

### From up above

adapted from an article by Davide Banis



- 1 The most pressing challenges for humankind are transnational and so complex that no country has enough resources to tackle them by itself. But even in the case of issues that apparently affect just a single country, solving them always requires the conjoined effort of many states. Technology has entangled the world in a web of relations and there's no way back.
- 2 However, it's evident that in Europe, and in the Western hemisphere in general, nationalism is making a comeback and there's an increasing number of people that find it difficult to think beyond the boundaries of their own country. This is literally a quite limited horizon. If we want to tackle global issues such as climate change, we need to start thinking of the Earth as a single entity, beyond the narrowness of national borders.
- 3 The only people who truly experience the Earth as a single entity are astronauts. From space, astronauts can contemplate the planet as a minuscule dot, lost in the sea of nothingness. Viewing the planet from space has changed many astronauts' perspective on the planet itself and on other earthly matters. Among the many spacefarers who reported this cognitive shift in awareness — that is known as 'overview effect' — there's the Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield who said that, while orbiting Earth, he felt more connected to the people on the planet than ever before. Unfortunately, by June 2018, only 561 people had made it to space and experienced the Earth as a single environment.
- 4 But what if we could get hundreds of thousands of people to experience the 'overview effect'? Even better, what if every child had this chance? After all, a child's mind has not yet been molded and made rigid by decades of news

about wars over borders and similar matters. Children who have experienced the 'overview effect' would probably become adults more prone to see the Earth beyond the narrowness of national boundaries and interests, eventually resulting in a new population better equipped to front global challenges such as the climate breakdown.

- 5 In a way, this is the goal of a newly established Dutch organization called Spacebuzz. A few days ago, while ruminating over these issues, I bumped into their website. Their mission statement is to become "an educational project to inspire children worldwide to become ambassadors of our planet through the experience of viewing Earth from space like an astronaut." In particular, they want to visit schools with a custom-made immersive virtual reality experience and make children aged between nine and twelve experience the 'overview effect' as if they were astronauts hanging on in space. The project, which is encouraged by real-life ESA astronaut André Kuipers, is still in its launch phase but it already looks like a promising stride in the right direction.
- 6 "Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark." That is how astronomer Carl Sagan described a photograph of Planet Earth taken by space probe Voyager 1 in 1990 from a distance of about 6 billion kilometers. He added: "In our obscurity there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves." So it is up to us to (try to) stop climate change and find sustainable ways to grow and develop. And it's up to us to solve these problems together, beyond outdated national borders. A project like Spacebuzz will definitely help.

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