

Travelling Europe

Lucie Berat & Marianne Abdellaoui



to sow hope

I always thought that it would take me years to find a lifestyle in which I would feel good and in line with my ecological commitment. I had this idea that you have to do a "classic" job for a while before having the financial resources to change direction; or worse, that you have to wait until you burn out before deciding to take a step back. In any case, these are stories that the media are particularly fond of.

Tish, Ivain, Gaëlle and Valentin, whose path I crossed during my internship in Budapest, tell another story. This group of friends, who came to spend a few days there as part of their Seeding for Future project, showed me that it is possible to get off the beaten track very early, as soon as you finish your studies. We talked for hours about their backgrounds and projects; and I must say that I came away full of hope and motivation to invent my own path!

This is the story of each of these four people who decided to come together and travel across Europe for three months to sow hope.

Tish

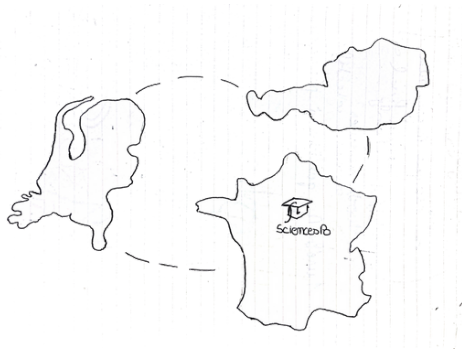
26 years old

Defines themselves as a white, able-bodied person

"I was lucky to have access to a good education and higher education, I never lacked the essentials"



"I feel like the thing that drives me is really understanding how to function as a human mycelium; how to create ways to understand each other and strengthen each other."



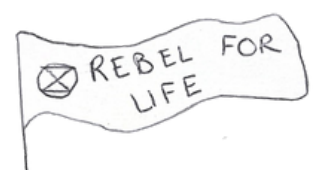
Tish grew up with three cultures: they are French-Austrian and his grandmother is Dutch.

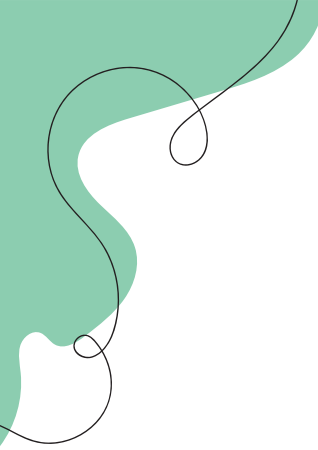
Their identity, made up of several origins all over Europe, takes an important place and a very particular meaning in their life: they grew up in Vienna and studied in Paris, at Sciences Po.

Before they set off to wander around Central Europe with *Seeding for Future*, they were already living a rather nomadic life between France (Lyon) and Spain (Madrid). They also told me that travelling from one country to another by train is not at all new to them, and this project is not so far removed from their childhood spent tossing around Austria, France and the Netherlands.

Tish has a background in environmental activism that impressed me a lot. They started very early, at the age of 15, and continued to oppose ecocidal projects during their studies in Paris. This nourished them a lot, but they ended up running out of steam from being in perpetual opposition. Their story reminds me of other testimonies that I have had through meetings or readings.

In any case, it seems important to me, what they did to preserve themselves; **not to dedicate all of one's energy to blocking and resistance actions, but also to take time to take care of oneself and to dream of desirable futures. But of course, it is important to fight while one has the energy and motivation!**





So it is with this desire to slow down that Tish began to change their lifestyle. They told me: *"I wanted to give myself the freedom I never had. I had always been pushed on a fast track, school and university, without ever taking a break, then the highway to career and retirement."* And that's why they began by **gradually breaking out of a sedentary lifestyle to enjoy a more nomadic life**, free from rent and charges. They then joined the *Seeding for Future* adventure in a process of **searching for a job that would really suit them**.

This whole process of seeking "freedom" and refusing the "career highway" perfectly echoes the intentions of this project and the quest for meaning in which I find myself. And I find it interesting that their first reflex was to get moving, literally. Perhaps the **nomadic life as a starting point** is a path to explore? For the lover of stability that I am, it's quite dizzying...but it could turn out to be exciting!

Another trait of Tish's personality that struck me is their ability to find very original metaphorical images for each complex situation that they have to describe. It's very funny to witness and often very effective! So, when I asked them what they plan to do after this trip, rather than answering "I don't know", they told me: *"For me, the image I had of this project is a trampoline where I already come with a lot of things and maybe by jumping on it I'll let some go. So the challenge is not only to bounce endlessly, but to come out with momentum and a somewhat precise direction towards where to bring things that I remember from it."* Not a bad, right?

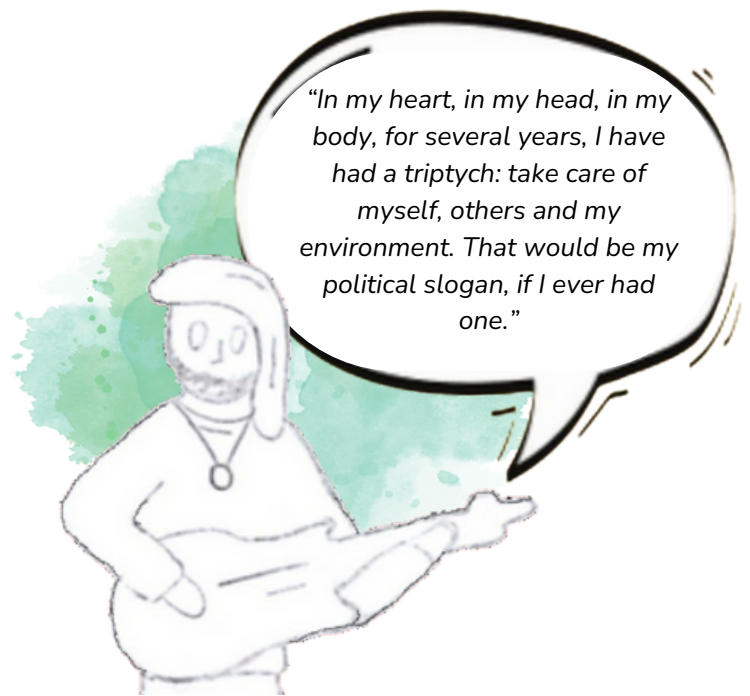
In any case, if you were wondering about the answer to my question about what they plan to do after this project, one path that attracts Tish is **professional facilitation, and in particular in the Murales network in Spain, which corresponds to the network of Murals (or Fresks) in France** - climate fresk, biodiversity fresk, digital fresk, and many others -.

Ivan

25 years old

Defines himself as a white, able-bodied man.

"I fit the dominant societal criteria and therefore feel very privileged on a daily basis."



"In my heart, in my head, in my body, for several years, I have had a triptych: take care of myself, others and my environment. That would be my political slogan, if I ever had one."

really like Ivain's journey because it is progressive, in phases. We see the seed of awareness planting and growing gently in his mind and in his actions.

From his childhood, his parents explained to him how humans were destroying the world. And so, from the age of 8, he was already acutely aware of these issues. But as he grew up, seeing nothing change, **this awareness gradually fell asleep and took second place in his concerns.** Of course, as a good citizen, he took part in the "small gestures" to save the planet: he learned that flying pollutes and therefore stopped using this mode of transport; he learned that meat poses many problems and therefore stopped eating it... It must be said that such renunciations are not such small gestures, and it is also seen as an insurmountable sacrifice by a large number of people around us. I also think that, for the moment, at certain times in my life, my commitment stops at these choices of sobriety, limiting my impact on a daily basis, and bringing me well-being and peace of mind. But in Ivain's eyes, **his investment in the ecological cause had not really begun, he had not yet joined the fight.** And this fight began in 2022.

First, there is a **gradual slowdown**, in two stages. After graduating as an engineer - which he says he didn't do much of - he decides to switch to 60%, with the aim of dedicating the time thus freed up to finding an activity that was meaningful to him. Finally, this 40% of free time is filled with activities that he already did: sleeping, reading, cooking... In fact, he takes the time to do more in-depth activities that were already present in his life, which allows him, for example, to buy better quality products and spend more time preparing good and balanced meals. In short, he slows down!



And this departure from the world of always faster, always further, ends with an even more radical break: he leaves his job and goes on a tour of France of woofing by bike. This time spent in the middle of nature marks a turning point: he is filled with a feeling of fullness. And what marks him even more is the unease felt when he returns to the city; the excesses of solicitations and violence - physical, sound, verbal, auditory, visual - specific to urban spaces are now difficult for him to bear. This is an observation that resonates a lot with my experience and my questions about my future establishment.

Alongside his loss of momentum, a second turning point in his ecological commitment takes place in Ivain's life. While he was telling his friends about a caravan project going from place to place to disseminate new stories and highlight existing links at the local level, one of them replies "listen I have the same project, but in Europe". And that's how **he found himself travelling around Europe with his three friends from *Seeding for Future*, and our paths were able to cross in Budapest!**

What can one do when returning from such an adventure? I think Ivain doesn't know it yet, but he intends to **continue his nomadic life in France**. And one thing is certain, this experience will have allowed him to continue to define what he likes - the facilitation of collective processes, transmission - and what he currently lacks and would like to see take more place in his life - artistic projects -.



The nomadic lifestyle that Ivain has invented for himself is very interesting. It is a great **gateway to an ecologically and socially sustainable life** for anyone eager for adventure and encounters. But for my part, I could not see myself living like this all my life. And similarly, I wonder if this is a **passing rhythm of life due to his youth, or if it could be a sustainable model over time**.

Gaëlle

25 years old

Defines herself as a white, able-bodied, queer woman, raised in a Catholic family



After business school, Gaëlle realized that she didn't want to continue down that path. So she did a quick training course to become a web developer and then joined a company that she really liked.

Based in Berlin, she has built herself, piece by piece, a life to her liking: "a good routine, a small apartment - not so small, actually -, a life that I like, circles and people who inspire me...". At the same time, she is involved in various activist groups. She finds a lot of meaning and energy there, but regularly comes up against time constraints: she sometimes has to give up participating in events that were important to her because of professional obligations. This began to create in her a **dissonance between the time and energy she wants to devote to these activities and what her work allows her**; to the point that she decides, in 2024, to take a sabbatical. At the time, she has no clear idea of what she is going to do, apart from one certainty: she wants to "put ecology at the center of [her] life"! So, when Ivain asks her to join the *Seeding for Future* adventure, she is immediately won over by the project.

I find that Gaëlle's experience raises a very interesting question here: that of **time**. **It is very easy to have many interests and aspirations that overlap and compete, especially on ecological issues**. How do you juggle all of that? How do you make room for activism, the desire to raise awareness and the creation and dissemination of new imaginaries at the same time? These are subjects that question me a lot in my reflections on my own future.



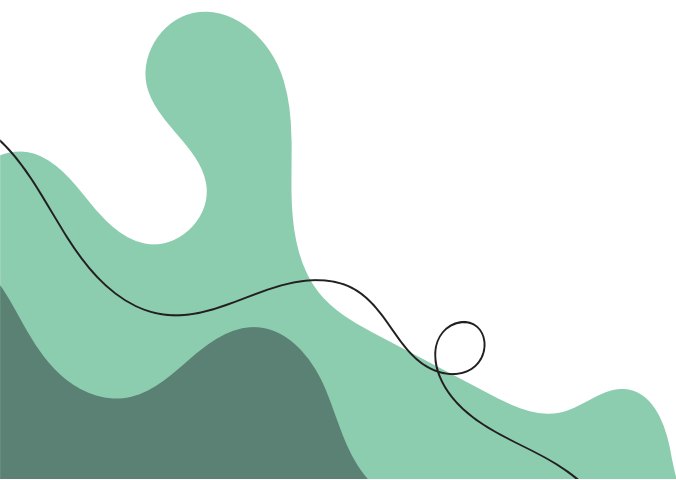
But let's get back to Gaëlle, because for her the adventure is only just beginning! These three months spent travelling around Europe with her friends and meeting many people have highlighted other possibilities for her, in which she could feel more in agreement, than her Berlin life. In addition to saying goodbye and thank you to the past, she is therefore taking advantage of this trip to take stock of everything she would like to experience differently now. First of all, she would like to review her **relationship with work and money**, which currently consists of working 35 hours a week in a European capital and spending her salary, in addition to the rent, on activities, products and places of consumption. In the future, she would like to be able to live with less, "to detach [herself] from the value of money to move closer to the value of time" - we come back to it again -. To do this, she is first considering **leaving salaried employment**.

In addition, to be less dependent on money, she relies on mutual aid; and this implies, for her, moving out of individual housing to collective housing. In Berlin, Gaëlle lives alone in a large apartment. It was very important to her when she moved here, but now it no longer makes sense to her. This is why she sees herself joining a collective place driven by a common project. But how do you choose where to settle? Although she feels particularly drawn to Austria or Italy, she told me during a discussion: *"I feel that the country doesn't matter that much, and that it will be more the place or the people who will take my heart."*

There is still one last obstacle to the work she wants to do to transform her daily life: she is on sabbatical, which means she will have to return to work. **How can she not fall back into her usual, reassuring routine?** When I asked Gaëlle about this question, she replied that, although unlikely, it is an existing risk. But what she is most concerned about is *"how can I make a smooth transition to something else?"* One idea she has in mind, being attracted to facilitation just like her three travel companions, would be to **start by changing roles within her company**: moving from her current exclusively technical activity to positions facilitating collective processes. This would allow her to gradually prepare for the bigger changes she is considering later, once she has left her company and said goodbye to being an employee.

During our discussions, Gaëlle told me something that struck me: **she has always had "a desire to explore lots of lives"**. She sees herself one day becoming a baker or cheesemaker like Valentin, or working in a planetarium.

I find myself very much in her enthusiasm for many activities, and the inability to choose between all the possible "lives" - more or less artisanal, collective, remunerative - that are offered to her. But at the same time, as she explains very well, this implies making temporary mournings of certain existences to concentrate her energy in one direction. In any case, I hope that with all these reflections and drafts of answers, she will succeed in building a next life that she will like. I am curious to see what the future has in store for her!



Valentin

26 years old
Defines himself as a white, cisgender,
able-bodied man



I can't say why, but Valentin's journey is the one I can best identify with.

Maybe it's the fact that he studied engineering? Or maybe it's his interest in manual activities? Or even that we have common hobbies like writing, yoga or cooking. In any case, his career path is as interesting as it is atypical.

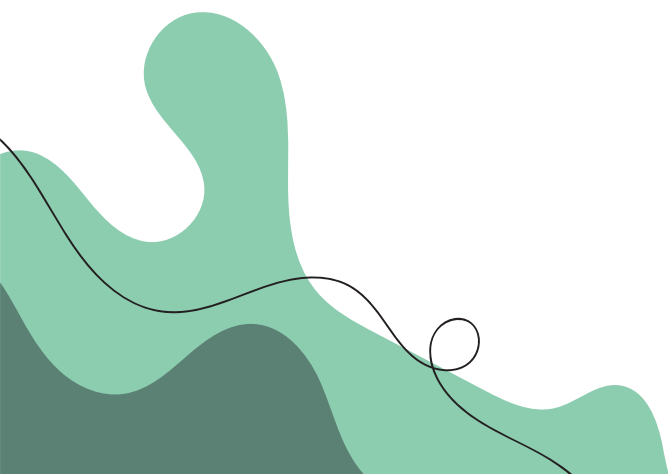
Apart from some experiences in a design office and in a company providing transport for people with disabilities, he has not worked much in transport engineering, which is his field of studies. Instead, for several years, he has been exploring: **he goes from place to place without having planned what he will do there, and finds a way to make himself useful once there.** This way of life is, for him, the opportunity to be "self-taught" and to practice many manual trades (baker, cheesemaker) and other activities creating links between people.

This choice of life is, for him, very linked to the notion of money and our dependence on it. Indeed, he wanted above all to learn to **live out of step with the standards of a "normal life" of our society**, by trying to go a little less into supermarkets, by going less to places of paid entertainment: *"I learned to live with less money and it gave me the possibility to experiment differently"*.

But it is important to remember that being able to make such choices is a luxury, a privilege linked to the security that our graduate degrees provide us. To illustrate this, Valentin likes to quote a sentence pronounced during the speech calling for desertion at a well known French agronomy school's graduation ceremony: *"Let's desert before being stuck by financial obligations"*. When leaving school, these are the alternatives available to us: join the system, earn money and invest by getting into debt, or desert in the name of freedom and the preservation of our environment. This "we" includes a tiny part of the French population - and yet the vast majority of people I meet; people in precarious situations (even in student circles at high schools) do not have the room for manoeuvre necessary to take such a step aside. **Learning to limit our needs and income is a privilege, and it is therefore, in my eyes, a duty!**

This is not the first time that Valentin has travelled across Europe. However, his first experience in this area was very different from his journey with *Seeding for Future*: alone and by bike! It was an opportunity for him to push back certain limits of comfort and time spent outdoors, which must make the current journey - in a group and by train - almost banal! Valentin likes, moreover, to compare these two adventures, and in particular his brand new discovery of working in a group. **Another great revelation within *Seeding for Future* is facilitating workshops:** *"The time spent preparing a workshop is time that doesn't cost me, but which takes me out of my fatigue or my torpor if I find myself there, because there is this objective that I like and for which I try to be the best I can do."*

However, *Seeding for Future* and the whole adventure that followed will not cause the same upheavals in his daily life as for Gaëlle. Indeed, **this experience fits logically into his current lifestyle, based on short-term projects.** It is yet another leap into the unknown, and there will be others to come. He will therefore continue to oscillate from volunteering at festivals to engineering design offices, and everything that lies in between. And yet, just like for his comrades, such an experience will have transformed him definitively: *"Traveling with *Seeding for Future* allowed me to reconnect with a form of gentle madness and uncertainty in which I usually swim with pleasure, and against which I had lately registered a little false, by telling myself "now we have to get serious". And in fact no, life is not serious, and I am tasting it quite a bit with this project".* It was therefore a great opportunity to grow and learn as he loves to do so much.



Sowing desirable futures across Central Europe

Our four protagonists met at different times in their journey, united by the same desire to go on an adventure together to talk about environmental issues.

Seeding for Future was born in **2019**. At that time, 7 students came together to create the first edition of the project. Their goal was to collect European youth perspectives on **environmental movements** and bring them to the **European Parliament** in Brussels. Unfortunately, the global pandemic of 2020 forced the cancellation of the trip; but the idea remained and a first group left in 2021.

The aim was to raise awareness about the ecological crisis across Europe in order to understand the plurality of visions of this matter. They also met **people already involved in climate and social justice**, and from there the documentary series **ACTIVIST** was born.

Another team took over the project in 2022 and produced a series of podcasts based on the meetings. The aim is that each year a new group will travel across Europe with the aim of bringing together **European perspectives on environmental and social justice**.

The group I met chose as its central theme the **imagination of desirable futures** and the dissemination of these new narratives. To do this, they sought to create spaces for dialogue for citizens in **different countries of Europe, especially Central Europe**, through the animation of workshops.

They wanted to complete this project with the **discovery of initiatives** through an Erasmus+ project which aims to understand what methods of popular education are mobilized for the attention of young people by these initiatives. And more broadly, how can we bring an awareness speech on ecological matters to young people through **methods of action in the street?**

In total, they led around twenty workshops, **met around a hundred participants and discovered around ten initiatives** ranging from the shared neighbourhood garden, to the “Tesla-Stoppen” occupation camp near Berlin.

“We did Berlin, we did Poland, then we crossed the Czech Republic, we arrived in Austria and we spent two weeks there, then we went through Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Austria again; and now we are in Hungary, in Budapest.”



Strengths and weaknesses of a collective

Challenges before and during the adventure

Valentin, Gaëlle, Tish and Ivain met for the first time only three months before their departure; before that, all the organization was done by videoconference.

This allowed them to realize how **being in a group highlights much more group dynamics than through a screen**. After the first ordeal of the meeting, the ultimate challenge arrives: going on a trip together for three months! This is then the opportunity, in addition to managing the tensions that appear within the group, to realize the immense workload linked to this project. Usually, teams of 7 to 9 people leave, and they have more time to prepare. The team learns a valuable lesson: that of sorting out priorities, **reducing the sails to preserve itself**. Thus, a large part of the group's energy, during this trip, was dedicated to this question of *"how can we succeed in doing things that we can be proud of, on which we are collectively aligned, while preserving our energy?"*.



"Ultimately, it is a big challenge to embody a new narrative for oneself, and to apply what one preaches externally: internal ecology, taking care of oneself individually and collectively."

Tish

Taking care of the group

The difficulties presented above highlight a major challenge of collective projects, often forgotten or denigrated: taking care of the group.

It can never be said enough, but when it comes to carrying out a project, **the technical aspect is very rarely the main sticking point; what is blocking things is rather what we call the human factor**. This is why, when tensions arose within the group, the team took the time to discuss and resolve them.

Similarly, a large part of the working time, outside of the workshops and their preparation, consists of defining the organization of the group. **A horizontal organization, with shared governance** was chosen, which means spending a lot of time discussing the different roles and how to rotate them according to the constraints of each person.

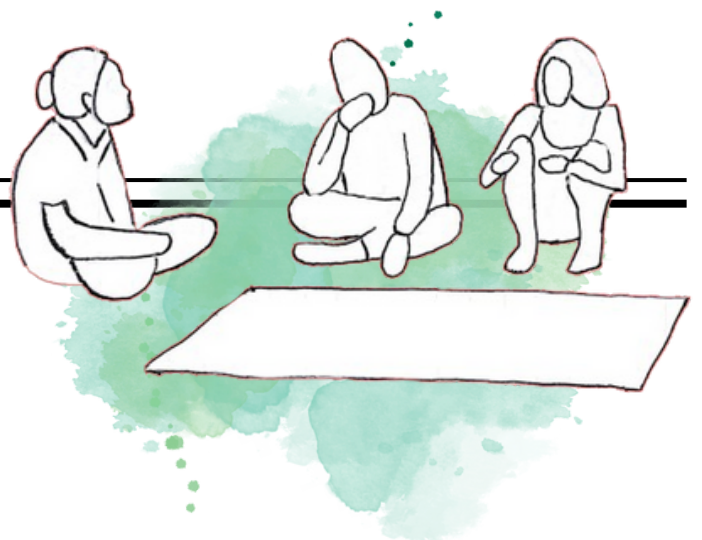
Such an organization therefore allows us to take care of the group and its members, and in particular, it was valuable in adapting to the health problems that Tish had during the trip, preventing them from putting all their energy into the project. I was also very touched when they told me: *"I find it super beautiful to now feel legitimate to be in this conversation, thanks to the adjustments we made and how it was received in the group."*

Group connection with people met

find Valentin's testimony on the contribution of the collective during meetings with the people hosting them, each time they arrive in a new city, very interesting.

So I'll allow myself to quote it to you as is: *"I've wandered around a lot on my own, and one of the great pleasures of being in a group is to benefit from the openness of a person in the group towards our host. Some like to cook, others like to play music, others like to have more philosophical discussions or political debates... And of course it's Ivain or Tish or Gaëlle who connects with someone, but it's also a bit like the Seeding for Future group; and it's a nice introduction, I think, towards the people who host us, to be received as a Valentine but also as a member of a group and a project."*

Ultimately, the story that has just been told here is that of four very different trajectories that crossed paths during a collective project. From this meeting is born a group that, through the strength of cooperation and care, has been able to face difficulties and achieve great things throughout Central Europe. As Ivain would say: *"We are the same individuals as at the beginning of the journey, but I have the feeling that we are a really different group."*



Conclusion

Being able to take care, of myself in particular

Learning from others, making discoveries

Feeling connected to my surroundings

"Living with my grandparents, other people's parents and other people's children."
Valentin

Having time

Having quality relationships

The ingredients of a beautiful life

Having fun (cooking, cycling, etc.)

Eating fruits and vegetables that taste good

Making encounters

"My mother's voice resounds very strongly within me, always asking for peace in the world."
Tish

Understanding and being able to repair the objects I use

Having fewer external requests and information



Food for thought and advice

Here is the discussion that Gaëlle, Ivain and Tish had when I asked them what advice to give to people who, like me, are in dissonance with their studies or their daily activities:

Ivain: I have a quote that I like: "*Don't ask yourself what the world needs. **Look for what makes you vibrate, what makes you live and do it.** Because what the world needs is people who live, who are fully alive.*" And I resonate with that: I think I tend to look too much for what the world needs. I try to fill this need and thus, it's not what I want to do.

Tish: The thing that gives me hope or keeps me here is **being in honest dialogue with myself.**

Gaëlle: I would like to call for **indulgence, patience with oneself and the joyful acceptance of not knowing.**

Ivain: In indulgence there is really the thing of **trying** if it seems to please you and maybe it will not be the right thing exactly, but it's ok and you will know.

Tish: Indeed! I also wanted to celebrate **curiosity about ourselves and others, and everything around us!**

Gaëlle: And one more thing: **trust yourself**, listen to your instincts and your curiosity a little. Go and open little doors just because "why not?": if that little door is humming, go and listen to it more closely.

Ivain: And I also think that it can be difficult to explore paths that are not those that are the references of the people we know, of our family... And I think that we should **not force ourselves to be in something totally different** and that will make us unhappy.

And then talk, talk, talk, discuss. That's what I like: explaining why I'm here, what I'm doing here... And when I speak from the heart, people don't say "no, that's nonsense!", but "ok, he's not perfect".

Some resources to go further

Seeding for Future

- Website : <https://seedingforfuture.wixsite.com/accueil/fr>
- LinkedIn page : <https://www.linkedin.com/company/seeding-for-future/posts/?feedView=all>

Partner initiatives of the project

- Association carrying out this project: CliMate
- The post-baccalaureate school for ecological, supportive and civic transition Sup'écologique

Workshops led by Tish, Ivain, Gaëlle and Valentin

- the New Narratives Collage: a theoretical part in the form of a fresk (mural) and a practical part of writing a new narrative.
- 2030 Glorieuses: invitation to travel to 2030 thanks to a utopian conversation.
- Ecological Renaissance Fresco: Gathered around a drawn frieze measuring 3 meters by 1, the participants formulate proposals for local ecological policy.

