

### **What do we actually know about climate change?**

“Climate change is sometimes misunderstood as being about changes in the weather. In reality, it is about changes in our very way of life.” This is a quote by Paul Polman, a Dutch businessman who is the former CEO of the multinational company ‘Unilever’. What he is trying to say is that climate change is indeed about changes in the weather and overall climate but that it is a consequence of human activity, specifically those located in the global North. Nevertheless, the effects of climate change already have and unfortunately will continue having an effect on every human being on this planet in one way or another, if we do not make radical changes soon. Despite there still being a lot of uncertainty around the topic and what impacts climate change will continue to have, one thing is certain: governments have to act now! Thus, the main question that will be aimed to answer is how climate change can be solved and if new innovations can help with reducing the impacts our capitalist society has on the climate.

One of the people I interviewed actually reinforced the fact that uncertainties about predictions for the future are immense and that we as a society do not know much about climate change and what might or might not happen in the years to come. Thus, they think that we should explore what solutions not only sound good or make a company/business look good but actually work and could mitigate the effects of climate change which we are currently facing. This is a rather hopeful view of it but there are also more pessimistic people, such as the second person I interviewed, who think that ‘fixing’ the problem will not be possible because of how expensive it would be to for example switch to only renewable energy, such as solar or wind energy. This will especially be costly for third world countries. Thus, the question is: Who will have to bear the cost for those nations to transition to more sustainable energy sources? The countries that emit the most or does everyone pay an even share even though not everyone pollutes as much as others do? Additionally, installing those new technologies such as solar panels or wind turbines could also destroy already existing ecosystems and societies, as did the ‘Three Gorges Dam’ in the Yangtze river in China, which generates hydroelectric power. The construction of the dam has among other things already led to several landslides where people have died and has driven a rare dolphin species to extinction. This is only one of many examples of species that are losing their natural habitat due to human activity.

In fact, even though many companies or organisations are currently trying to improve their environmental footprint by for example producing more sustainably, they tend to still not comply with the policies put in place and thus, do not meet the environmental requirements introduced by many governments. The Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), one of the many EU climate policies aimed at tackling climate change which was introduced by the EU in 2005 is one example of this. Even though overall GHG emissions seem to have dropped since then, it might have also been because of a variety of other reasons such as financial crises, changes in consumption, or other climate legislations - the correlation between decreasing emissions and the implementation of the ETS is not necessarily a causal one. Another example is 'Tesla' which claims to produce their electric cars sustainably but at the same time refuses to disclose their carbon emissions. The company has also failed to commit to carbon targets.

Additionally, many companies 'greenwash' their consumers, which means that they market their products in a way which makes consumers think that they were produced in a sustainable way when in reality that is not the case.

However, another interviewee seemed to be more optimistic about the future by saying that they have hope in firms and think that they will lead the way to a more sustainable future. They also believe that with the help of new innovations, the climate crisis can be solved and the future could look better than we envision it to be today.

In conclusion, no matter if some people are more optimistic than others, I think most people do not understand how significant the problem actually is and are quite selfish in the sense that they do not think about future generations. Nevertheless, we cannot only blame individuals themselves because most of this is the fault of big corporations and especially governments who are not being strict enough. Moreover, a lot of people are not sufficiently educated on the subject which partly has to do with the fact that there is still so much that has not been researched yet. Thus, education would be the most effective way to make people aware of how serious the problem is and that we need to be mindful of what and how much we consume.