Insights from Portuguese Youth at the World Youth Day 2023. This study delves into the pivotal role of core values and beliefs in shaping the daily choices, actions, and perceptions of youth. While youth embodies promise and hope for a better future, contemporary challenges arise from irreversible past decisions. World Youth Day serves as a platform for reflection on these challenges through the lens of Catholic values. Focused on the realization of World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2023, this research seeks to characterize how Portuguese youth perceives their future. An online survey conducted between April and October 2022 gathered responses from 2480 individuals aged 14 to 30. The findings illuminate the religious beliefs and practices of Portuguese youth, revealing the importance of specific values and how they envision their future. The study also explores correlations between projected futures, core values, and religious faith, shedding light on the changes these young individuals desire and consider essential, as well as their perceived roles as agents of change.

Keywords: World Youth Day, Young people, Religion, Catholicism

Abstract (Français) – Visions de jeunes : avancer vers l'avenir dans la foi. Le point de vue de la jeunesse portugaise aux Journées Mondiales de la Jeunesse 2023. Cette étude se penche sur le rôle central des valeurs et des croyances fondamentales dans l'élaboration des choix quotidiens, des actions et des perceptions des jeunes. Alors que la jeunesse incarne la promesse et l'espoir d'un avenir meilleur, les défis contemporains découlent de décisions passées irréversibles. La Journée Mondiale de la Jeunesse fait office de plateforme de réflexion sur ces défis, à travers le prisme des valeurs catholiques. Axée sur la réalisation des Journées Mondiales de la Jeunesse à Lisbonne, au Portugal, en 2023, cette recherche vise à caractériser la façon dont la jeunesse portugaise perçoit l'avenir. Une enquête en ligne menée entre avril et octobre 2022 a permis de recueillir les réponses de 2 480 personnes âgées de 14 à 30 ans. Les résultats mettent en lumière les croyances et les pratiques religieuses des jeunes Portugais ; ils révèlent l'importance de valeurs spécifiques et la façon dont ces jeunes envisagent leur avenir. L'étude explore également les corrélations entre les projections d'avenir, les valeurs fondamentales et la foi religieuse. Elle met en lumière les changements que ces jeunes gens souhaitent et considèrent comme essentiels, ainsi que la perception qu'ils ont de leur rôle d'agents du changement.

Abstract (Deutsch) – Visionen der Jugend: Unterwegs durch Glaube und Zukunft. Eindrücke von portugiesischen Jugendlichen auf dem Weltjugendtag 2023. Diese Studie befasst sich mit der zentralen Rolle von Grundwerten und Überzeugungen bei der Gestaltung der täglichen Entscheidungen, Handlungen und Wahrnehmungen von Jugendlichen. Während die Jugend das Versprechen und die Hoffnung auf eine bessere Zukunft verkörpert, ergeben sich die heutigen Herausforderungen aus unumkehrbaren Entscheidungen der Vergangenheit. Der Weltjugendtag dient als Plattform für die Reflexion über diese Herausforderungen in der Perspektive katholischer Werte. Diese Studie konzentriert sich auf die Durchführung des Weltjugendtags in Lissabon, Portugal, im Jahr 2023 und versucht zu charakterisieren, wie die portugiesische Jugend ihre Zukunft wahrnimmt. In einer zwischen April und Oktober 2022 durchgeführten Online-Umfrage wurden 2480 Personen im Alter von 14 bis 30 Jahren befragt. Die Ergebnisse beleuchten den religiösen Glauben und die religiösen Praktiken der portugiesischen Jugend und zeigen, wie sie sich ihre Zukunft vorstellen und wie wichtig ihnen bestimmte Werte sind. Die Studie untersucht auch Zusammenhänge zwischen Zukunftsvorstellungen, Grundwerten und religiösem Glauben und wirft ein Licht auf die Veränderungen, die sich diese jungen Menschen wünschen und für wesentlich halten, sowie auf ihre wahrgenommene Rolle als Akteure des Wandels.

1. Introduction

In the context of the World Youth Day, to be held in Portugal in August 2023 and following the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a relevant impact on the way each of us live our lives, CEPCEP has developed a study for the Portuguese Bishops' Conference with the aim of better understanding how the current generation of young people between 14 and 30 years old live the spiritual dimension in their lives, religion and faith, and face the future. We now present this article based on the study Youth, Faith, and Future (Dias et al. 2023).

At a time in history when we are confronted with the need to make decisions and change behaviour that will irreversibly define the future, whether in terms of climate change and sustainability, or in terms of economic and political models, or even in the relationship we have with technology, it is important to know and reflect on the lives and beliefs of young people with regard to these same themes. Knowing the vision that young people have of a future that is more theirs than that of the older generations can help us respond to the major challenges we face in a concerted and intergenerational manner.

Several authors agree that children and youth were particularly vulnerable during this period as, in addition to their individual situation, they were also exposed to stresses coming from their parents (Imran/Zeshan/Pervaiz 2020). The disruption of daily routines, in particular the temporary closure of schools and confinement, as well as the fear of becoming ill and the social distancing from

friends and peers, resulted in a decrease in the physical and psychological well-being of children and adolescents. One of the factors that appears to have had the most negative impact on young people's mental health is the excessive time spent on screens, which have become a locus for study, socializing and entertainment. Common feelings detected among the adolescents were anxiety, frustration, and boredom, as the forced isolation during the pandemic years did not allow them to have the social contact necessary for their healthy socio-psychological development at this stage of their lives. Another study, involving students from 56 secondary schools in Switzerland, showed that participants who already showed high levels of emotional stress before the pandemic were those who showed the most marked worsening during the subsequent period, regardless of the influence of other stress factors characteristic of these times, such as economic difficulties, fear regarding their own or their loved ones' health, and social isolation (Shanahan et al. 2022). This study also revealed that the most effective strategies for maintaining mental health during periods of compulsory confinement among these young people were to maintain a set daily routine, to exercise and to look at the situation and the future in a positive way. A systematic review of the comparative literature on the mental health of children and young people (aged 0-24 years) before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (Kauhanen et al. 2022), which focused on 21 different studies, concluded that there was a deterioration in the mental health of children and adolescents, and reported increased depression, anxiety, and psychological disorders.

Some of these studies propose that increased loneliness and negative thinking are at the root of decreased psychological wellbeing, but do not demonstrate a return to the pre-pandemic state despite a progressive return to a 'new normal' in which we learn to live with Covid-19. For example, a worsening of eating disorders among young people has been reported on a global scale since the start of the pandemic, which has yet to show signs of reversal (Katzman 2021). Similar results have been presented for other conditions such as depression and anxiety, and for mental health problems in general (Correia 2020; Cost et al. 2021). Another study, conducted with secondary and higher education students in Spain, revealed that, in general, their alcohol consumption increased during the pandemic. A post-pandemic data collection showed that consumption decreased among university students but remained high among younger students. Moreover, young people with symptoms of depression and anxiety are the most likely to consume alcohol, both during and after the pandemic, entering a vicious circle of worsening their physical and mental health (Vera et al. 2021). On the other hand, another study points to the possibility that the experience of spirituality, defined as a set of values of connection with oneself, others and the transcendent, helped young people cope with the challenges that Covid-19 posed to their mental health. The study further proposes that these values associated with spirituality, as well as a range of resources and skills related to

experiencing spirituality, not only made young people more resilient in the face of adversity but also made them envision a post-pandemic future in a distinctive way (Chirico 2021).

Based on the assumptions that young people tend to be more optimistic about the future, a UK study looked at how young adults (aged 22-29) coped with a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly its economic and financial dimension and the issue of unemployment. The study revealed that attitudes towards the future are determined by an interaction between individual resources (e.g. education, culture, skills, knowledge, social network) and individual attitudes. Among the latter, individualism, understood as the belief in the individual's capacity for agency and confidence in their efficacy, is a key determinant of optimistic outlooks on the future (Keating/Mellis 2022). These results are consistent with previous theorisations on the subject, which discuss which are the main factors that frame our awareness of the future and the way we form a perspective on it, emphasising the understanding of temporality, openness to alternatives, hold a systemic view of phenomena and events, concern for others, and belief in individual agency (Sools et al. 2022).

There are several studies that show that a striking event such as the Covid-19 pandemic, at all levels, motivated a questioning about how to live the present and a deep reflection on how one intends to, or should, live the future. A review of the literature on the topic shows that, after the periods of confinement, in parallel with the abandonment of measures of hygiene, security and social distancing, a discourse on the 'new normal' emerged, in which it is noted that the post-pandemic period is not exactly a return to the pre-pandemic status quo, but rather a reconfiguration of daily life in the light of this very disruptive experience. In this discourse on the 'new normal', themes such as the need to rethink the future and to change stand out, generically associated with the recognition of the importance of adaptability, innovation and resilience, and the reorientation towards sustainability (Ossiannilsson 2021). This idea also emerges in the study of Chirico (2021), according to which young people oriented towards values linked to spirituality and with a more intense experience of their spiritual dimension tend to value sustainability as the most important goal to achieve in the future. The path to sustainability is through an urgent halt (or reversal) of climate change and the achievement of the objectives for sustainable development proposed by the UN (2015). Alongside this desire to promote sustainability and to adopt a more sustainable way of life, a concern is also emerging with work in the studies on how young people envision the future. This concern is not so much about whether they will have a job or a livelihood, but rather a questioning of how work is conceptualized and experienced in contemporary society, with a search for alternative models that provide a better balance between work activity and other dimensions of life, as well as greater well-being (Carbajo and Kelly 2022).

Research among Croatian adolescents during the Covid-19 pandemic highlights that religiosity not only fosters personal growth and resilience but also plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' responses to profound societal shifts, such as those brought by the pandemic. (Filipović/Rihtar 2023, 134)

Against this background, and in a year when the World Youth Day is being held in Portugal, the Portuguese Bishops' Conference, in partnership with the Centre of Studies on Portuguese Speaking Peoples and Cultures of the Catholic University of Portugal, has launched a survey among young Portuguese aged between 14 and 30 (the target public of the World Youth Day). Getting to know their beliefs, the values that govern their conduct, and the way they see the future are key objectives to better understand and accompany young people on their journey of spirituality and faith (religious or otherwise).

In January 2017, in a letter to young people on the occasion of the presentation of the preparatory document for the Synod of Bishops entitled *Young people, faith and vocational discernment*, Pope Francis invited young people to "go out"; to set out to find a "more just and fraternal society", recalling that change is born in the hearts of those who, in his words, cannot and do not want to submit to the "culture of the disposable, nor give in to the globalization of indifference". The idea of movement underlying the act of going forth is evident in the themes of the last World Youth Days – "Young people, I say to you, get up" (cf. Lk 7:14); "Get up! I call you to witness what you have seen" (cf. Acts 26:16) and "Mary arose and departed in haste" (cf. Lk 1:39), the latter being the motto of the message for the XXXVII World Youth Day to be held this year in Portugal. Like Mary, Pope Francis calls young people to be involved and to live "a good haste", capable of leading them to meet the other, to overcome distances and to build memories, highlighting their role in building unity as opposed to the fragmentation that characterises humanity.

These themes also echo the fundamental and foundational ideas of the Holy Father evident in the encyclicals *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). The care for our common home shows itself to be a growing concern among young people, with the latter having the power to dream "as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all." (FT 8)

2. Methodology

This study has the following objectives:

- i) To understand how young people live the spiritual dimension of their lives, including diverse experiences and beliefs, focusing particularly on the Catholic religion;

- ii) To understand the perceptions of young people aged 14 to 30 about the main challenges for the future (e.g. sustainability, climate change, economy, politics, health, technology, work, space exploration);
- iii) Explore relationships and patterns between beliefs, values and priorities for the future and young people's religious experience;
- iv) To learn about the degree to which young people are involved in shaping the future, and to understand the extent to which they believe their action can make an important difference.

To meet these objectives, we used a quantitative approach based on a questionnaire survey to a representative sample of this population group in Portugal.

The development of the questionnaire was based on a scientific literature review on the topics under analysis. Two versions of the questionnaire were developed, with the same structure, but with slight language adaptations and also different forms of dissemination. Version A of the questionnaire was developed for young people aged 18 to 30 years, and version B corresponds to an adaptation of the first one for young people aged 14 to 17 years, including a more informal language and additional explanations on some terms. A total of 2480 young people participated in this study, and the questionnaires were disseminated via an email with a link-invitation or QR code to 827 educational institutions (schools and higher education institutions) and 667 associations dedicated to young people, such as student associations, cultural associations, NGOs, youth networks, scout groups and sports associations.

All participants were informed about the objectives of the study and were made aware that all responses would be entirely voluntary and anonymous, and it would not be possible to identify the author of the responses from the data collected. Data were collected between April and October 2022.

Both versions of the questionnaire are composed of 23 closed questions, organised into three parts. Initially, the study is presented, and the participants' informed consent is requested (in the case of minors, the consent of the guardian was obtained prior to the presentation of the questionnaire to the respondent), and only after obtaining it does the respondent proceed to completing the questionnaire. The first part focuses on the experience of the spiritual dimension of life, and has 12 questions, some of which are not shown to all participants, depending on previous answers. The questions deal with position towards religion, participation in religious practices, motivation to participate or not to participate in religious practices, impact of faith or lack of faith on their life, discrimination due to religion, knowledge about the World Youth Days and intention to participate in the 2023 edition. The second part addresses how the respondents envision the future. It includes six questions, which focus on what concerns them most about the future, their conceptualisation of happiness, their expectations about the society in which they will live in the future, the values

they consider most important, their perception of the impact of individual agency on the future, and what they would change in the future. Finally, the third part collects five socio-demographic indicators: age, sex, area of residence (by district), education (in the case of version A, 18 to 30 years old) or year of schooling (in the case of version B, 14 to 17 years old) and, finally, gross individual income (in the case of version A, 18 to 30 years old) or gross household income (in the case of version B, 14 to 17 years old).

Before the dissemination of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted with undergraduate students of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, in a classroom context, which allowed optimising the language used.

The selection of the sample and the distribution of both versions of the questionnaire was the responsibility of CESOP – The Centre for Studies and Opinion Polls of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

2.1 Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does Portuguese youth experience and practice the spiritual dimension of their lives (particularly those who identify as Catholics)?
- RQ2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of Portuguese young people between 14 and 30 years old about challenges they will face in the future, and their priorities?
- RQ3: To what extent do Portuguese young people believe in their agency regarding the future, and are committed to their priorities?
- RQ4: Are there patterns or differences in perceptions and beliefs about the future that are correlated to religious beliefs/practices?

2.2. Research method and design

This study follows a quantitative method, and a simple design, with a single data collection stage, based on an online survey.

2.3. Sampling technique

Our sample, despite being non-probabilistic, is representative of the Portuguese population in the age range between 14 and 30 years old. Participants were recruited by distributing the link to the online questionnaire through Portuguese public schools and universities, across all districts of the country. As it depended on volunteer answers, at a later stage people within this age range were approached personally, in public places in the country's capital, Lisbon, and invited to answer, aiming to correct the lack of representativeness of older participants.

2.4. *Data collection technique*

The study involved two versions of the questionnaire, both sharing the same structure and content. However, Version A targeted participants aged 18-30 through public universities, while Version B was aimed at participants aged 14-17 via public schools.

The questionnaire was developed online using Qualtrics and distributed via email to 1494 educational institutions between April and October 2022. The initial section of the questionnaire included an informed consent form detailing the study's objectives and scope, ensuring anonymity, and requesting consent from respondents or their legal guardians for those under 18 years old.

Each version of the questionnaire consisted of 23 closed-ended questions organized into three parts:

1. The first part explored the spiritual aspects of the respondents' lives, comprising 12 questions. Depending on previous responses, some questions were conditionally displayed. Topics included religious affiliation, practices, motivations for participating in rituals, the impact of faith, experiences of discrimination based on religion, knowledge about World Youth Day, and intention to participate.
2. The second part focused on respondents' perceptions of their future, featuring 6 questions. Topics covered concerns about the future, definitions of happiness, expectations, values, perceptions of individual agency in shaping the future, and opinions on important changes.
3. The third part gathered sociodemographic data including age, gender, district of residency, education level, and income (individual for Version A, family for Version B).

Prior to distribution, a test was conducted with B.A. students from the Catholic University of Portugal in a classroom setting. This test helped refine and optimize the language and formulation of questions in both versions of the questionnaire.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. *Characterization of the sample*

Our sample is composed of 2480 participants within the age range between 14 and 30 years old. This age range corresponds to 15,8% (1.629.876) of the Portuguese population ($n=10.343.066$) (Pordata 2021). The average age is 19 years old, and the standard deviation is 3,75. We divided our sample between teenagers (14 to 17 years old) and young adults (18 to 30 years old), corresponding to 46% and 54% of the sample, respectively. Our sample includes more women (59,3%) than men (37,8%).

In order to obtain a representative sample of this age range of the Portuguese population, at a final stage of data collection, we approached people with specific characteristics in public places. For that reason, our sample is predominantly from the Lisbon district (41,3%), but all districts are present in our sample.

Concerning education, it is consistent with the age of the participants, as 58,9% had finished High School, and 20,3% had completed a B.A. The fact that many of the respondents are still students is reflected in their personal income, which is non-existent for 61,8% of the sample.

3.2. *The spirituality of Portuguese youth*

Figure 1 presents the religious beliefs of our sample. We can observe that 56% claim to have a religion, but only 34% practices a religion regularly. Teenagers (14-17 years old) are more active in their religious practices than young adults (18-30 years old).

Figure 1. Religious beliefs, by age group (in percentage) (n=2480).

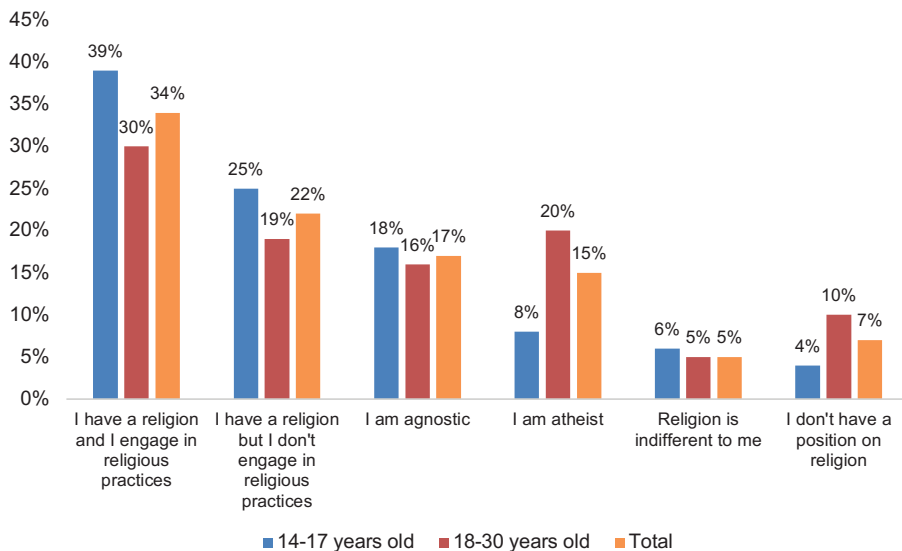
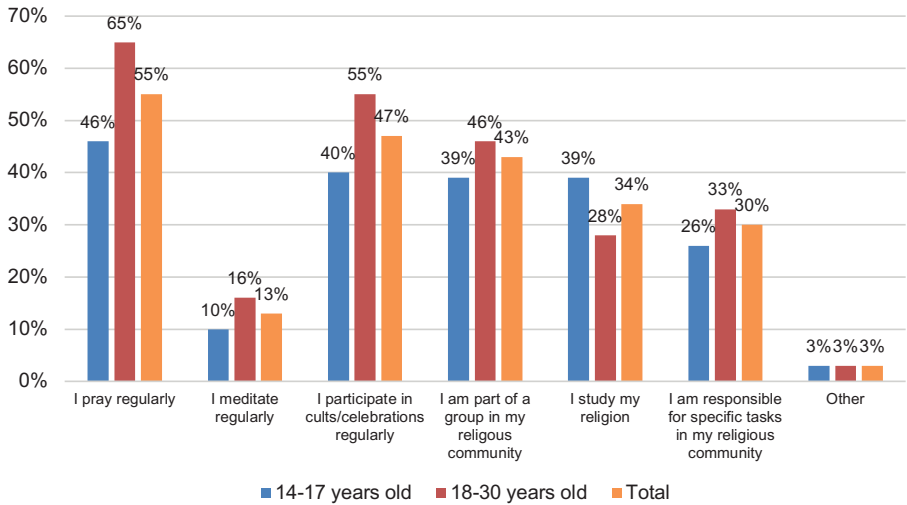


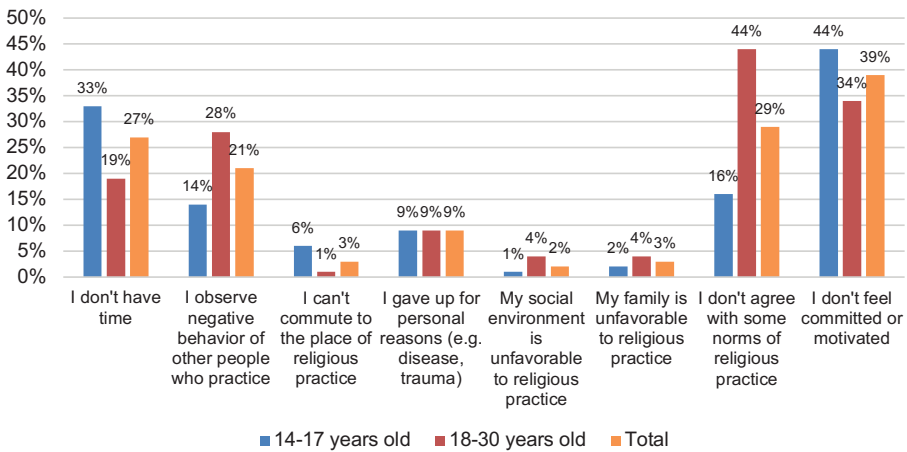
Figure 2 reveals the most common religious practices, among those who declared themselves as religious practitioners (n=971). Although a higher percentage of teenagers practice their religion (39% compared to 30% young adults of the total sample), young adults seem more committed to regular and frequent practice, as 65% of religious practitioners pray regularly (compared to 46% of teenagers), for example.

Figure 2. Religious practice, by age group (in percentage)
(n=971, 34% of the total sample).



We asked those who do not practice their religion their reasons for this. Figure 3 shows us that the most common reason was “lack of commitment and motivation”, for 39% of the sample. For the teenagers, this was the most common reason (44%), followed by “lack of time” (33%), but young adults are deterred by “disagreement with some norms of religious practice” (44%), thus revealing a more informed and intentional position about how they live their spirituality.

Figure 3. Reasons of believers for not practicing their religion, by age group (in percentage) (n=613, 22% of the total sample).

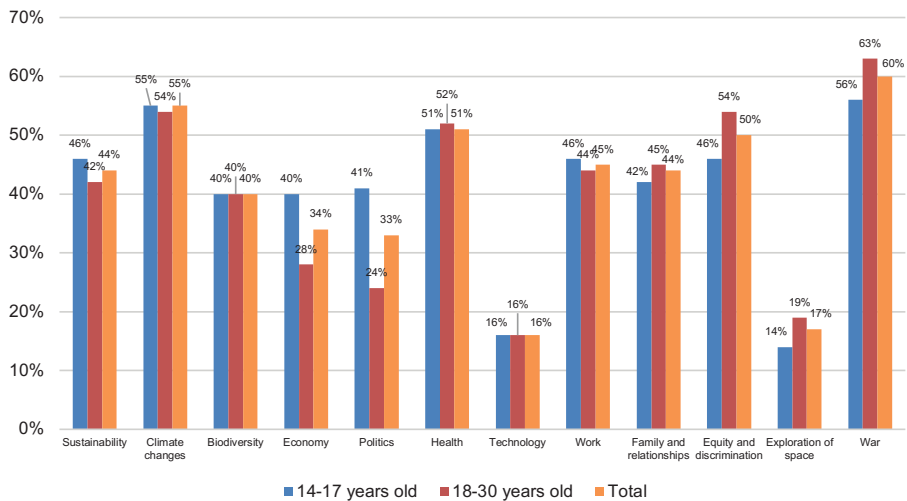


We wanted to find out if our sample is aware about the upcoming World Youth Day taking place in Lisbon, Portugal, in August 2023. In general, 58% of the total sample was aware of the event.

3.3. Portuguese youth's view of the future

Our study aimed to find out how Portuguese youth foresees their future. First, we set out to identify the most important challenges that they expect to face in the future, asking respondents to declare their level of concern regarding a set of relevant topics on a scale of 1 – “not concerned at all” to 5 – “very much concerned”. Figure 4 displays the percentage of our sample declaring to be “very much concerned” about each of the topics.

Figure 4. Respondents who are “very much concerned” about future challenges, by age group (in percentage) (n=2480).



In general, our sample is mostly concerned about War (60%) (bear in mind that this survey was conducted in the aftermath of Ukraine’s invasion by Russia on February 24th 2022), Climate change (55%): during the Summer 2022, Portugal was affected by an unusually severe drought which caused water rationing throughout the country; and Health (51%): the Portuguese National Health Service has been facing several challenges as a result of the exhaustion of health professionals during the Covid-19 period, the most relevant being the fact that various hospitals were unable to provide emergency care due to personnel shortage during the Summer 2022. Teenagers and young adults share, overall, the same

concerns. The main differences are a greater concern of teenagers about the economy (40% versus 28%) and politics (41% versus 24%), while young adults are more worried about the war (63% versus 56%) and equality and discrimination (54% versus 46%).

In Table 1, we summarize the three more and less important concerns (according to the number of answers to “very much concerned” and “not at all concerned”, respectively), exploring differences between gender and religious beliefs.

Table 1. Top 3 of more and less important concerns, according to gender and religious beliefs (n=2480).

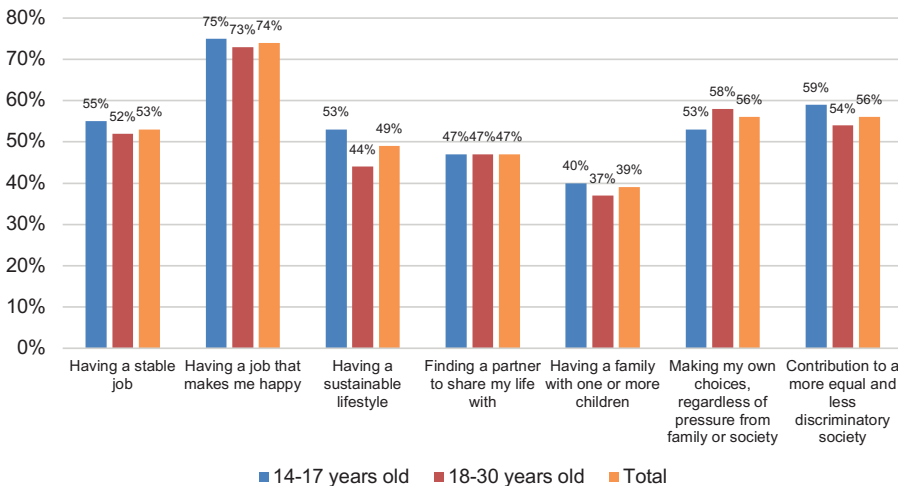
		Very much concerned	Not at all concerned
Male	1st	War (314)	Space exploration (93)
	2nd	Health (298)	Technology (66)
	3rd	Climate change (279)	Politics (37)
Female	1st	War (737)	Space exploration (96)
	2nd	Climate change (683)	Technology (55)
	3rd	Equality and discrimination (680)	Family and relationships (30)
Religious	1st	War (769)	Space exploration (107)
	2nd	Health (645)	Technology (78)
	3rd	Family and relationships (615)	Politics (45)
Non-religious	1st	Climate change (573)	Space exploration (122)
	2nd	War (506)	Technology (75)
	3rd	Equality and discrimination (492)	Family and relationships (50)
Catholics	1st	War (446)	Space exploration (59)
	2nd	Health (366)	Technology (39)
	3rd	Family and relationships (362)	Family and relationships (15)
Religious non-Catholics	1st	Climate change (852)	Space exploration (170)
	2nd	War (829)	Technology (114)
	3rd	Equality and discrimination (759)	Politics (69)

Looking at gender, all are concerned about War and Climate change, but Health is among the most important concerns for men, while women are more concerned about Equality and discrimination.

Religious beliefs point to more differences. The biggest concern for the non-religious is Climate change, and they also consider Equality and discrimination. Religious respondents are more worried about Health and Family and relationships. This contrasts with the fact that Family and relationships are among the topics that non-religious respondents are less worried about. Similar differences appear when we consider the Catholics and religious non-Catholics. Important topics for other religious beliefs such as Climate change and Equity and discrimination are not the most important concerns for Catholics, who focus on Health and Family and relationships. Actually, Family and relationships is a controversial topic among Catholics, as it is, at the same time, one of the topics that some of them are more worried about, while others are less concerned about.

We also questioned our sample about their degree of agreement, on a scale of 1 – “strongly disagree” to 5 – “strongly agree”, with statements about certain dimensions/aspects of their lives being important for them to “be happy” in the future. Figure 5 displays the percentage of our sample declaring to “strongly agree” with each of the statements.

Figure 5. Respondents who “strongly agree” with statements about aspects of their lives that are important for their future happiness, by age group (in percentage) (n=2480).



In alignment with previous research about Portuguese youth and the future (Sagnier/Morell 2021), having a fulfilling job is key to being happy for 74% of our sample. Being free of pressure from family or from society is also important (56%), as well as contributing to equality and non-discrimination (56%) and having a stable job (53%). Teenagers and young adults are generally in agreement

about the aspects that are necessary in their lives for them to be happy in the future. At a time when work/life balance is being increasingly discussed (Shirmohammadi/Au/Beigi 2022), it is worth stressing the importance that Portuguese youth attributes to the professional dimension of life. This may be intertwined with the economic conditions of the country, where the minimum wage is still one of the lowest of the European Union, and the minimum wage is close to the average wage (Eurostat 2023a, 2023b). The rise of inflation in the last year (Banco de Portugal 2022) has strongly contributed to decrease the purchasing power of the Portuguese people, and consequently their quality of life (Banco de Portugal 2022). More education does not necessarily result in higher income (Sagnier/Morell 2021), and support from the State (e.g. unemployment subsidy, survival subsidy, family subsidy) is crucial for an increasing number of Portuguese families to meet their needs. This context may point to why professional stability and success is so important for Portuguese teenagers and young adults.

Next, we explored differences according to gender and religious beliefs, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Top 3 more and less important aspects for future happiness, according to gender and religious beliefs (n=2480).

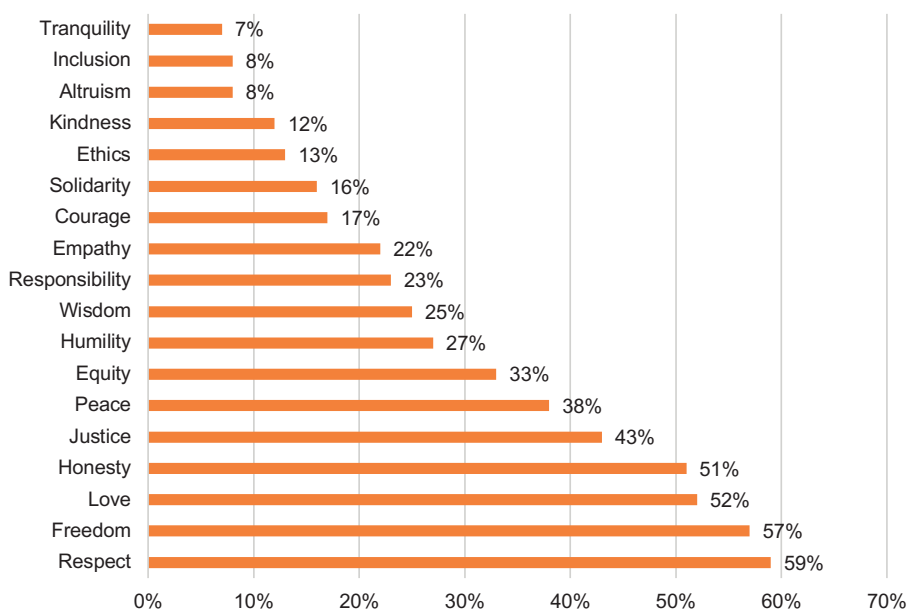
		Strongly agree	Strongly disagree
Male	1st	Job that makes me happy (445)	Family with children (31)
	2nd	Life partner (330)	Equality and non-discrimination (14)
	3rd	Stable job (301)	Freedom from pressure (12)
Female	1st	Job that makes me happy (859)	Family with children (67)
	2nd	Equality and non-discrimination (740)	Life partner (21)
	3rd	Stable job (636)	Freedom from pressure (17)
Religious	1st	Job that makes me happy (838)	Freedom from pressure (42)
	2nd	Equality and non-discrimination (639)	Family with children (28)
	3rd	Stable job (630)	Equality and non-discrimination (13)
Non-religious	1st	Job that makes me happy (682)	Family with children (102)
	2nd	Equality and non-discrimination (519)	Freedom from pressure (47)
	3rd	Stable job (462)	Life partner (30)

		Strongly agree	Strongly disagree
Catholics	1st	Job that makes me happy (466)	Freedom from pressure (32)
	2nd	Life partner (367)	Equality and non-discrimination (8)
	3rd	Family with children (353)	Sustainable lifestyle (6)
Religious non-Catholics	1st	Job that makes me happy (1054)	Family with children (124)
	2nd	Equality and non-discrimination (812)	Life partner (38)
	3rd	Stable job (750)	Freedom from pressure (37)

Concerning gender, men and women agree that having a job that makes them happy and having a stable job is determinant for their future happiness, while having a family with children and being free from family and/or social pressure is not. However, there is a contraction regarding the importance of finding a partner to share one's life. While men value this, women do not find it determinant to be happy. On the contrary, women feel fulfilled by contributing to a more equal and less discriminatory society, while this aspect is not important for men.

We have also searched for patterns of similarity and dissimilarity according to religious beliefs and practices. First, we have distinguished between those who claim to have religious beliefs, of any faith, and those who do not: atheists and agnostics. The aspects considered as most important for future happiness coincide. However, we can observe that having a family with children and finding a life partner is less important for the non-religious. Then, considering only the religious group, we have divided them into Catholics and non-Catholics, and here we found more significant differences: finding a life partner and having a family with children is determinant for the happiness of Catholics, while non-Catholics value contributing to equality and non-discrimination and having a stable job instead. In fact, having a family with children and finding a life partner are precisely among the aspects that non-Catholics consider less important. On the contrary, Catholics find that being free from social and family pressures is not important, nor is contributing to equality and non-discrimination and having a sustainable lifestyle. Although family has always been a cornerstone of Catholicism, it is worth pointing out that Pope Francis has been leading discussions about all humans sharing a "common home", and about how Catholics can contribute precisely to increasing equality and sustainability. These themes

Figure 6. Values considered the most important (in percentage) (n=2480).



also echo the Holy Father's fundamental and foundational ideas evident in the encyclicals *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). An event like the World Youth Day is an opportunity to increase awareness about these topics among youth.

Next, we asked our respondents to pick their five most important values out of a list with the following options: wisdom, courage, honesty, freedom, love, equality, solidarity, justice, peace, tranquillity, respect, kindness, inclusion, altruism, empathy, ethics, humility, and responsibility. Figure 6 shows us that respect is the most important value for 59% of our sample, freedom for 57%, and love for 52%. On the contrary, altruism, inclusion and tranquillity are the values less often picked (by only 8%, 8% and 7%, respectively). Looking at the most important values in the light of their main concerns for the future (see Table 1), there seems to be a connection between the main concerns and the most important values not being applied enough in the future, pointing to the need for deeper research to better understand the relationship between values and aspects/dimensions that are considered to be important for a happy future.

Table 3 displays the three values that were picked most often for different groups, according to age, gender, and religious beliefs.

Table 3. Top 3 more important values, according to age, gender, and religious beliefs (in percentage) (n=2480).

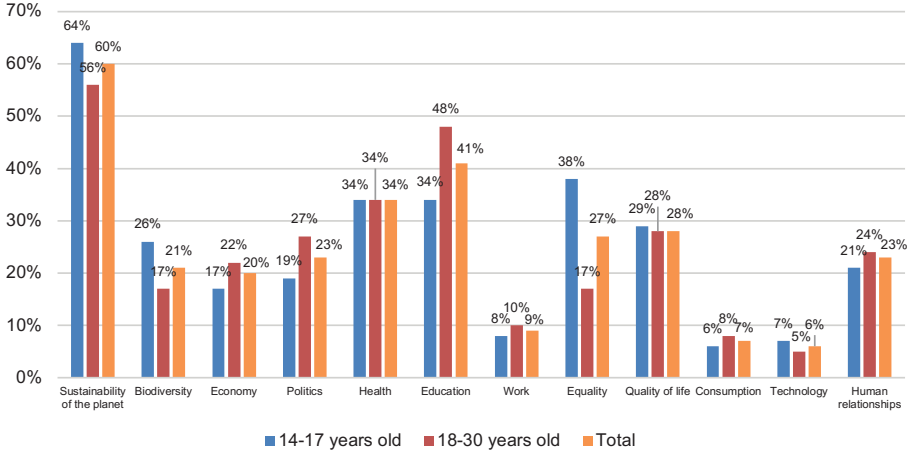
	1st	2nd	3rd
Teenagers	Respect (49,8%)	Freedom (43,9%)	Love (42,7%)
Young Adults	Respect (39,1%)	Freedom (36,7%)	Love (33,2%)
Men	Freedom (53,7%)	Respect (52,9%)	Honesty (46,9%)
Women	Respect (59,9%)	Freedom (56%)	Love (54%)
Religious	Love (42,8%)	Respect (42,3%)	Honesty (38,9%)
Non-religious	Freedom (47,1%)	Respect (43,4%)	Honesty (34%)
Catholic	Love (48,4%)	Respect (45,4%)	Honesty (41,3%)
Non-Catholic	Freedom (43%)	Respect (41,7%)	Honesty (34,9%)

Teenagers and young adults agree on the most important values. However, when considering gender we found differences. Freedom and respect are both in the axiological hierarchy, although in a different order. Men value honesty, while women believe love is more important.

Considering religion, respect and honesty appear in similar places of the religious and non-religious axiological hierarchy, however, religious respondents value love above all, while non-religious participants elect freedom as the most important value for them. Looking specifically at religious respondents, we found the same results when comparing Catholics with non-Catholics. These differences are consistent with the fact that religious respondents, and particularly Catholics, consider finding a life partner and having a family with children as determinant factors for a happy future, which is consistent with valuing love.

Finally, we asked our respondents what they would change in the future if they had the opportunity to do so. Figure 7 reveals that the main change, considered by 60% of our sample, would be ensuring the sustainability of the planet. This finding is inconsistent with the fact that sustainability was not considered determinant for their future happiness. If both teenagers and young adults agree on changing this, they disagree on other changes that might be necessary. Among the teenagers, 38% would make our society more equal, while 48% of young adults would improve education. Next, they also agree that it is necessary to improve health (34% of teenagers and 34% of young adults). In the light of our sample having previously expressed how important they believe work to be for their future happiness, it is curious to observe that only 9% would change the labour market and working conditions. It is also contradictory that, despite 60% of our sample claiming that they would ensure the sustainability of our planet, only 7% are willing to change their consumption practices, or at least

Figure 7. Changes that the respondents would make regarding the future, by age group (in percentage) (n=2480).



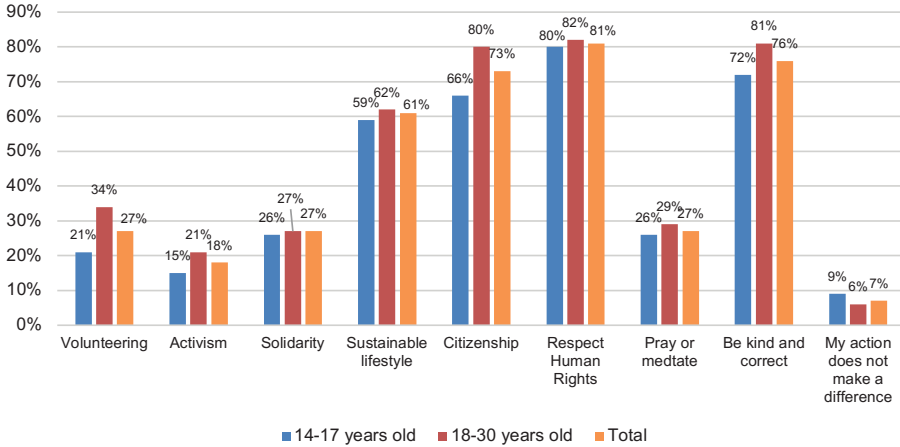
acknowledge this change as being necessary or important. Expanding this discussion to education, economy, and politics is essential, as these areas play crucial roles in shaping sustainable behaviours and implementing policies that promote environmental preservation.

3.4. *The importance of individual agency*

Finally, based on the argument that a strong belief in the impact of personal agency leads to action, while a strong belief in the almost insignificant impact of individual agency leads to the maintenance of habits, indifference, or accommodation (Miles 2015), we set out to discover if our respondents believe that their own personal action can make a difference in shaping the future, and how. Figure 8 displays how our participants believe that they can contribute to building a better future.

The most important contribution is respecting Human Rights, enacted by 81% of our sample, followed by 76% who try to be kind and act correctly daily, and by 73% who are (or intend to be in the case of teenagers) active in their citizenship. Only 7% believe that their individual agency will not make any difference in shaping the future. It is interesting to observe that young adults are more committed to building a better future than teenagers, with slightly higher percentages in many of the activities proposed, while more teenagers (9%) believe that their individual action does not make a difference (compared to 6% of

Figure 8. How our respondents claim to contribute to a better future, by age group (in percentage) (n=2480).

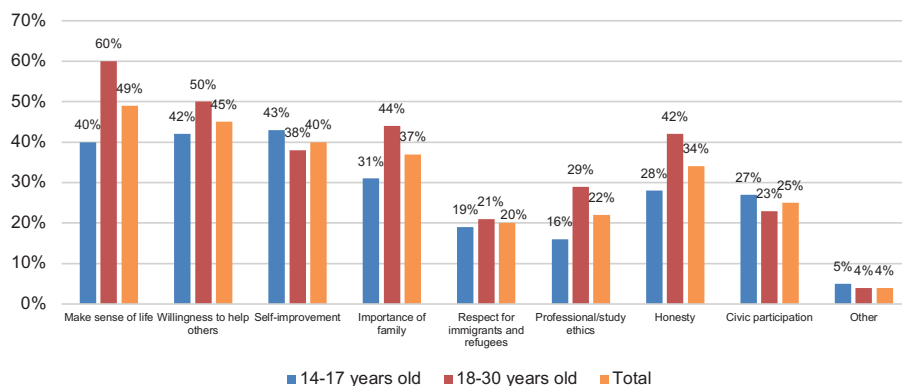


young adults). Also, it is curious that our respondents are not very active in terms of standing for causes or participating in activism (only 18% consider themselves activists) or participating in volunteering (only 27% does so regularly). Although 56% of our sample is religious (34% practising such religion, and 22% not practising), only 27% believe that religious practices such as prayers and/or meditation can contribute to a better future.

We didn't find significant differences when we explored comparisons according to gender and religion. Respecting Human Rights, trying to be the kindest and as correct as possible daily, and being participative citizens are the actions that most respondents put into practice, or intend to put into practice in the future (in the case of the teenagers who cannot vote yet, for example). On the contrary, the actions less practised are activism, volunteering, solidarity, and praying/meditating.

These results prompt us to a deeper reflection about which actions reflect which values in different dimensions of life, and to what extent agents perceive their actions as being successful or having a relevant impact on enacting the most important values for them. Our results point to a generic disbelief in specific efforts – through activism and volunteering for example – which is consistent with research on this topic (Glenn 2015), and to a more holistic enactment of values, put into practice in different dimensions of daily life, and being influential by example. Further qualitative research would be key to a better understanding of how young people view their agency in the world.

Figure 9. Impact of religious belief on different dimensions of life, by age group (in percentage) (n=1388).



3.5. Religion, values and the future

Finally, we wanted to explore the interconnection between religious belief and the way our participants anticipate their future. We asked only our religious participants about the impact of their religious beliefs on different dimensions of their lives, as showed on Figure 9.

Almost half of the respondents (a total of 1388 for this question, only those with religious beliefs) (49%) considers that their religious belief helps them “make sense of life”. The percentage of young adults who agrees with this claim is higher when compared to teenagers (60% versus 40%), as well as with the claim that they are more willing to help others (50% versus 42%) and value family more (44% versus 31%) because of their religious beliefs. On the contrary, more teenagers agree that their religious beliefs contribute to their desire of self-improvement (43% versus 38%).

4. Conclusion

The upcoming World Youth Day taking place in Lisbon, Portugal, in August 2023, triggered a reflection about what the future may entail and what the future may become, in the light of Catholic values. Our study set out to promote this reflection, starting with shedding light on the perspective(s) of Portuguese youth. Thus, this research focused on three main topics: the role of religion in the life of Portuguese youth, how Portuguese youth looks at the future, and exploring the intricate interactions between religion, values, beliefs, and action.

While our study in Portugal explores the influence of Catholic values and our youth's vision of the future during World Youth Day, comparative studies have examined how religiosity impacts the emotional resilience and personal growth of adolescents during global crises. Moreover, other studies have demonstrated how religiosity shapes not only individual beliefs but also community practices and civic engagement among young people.

This approach enables an intriguing comparison of the diverse perspectives and experiences of youth in Portugal and other countries, highlighting both the similarities and the cultural and religious specificities that influence their lives and aspirations.

Concerning how Portuguese youth experiences and practices the spiritual dimension of their lives, our study revealed that 56% claim to have a religion (50,9% are Catholics), but only 34% engage in religious practice. Among this group, the most common religious practices are praying regularly (55%), participating in cult/ceremonies regularly (47%) and being engaged in a religious group or community (46%). At a time when, in the Portuguese public sphere, the Catholic Church is facing reputational crises due to cases of sexual abuse and overspending on the World Youth Day, the 22% who are religious but do not practice justify their option with personal reasons, namely not feeling committed or motivated (39%) and not agreeing with some norms of their religion's practice.

Regarding the World Youth Day specifically, 58% of our total sample was aware of the event and, among these, 56% intended to participate. These numbers highlight the capacity of such an event to bring youth together and foster engagement and participation.

Regarding their view of the future, Portuguese youth is "very much concerned" about war (60%), climate changes (55%), health (51%) and equity and discrimination (50%). When we compare religious and non-religious participants, we can observe that the religious are also very much concerned with family and relationships, a topic that is not as important for the non-religious. This difference is even more significant when we compare Catholics and non-Catholics, thus reinforcing the importance of family as a pillar of Catholic belief and action. In the light of these concerns, we asked our participants about what they believe will be determinant for their future happiness. For 74% of our sample, it is having a job that makes them happy, and for 56% it is making their own choices regardless of pressure from family or society and contributing to a more equal and less discriminatory society. It is contradictory that only 49% mention a sustainable lifestyle, when climate change is such a big concern. This could expose a gap between belief and action, which has been described in academic literature as the "green gap" (Gleim/Lawson, 2014), but it could also reflect an inconsistency in the way the survey-questions were built, as climate change and sustainability

were two different topics when participants were questioned about their concerns, and they were merged in the expression “sustainable lifestyle” when asked about what would be determinant for their happiness in the future. Again, looking at religious and non-religious respondents, having a life partner and having a family with children emerge as determinants of future happiness for religious respondents, particularly Catholics.

Further, exploring gaps between belief and action, we asked our sample about the most important values for them. Respect (59%), freedom (56%), love (52%) and honesty (51%) stood out, and these choices are the same when we compared ages, sex, and religious belief, revealing a surprisingly uniform mindset for this generation. Looking at how these values translate into concrete practices for building a better future for themselves and others, 96% of our sample believe that their individual action can have an impact. However, the most commonly chosen actions are respecting Human Rights (81%), being kind and correct (76%) and being active citizens (73%). With such a strong belief in human agency, it might be expected that Portuguese youth would take more action through volunteering or activism. And, when comparing different groups, the results were also similar.

In conclusion, our study revealed that Portuguese youth is facing the future in an inconsistent and undirected manner. They are quite unanimous about their concerns and values, but they are not taking concrete action to address such concerns or put those values into practice. We believe that this overview of Portuguese youth can point to directions regarding the World Youth Day and the subsequent youth communication and action of the Catholic Church in Portugal, which can lead the way and become a driver of change.

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