

Active8-Planet Newsletter



Newsletter #3

July 2022

www.active8-planet.eu



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTIVE8-PLANET:

"It is also about poetry and beauty, not just technology."

PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVE8-PLANET:

Interdisciplinary teamwork and the applied side of Anthropology

INTERVIEW WITH MONIKA KLOBČAR:

Designing characters with soul

HUMAN VS. ECOLOGICAL ECOSYSTEMS

"WE ALL HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE THE WORLD"

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On the cover: participants of the Active8-Planet event in Ljubljana.

PREFACE

elcome to our third newsletter! In this edition we will explore different topics from our project Active8-Planet. The main idea behind this EU-funded Erasmus + Knowledge Alliances project is that students, academic supervisors, professionals and other stakeholders work in multidisciplinary teams to develop an approach, an intervention or a solution toward a better future for people and the planet. That may sound like a mouthful, but ... in essence, it's all about collaboration!

ince Autumn 2021, four 7+1 teams have been collaborating on their challenges; ranging between mobility, circular building design and healthy environments in healthcare. Since the last newsletter, the students have pushed themselves to create outputs that can make a sustainable impact.

n this newsletter, we focus on the process of Active8-Planet and share our view on sustainability, the role of design, and a report on our first LIVE event! Most importantly, though, we hope to get you inspired and that you will want to keep up to date with the project in the upcoming newsletters. You can expect to read more from us every six months! In the meantime, you can already follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, Twitter, YouTube and, of course, on our project website: www.active8-planet.eu.

Please also feel free, anytime, to drop us a line at info@active8-planet.eu

Soesja van Wijgerden

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The first Active8-Event: An opportunity to meet and reflect



After a (too) long period of uncertainty, trying to decide whether we will be finally able to physically meet for the first time during the Active8-Planet project, we were all very positively surprised when the voice of action came directly from our key project representatives and future ambassadors. It came from our enthusiastic students who are directly involved in the Active8-Planet 7+1 team projects, collaborating to make a difference that would lead us towards better and sustainable futures. Since they were all fed up with digital/hybrid education, the sole mention of a possibility of having a "virtual international mobility event" triggered doubts and reluctance. So, the decision was clear: Ljubljana it is!

Between 15th and 17th of May 2022, the Active8-Planet 7+1 teams met for the first time in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to share and reflect on their Active8-Planet team projects' experiences gained in the first learning cycle. Following the ice-breaker get-



together on Sunday evening, we kicked-off the following day with sharing our learning experiences and co-creating new ideas. Our event facilitators, Josine Bakkes from Regenerative Alliance and Stephanie Coreth from New Work led us through different workshops and challenges to immerse ourselves in several key questions, such as:





How to embrace ourselves and one another?

What is teamwork and how effective it is?

What are our unique strengths and how can we become aware of the strenghts of others?

How do we pitch an idea and what makes our team unique?

How can we demonstrate and argue for the value of planet-centred development?

The aim was to understand the value of the diversity of disciplinary knowledge and how our interdisciplinary collaboration contributed to solving specific environmental and societal challenges we dealt with in the first learning cycle. The workshops were followed by the official launch of our Active8-Planet card game, which is about awakening the superheroes and resisting the Dark Matter that wants to dominate the planet. An exciting and fun way to conclude our first day.



Since our Active8-Planet skills and team experiences were rather unique and unfamiliar to external audiences, our 7+1 teams presented the learning take-aways with other international students, academics. non-academic representatives. researchers, and media on the third international symposium "Green and Fun Cities of the Future" on Tuesday, 17 May. The event started with two keynote speeches from our Active8-Planet experts. Prof Griet Verbeeck from Hasselt University (Belgium) spoke about how the Doughnut economics, a framework for thinking about and achieving sustainability, can serve a compass for a green and fun city of the future. Following her presentation, Prof Vaike Fors from Halmstad University (Sweden) discussed how planners and developers can avoid boring (and inefficient) future mobility solutions by using people-centred design. After the keynotes the student teams shared with the audience their own ideas and solutions for the future, their Active8-Planet experiences and exchanged stories from their specific projects on sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, intergenerational solidarity, and social inclusion. The event was wrapped up with a moderated panel discussion of the key themes that emerged during the symposium, followed by informal networking and celebratory drinks.



Still, not all went as we hoped. Even though we had beautiful weather in Ljubljana, some Active8-Planet students were not able to join the event. The pandemics and traveling sustainably across Europe do require sacrifices and cost a lot of time. Time that some students did not have, while writing their thesis, keeping up their jobs to pay for their rent and translating their findings to be of use for their company partner. Many attempts were made to make a sustainable travel plan, but co-creation met its limits in pragmatism. Thankfully, some of them were able to meet locally and collaborate further on their challenge. Also, one representative travelled the Deutsche Bahn to represent her team and soak up all the international learnings to take back home.

We cannot wait to meet again next year, when our second learning cycle teams will further explore sustainability challenges!

Gregor Cerinšek





















At University of Hasselt (UH) our partners Evy Puelinckx and Griet Verbeeck are deeply invested in the topic of sustainability. For this newsletter Evy has interviewed Griet on her perception of sustainability within the Active8-Planet project.

Griet, I had the pleasure of working with you for 1,5 years on the Active8-Planet project. One of the things I appreciate very much is your strong commitment. I understand this already started in your childhood. Do you remember what triggered you?

My parents were very traditional but there was a sensitivity to sustainability. We usually went hiking in nature during our vacations, I was a member of the Panda club (WWF for children) and chemical pesticides were not allowed into the house. In short, you have to take care of your environment. We also had the book 'Limits to growth' in our house, which became tangible during the energy crisis in the early '70s. I remember I absolutely hated the house being cold inside.

You were looking for a way to shape this further after completing your engineering studies...how did that go for you?

A vacant lot, overgrown and full of plants, was being cleared out to erect a building during my studies. That was so sad, I realized that it could not become my profession. So, I sought out opportunities where I could develop/gain expertise in the field of sustainability, and I took advantage

of them to grow and try to make a difference. In the entire program, durability was only addressed in the course "building physics". That inspired me to work with that professor as a researcher and later as a PhD student. The focus of my work there was designing energy-saving homes that met the highest standards of ecological and energetic conservation. Considering that it was quite technical, I already included a bit of 'behavioral sciences' in my area of expertise. It was important for me to empower people and that clearly didn't work with only technical facts.

What I sometimes experience is that academia is very much about "analyzing the problems". But you really want to get things going.

The academic world is indeed a traditional environment that analyses, where things are uncovered and recommendations are formulated. The implementation is usually not our task. Research often takes place in separate silos, where people go in depth and pay too little attention to the broader context.

It is an ongoing quest for me to find the right way to get the message across about sustainability. To the students and colleagues, but also more broadly to society. As a Civic university, we really want to have a positive impact on society by working together with

Griet Verbeeck has a MSc and PhD in Architectural Engineering from KU Leuven. For many years she was a research fellow at the Building Physics Division of KU Leuven until 2007, with in-between a short stay at the Energy Administration of the Brussels Capital Region, where she was co-responsible for the energy policy in the Brussels Capital Region. Since 2007, she leads the Sustainability Research and Education Team at the Faculty of Architecture & Art, Hasselt University. While the focus of her research was at first mostly technological and on the aspect of energy and comfort, she considered this focus to be too limited and that other additional perspectives are necessary. So, over the years, she evolved into an educator and a researcher, who is strongly interested in guiding people, students and professionals in the building sector towards more sustainable choices, especially with regard to the use of natural resources, but with attention to social justice and planetary boundaries. She is inspired by the principles of doughnut economics and sufficiency and tries to introduce them both in her professional and personal life.



all stakeholders and looking for concrete solutions. I have learned that storytelling is necessary in order to inspire people. We spend a lot of time on the numbers, but telling the story behind the numbers is equally important and fascinating to me.

In the meantime, you have been leading your own research group in the UH architecture department for many years. Is that also the focus of your approach there?

When a question comes in from a company or organization we always try to first see if the right questions are being asked and only then look at how we can investigate that correctly.

Our focus is on the use of natural resources, in the broad sense of 'handling our materials in a sustainable way', without losing sight of the social component. And indeed, how can we support people and organizations in making the right choices, starting from their perspective. What solutions can we develop for them?

That's why I'm so excited about Kate Raworth's concept of the 'Doughnut Economy' (DE). It is an approach that is concrete, has a very broad view and is based on our current society. In this way she has set things in motion in companies, academia and politics and I myself feel a difference when I use her images and approach. Where there was previously resistance, this seems to appeal to many.

In Active8-Planet we work in a multidisciplinary way, students from different study programs work together with academics and businesses on one challenge. The matrix you developed in this project is based on the DE approach. What are your take aways after the first year?

We got to know each other, each other's vision and perspective better. I found that very enriching. All those years ago I would never have imagined that we would be at this point today, but at the same time we are still nowhere. And we must dare to say that. I have the feeling that people don't realize what gigantic steps we still have to take.

Technology alone is not the solution. We have to ask ourselves, what is enough? A systemic change is needed and we all have different roles in that system: as a person, as a consumer, as a citizen, as a student, as a professional, ... in all those roles you can do things and plant seeds for a healthy society, for both people and Earth.

Sustainability is not only about the environment but also about social justice. You could say that the victims of the flood last summer are the first climate victims in Belgium. That is also very clearly expressed in the Matrix.

Absolutely and that has also been an important change for me: going from 'how can I have a less negative impact' to 'how can I create a positive impact'. It's a paradigm shift and it gives you energy. Instead of thinking 'how can I do it less badly', 'how can I create added value'. I think that it also makes the Active8-Planet matrix more valuable.

The matrix works with four 'lenses', ecological and social, local and global. The workshops show us that the social-global lens is the most difficult to envision. What impact we have here on the quality of life of people elsewhere is a blind spot for many people, while it's also super important.

We certainly don't have all the answers yet, but at least we're taking it into account in our thinking process. How can we develop this even further within Active8-Planet?

Indeed, the matrix is a concept to take the first steps, to broaden the view, to change the mindset. But I think we still have to look for tools that really give you the handles to get started: "I have now initiated all those ideas; how do I turn that into action". The matrix still seems a bit too general for that.

Sustainability is a very dynamic process. It's continuously testing, seeing what works and where we need to adjust. The most important thing for me is that we continue to look at it critically and with an open mindset. We need to focus more on community, doing things together, trying things together.

You have recently become a sustainability coordinator for UH.
Do projects such as Active8-Planet contribute to the development of UH in the field of sustainability?

I think we learned a lot within our team and it stimulates us to work together with different departments and stakeholders on sustainability. For UH to be sustainable, it is important that everyone really supports it and wants to go for it,

that we work together with the students, teachers and staff and above all, it is also about poetry and beauty, not just technology.

Evy Puelinckx



Participating in Active8-Planet:

Interdisciplinary teamwork and the applied side of Anthropology

did not exactly know what the Active8-Planet project was about when I was writing a motivation letter to participate. Sure, I did a brief research on the project's website, but I could not quite imagine what an anthropologist might be doing. Thus, I mainly wrote about different spheres of mobility in which anthropologists, in my opinion, could successfully participate. I believe that by recognizing people's mobility habits, their use of mobility infrastructure, and how they value mobility (what it means to them in everyday life), anthropologists too can help ensuring sustainable mobility in the future. Mobility is a social practice, and the use of transportation and mobility infrastructure is socially conditioned. Only by studying people's habits and actions in smaller areas can we truly understand why they act in certain ways and what is most important to them.

In other words, an anthropologist's job is to examine local social practices, and the name of the project sounded like an aim to work globally. But after having been engaged in the project for an entire study year, I now recognize the benefits of participating in a university-business environment in which we truly can do so much more than just in the context of our own (academic) interests and methodological approaches. In my opinion, interdisciplinarity is the key to tackling global problems such as the environmental crisis. Although anthropology mainly studies the ways of people's lives on a microlevel, it can also have an impact on a macro-level by joining forces with other disciplines and decision makers.

Despite the fact that I had to participate in half of the project remotely due to an Erasmus exchange, my experience was extremely positive. Not only did I learn about interdisciplinary teamwork, but also about the practical, applied side of anthropology. However, while remote group work is possible and can be successful and productive, it cannot replace one's physical presence: in-person cooperation is also shaped by informal conversations and gatherings, which are not only a fun part of the project but can also bring insights that more formal meetings do not. Furthermore, for anthropologists, it is really important to conduct participant observation as part of the methodology. On the other hand, working remotely allows for much more time flexibility in organizing interviews and other project activities that you do from home. It was also interesting to observe the project progress month after month. Prior to that, I had only taken part in brief research projects as part of my studies, so I did not have much time to devote to fieldwork and data analysis. We could, however, take our time and conduct our research in stages within Active8-Planet. We collaborated with representatives from the company Endava in the topic of "mobility as a service", focusing primarily on mobile practices in the city of Ljubljana. We spent a considerable amount of time brainstorming different ideas, comparing our perspectives on mobility in Ljubljana, and laying out the fieldwork plan. We met on a regular basis to reflect on the data we collected and to highlight pertinent topics from the interviews we conducted. We also had the opportunity to present anthropology and its methodological approach to co-members from Endava, and they informed us back about their working environment. As a result, we identified some of the key concerns about shared mobility in Ljubljana, which could serve as a good foundation for the project's next year's participants and their own research.

At this point, the path to global sustainable mobility may seem unimaginable. However, if each of us begin to look around us and engage in local mobility challenges that are tightly intertwined with our everyday lives, the image of what mobility practices should look like for a friendlier and healthier environment becomes clearer. Even while we might believe that changing our lifestyle to one that is more sustainable won't actually help improving the world, doing so might just give us hope that changes are possible; and if they are achievable at the individual level, they may eventually be achievable at the systemic level as well. In this sense, it is better to think and act small than to persist in more comfortable but less ecological habits and do nothing. Riding a bike to the local store instead of driving, or sharing a car with a neighbour who has errands in the same location as we do, may not appear to be much, but are definitely improvements to the mosaic of today's and tomorrow's mobility practices.

Tina Krašovic, Slovenian 7+1 team







Monika Klobčar is a digital illustrator from Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her first work experience was as cartoonist, back in 2003, when she created funny comic books for Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Since then she started gaining experience: First as a graphic designer, then as a concept artist, character designer and illustrator for TV series, cartoons and mobile games. Recently, she has been focusing more on illustration for virtual reality and illustrations for boardgames.

How did you learn about Active8-Planet?

I learnt about it when I was invited to make an identity design for the Active8-Planet.

How did you came up with Active8-Planet theme and artworks? Where did you get your inspiration from? Can you talk about your creative process?

When I started designing the theme and artworks, I wanted the design to be bold, fresh and with some superhero feel known from comics. But packed nicely for corporate environment – so that the characters are like superheroes in disguise and would fit in serious business environments.



Characters that Monika designed for Active8-Planet Project

My creation process starts with an analogue pencil and paper sketch in the nearest coffee place. First, I want to know all about the project that I'm designing for. Then I find some good reference images that go well with the project's outlines. I learned that research and great reference pictures are the most important part of my creative process – then I just let inspiration do the rest of the work. I execute the idea first in my head, then do some sketches in pencil and when the idea is clear, I go to my computer & graphic tablet to work out the details.

What is the most important in your artwork?

Even when the characters or illustrations are not animated, I want people to feel the soul behind each character or object that I draw. I think the presence behind each line is important. For example – for every piece that I draw, I know exactly what I was thinking when drawing it. It stays there! And I must say, I had great fun drawing the Active8-Planet characters.

What is sustainability for you? Any specific sustainable practices in your art-making?

I'm quite fond of upcycling in art. I have some funny experiments at home and like to shape the used and unused objects into funny characters.

Is sustainability important in the art world?

I think there are a lot of areas where sustainability is significantly more important, but art can be a wonderful tool for raising awareness.

What are you expecting to see in the art world in the future?

great shift from analogue to digital art. I have already done quite a few projects for virtual reality and I think this is an emerging market for future artists along with NFT technology.

Human ecosystems vs ecological ecosystems

Wikipedia defines an ecosystem as follows:

"An ecosystem (or ecological system) consists of all the organisms and the physical environment with which they interact."

In this definition the title of this piece is already explained. The ecosystem encompasses both human and ecological worlds. Splitting these is possible only in linguistics, in reality they are completely intertwined on Earth.

Unfortunately, in human society this disconnection is often presented as fact, or worse - the ecological systems are ignored. The economic systems that drive most current societies exclude Earth's resources. Economy students get taught the following economic system (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Outdated economy system

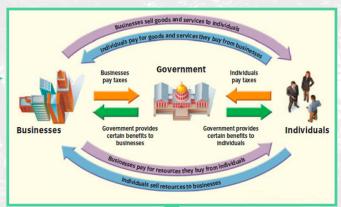
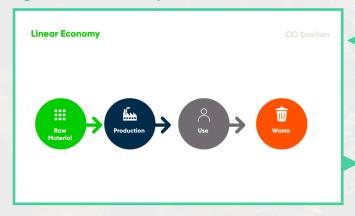


Figure 2: Linear Economy



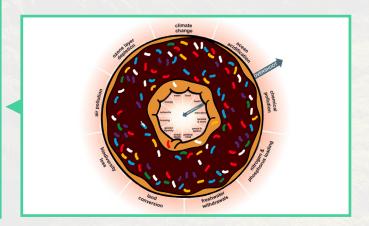
Thankfully, this picture is getting outdated. Many new classes are representing economy like this (Figure 2).

Or, in very innovative classes, the system becomes even more inclusive, like this (Figure 3).

These three models give an overview of what scientists might call the Human Ecosystem, albeit from an economic perspective.

Unfortunately, looking at the more inclusive models does not always translate to appropriate actions. The awareness of our planet's finite resources and our dependency on and integration in Earth's ecosystem is something that makes many humans uncomfortable. Staying in denial, avoiding the threat, but also making governmental decisions more in line with the linear economic systems is a habit that seems hard to shake.

Figure 3: Doughnut economy



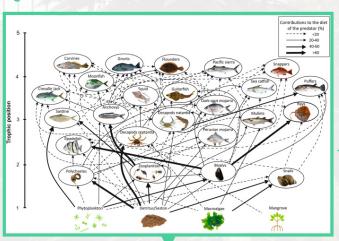


Ecosystems

In ecology, however, there is nothing to fear or deny. First of all; denial is not making anything any better. Moreover, ecology is not a threat at all. On the contrary, it is the source of all life and the structures in which it works are beautiful in its simple complexity.

Now, 'simple complexity' might sound like a contradiction. But look at the first lessons on ecosystems in elementary school where food chains are discussed. They are usually illustrated like this (Figure 4).

Figure 5: Food Webs



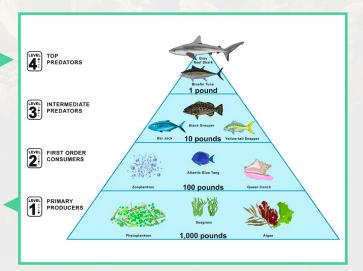
But now it looks complex! All these lines crisscrossing through each other. All these different species interacting. Some of the babies of one species might be eaten by the prey of its adult version. Although, through its complexity there is a simplicity (Figure 6).

"It is simply a pyramid!" Alas, in this picture level o is missing, which represents the resources. And again, the pyramid suggests an illusory linearity. All these organisms will at the end of life be reduced to (non) organic material that becomes a resource for others. So, what makes it simple? It will happen all by itself. Even if it is not completely understood by scientists, ecologists or economists. Even if one of the many crisscrossing lines was missed in the observations, it will happen. The ecosystem may not be self explanatory, but it is self governing.

Food Chain Concept

Pretty simple, right? Unfortunately, the reality of food chains, similar to the economic systems, is in most cases not so neatly linear. Studying food chains reveals they are not chains, but rather intricate webs that look more like this (Figure 5).

Figure 6: Food pyramid



The Clash

Even so, what happens when these so-called 'human' and 'ecological' ecosystems meet? First of all, they already do by existing. As stated earlier, humans are part of Earth's ecosystem. But at this point in time, human activity is tipping some scales and causing disruption in age-old systems. Is this detrimental to the Earth's ecosystem? Actually, no. Earth's ecosystem is self-governing. It will adjust to these new settings and continue on.

Unfortunately, humans are not that flexible. As a species we are thriving in Earth's current settings. Many changes will be detrimental to our ability to live on this planet. From an ecosystem perspective, we are a plague that has outgrown its place in the ecosystem and, due to resource depletion, will be knocked off its spot in the food web and suffer great loss of the population. It is sad that human activities, affecting not just Earth's resources but the entire climate, also bring down a lot of other species.

Ecosystem Integration

But there is hope! By embracing human interconnectedness with ecosystems, many fruitful collaborations become visible all around us. Affecting the ecosystem does not make humans unique. Many species, called ecosystem engineers, change their environment actively to make it suit their needs. Ants, beavers, elephants, but also coral

and kelp are all examples of species that engineer an ecosystem to enable them to thrive. The key thing is that, since they have been doing this for a long time, many other spots (niches) have opened up for other species to join their created ecosystem. In many cases species actively create habitat for other species to invite their function into their ecosystem. Leaf cutter ants for example 'farm' a fungus in their nest. They feed them leaves and 'milk' them for sugar. Closer to home in Europe, ants are known to farm aphids. Guarding them from predators and milking them for honeydew.

These ecosystem engineers create flourishing ecosystems that benefit many species. They don't do this from an altruistic perspective, but with a purely functional aim; to create room for their life.

A good example of human ecosystem engineering is the story of the redevelopment of the Loess Plateau in China. This video shows you how this area, first degraded by human activity and erosion, was restored by ecological restoration. The process was not simple and the experience gained cannot simply be extrapolated to all other ecosystems. But it gives hope on how human ecosystem engineers can

integrate and collaborate within earth's ecosystems.

Soesja van Wijgerden

Figure 7: Ant milking aphid







e all have the power to change the world, and I'm not saying that to be cliché. We really do all have the power to change the world. Deep inside of us, every single one of us, has the capacity to create the most powerful device known to man... and that's an idea.

Our ability to imagine the future is limited only by our imaginations. Everything we use or recognise — from riding horses to driving cars, reading newspapers to using tablets — has emerged due to someone, or a collection of people, daring to imagine a better alternative to what currently exists. A reality outside of a set of lines.

A single idea from the human mind, can start a groundswell, it could kickstart a movement, and it can actually rewrite our future.

However... an idea is powerless if it stays inside of us, if you never manage to convey the ideas to others, if you never pull that idea out for others to contend with it. To connect with it. To feel a sense of belonging to it, and to grow it with you.

3 things that struck me:

Autonomy

The freedom to develop one's self, increase one's knowledge, improve one's skills and to define one's own success. Variables, that are often so hard to find in our current educational system.

Active8-Planet has created a beautiful architecture for a network of self-steering teams of students and teachers in local university communities, and empowers them to design their ideas completely autonomously but in close connection with a global network of like-minded pioneers.

By ensuring a high-level of autonomy, students are be able to act on their own motivation, create their own journey, and are able to work towards the best possible solutions that suit to their local challenges' needs.

So, now my question is. What does it require to mobilise a diverse group of people to design ideas and business solutions to large-scale sustainability challenges? The answers can be found in the foundational design of the Active8-Planet programme, an international project co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+Programme.

From May 15 - 17, a group of multiple ethnicities, nationalities, ages and disciplines came together in the "green capital" Ljubljana. With one mission: to present green and fun ideas for a sustainable future.

I had the honor to be part of this lovely community, and support in the creation of the 2-day "Joint Event", uniting the community and facilitating moments of exchanges, workshops and fun.

I therefore, also had the pleasure to look at all that happened on little distance, to walk along the paths paved by the community members, to listen and to observe.

To come back to the question I previously posed. What allowed the Active8-Planet Programme to unite, mobilise and empower such a diverse group of people to design green and fun ideas?

Play

Play is serious business. As Albert Einstein mentions: "Play is the highest form of research". Through play we create the experience to nourish our inner creative and to energise our minds. Through play we absorb and observe. We become curious and our creative muscle gets expanded. We learn to be and do without hang-ups. Here we can find space and evitality.

Active8-Planet understands very well, that imagination is more important than knowledge. I haven't seen a fixed set of frameworks, a full programme without breaks or a score card. Instead, I felt that there was lots of space to play. Wasn't it through their newly developed game, then it was through the space they utilised for hosting their workshop days. A youth hostel.

Trust & Positivity

I'm often finding myself in event setting, where the world and us as human kind is showcased as something that is, how to say, pretty much doomed. Cynicism and pessimism have become the order of the day.

However, the Active8-Planet event came forth as a breath of fresh air. It equipped me with a rat of hope, that the essence of humanity is goodness. That solutions are out there, as long as we dare to dream, create and share.

It is the beacon of hope that provides solutions in a fractured world. Especially, in the difficult situation that we find ourselves in at the present.



Josine Bakkes

Active8-Planet partners:



Slovenia

Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana

http://iri.uni-lj.si/en/domov-2/



The Netherlands

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)

https://www.vu.nl/en/



Belgium

Hasselt University

https://www.uhasselt.be/en



Sweden

Halmstad University

https://www.hh.se/english.html



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Project reference number: 621436-EPP-1-2020-1-SI-EPPKA2-KA



