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## Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

Unfinished supports [Project Liberty](#) in engaging diverse voices to build the critical digital infrastructure that catalyzes change.

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## Igniting Gen Z's Civic Spirit

*What are the emerging issues that young people will tackle in the next 10 years?*

*How will Gen Z organize and build movements different from previous generations?*

*What does a renaissance in civic education look like?*

We sat down with [Thanasi Dilos](#), the remarkable, 20-year-old co-founder of [Civics Unplugged](#), to tap into the collective consciousness of Gen Z (people under 26 years old). Civics Unplugged is building an ecosystem in 70+ countries dedicated to training, funding, and connecting young people who are leveraging technology to solve issues in democracy, climate change, digital democracy, and a host of other issues.

Below is a condensed and lightly edited conversation with Dilos. Let's dive in!

## **The issues and challenges Gen Z is tackling**

"In 2020 and 2021, we saw a lot of young people focused on climate change, climate action, and climate innovations. But in 2022, we saw a huge shift from climate change to mental health and digital rights.

The shift began with a lot of young people saying: 'I have lived experience with mental health problems being exacerbated by the social media epidemic, driven by all of these algorithms. I am depressed.'

We also heard young people saying 'I don't want my data to be used without my permission. I know that in 20 years, my data will be the most valuable thing I own, and I want to start writing the legislation that protects it. I want to lobby congress to create the frameworks we are going to use to legislate in the digital world.'

In the digital rights/technology/social media space, we are much earlier than the climate space, which is doing the important work of addressing entrenched systems that have been around for decades. We have the opportunity to intervene earlier by stopping big platforms and tech companies from doing the same thing to our digital world.

We need to build an apparatus that is able to train hundreds of these really knowledgeable, connected, and empowered young people to tackle this digital rights and digital future issue. The digital rights space has a ton of great youth leaders, but we don't yet have a funding or training apparatus like the climate movement where there are climate clubs and there are climate movements in cities and towns. Which is why Civics Unplugged is launching a pilot program in 2023 to train digital rights innovators."

## **Gen Z and the future of digital movements**

"When it comes to young people and youth movements, Gen Z has always seen movements, organizations, and clubs in much more of a horizontal and distributed way than in a vertical leadership way. This is just the way we look at the world by virtue of growing up on the internet.

Even if they won't be called DAOs (Decentralized Autonomous Organizations), a lot of movements are already DAOs. If you look at the climate movement, it is distributed. There is no one leader. There are the storytellers, the funders,

the researchers, the scientists, and they all work in a great synchronous way. It is a DAO.

Web3 is easy to understand for a lot of young people because that's the way they look at the world, so we will see a lot more young people getting involved with Web3 tech."

## Teaching civics is not working

"We have a civic brain drain that is happening when our smartest young people are passionate about issues, but when they hit college and start looking at the job market, they have to make a choice between their desire to help people and their desire to make money. Starting in high school or even before, civics (defined as anything you do to make the world a better place) is taught in a way that separates making an impact from making money.

We have [a very weak civic spirit](#), especially amongst young people in the United States. This weak civic spirit is due to the fact that the exposure they have to civics education is siloed from their perception of the real world and what they can do as a career that makes them money and makes their parents proud. There is this idea that 'I can do really good for the world, but only after I get a job that pays me a lot of money.'"

## Enter Civics Unplugged

"The core idea behind Civics Unplugged is, what if you taught civics in a way that allowed young people to see that pursuing a career in civics was financially, professionally, morally, and societally fulfilling?

Civics Unplugged's goal is to reach these people as quickly as possible before they have ingrained mental models and incentives to pursue other careers.

[The Civics Unplugged Fellowship](#) itself is an exposure to people who have done it successfully.

The real magic comes post-fellowship where we have the money and the network to allow these young people to put their civic ideas into action—from Fellows being appointed to the California State Board of Education, to creating and testing mobile voting platforms, to building flood detection systems, to launching international DEI curricula. When you are paid to do social impact, you are more likely to take that work into college. When you are doing work that is successful and funded, you're more likely to do that work after college.

By giving money to young people, we are proving that working in civics is a financially sustainable career path.

## The Civics Unplugged Lab and DreamDAO

"The [Civics Unplugged Lab](#) leverages the ecosystem of young people at the forefront of every issue and trend in the community to run a new experiment

that tries to push the youth empowerment and civics space forward with our alumni at the helm.

Last year, our alumni built [DreamDAO](#), which has raised over \$350,000 to fund young people all over the globe to work on tech for good. They get trained in the principles of tech for good, each receive \$2,000, and get support to go to conferences, hackathons, and participate in internships.

As they are currently conceived, DAOs are probably dead. But where I think DAOs are the future is probably in philanthropy, like DreamDAO, which allows a lot of community members or grantees or people with lived experience to have some sort of say in where funds are directed."

## Final word

"My generation is among the [most impacted by the mental health crisis](#): high suicide rates, high rates of depression and anxiety...that is all because of a system that keeps people as far away from their purpose as possible.

In order to solve a lot of the problems that are coming (digital rights, climate change, criminal justice, etc.), we need to solve the first problem of how we get young people to find their purpose.

Civics Unplugged is not around to focus a bunch of young people to solve one issue or push one agenda, it is purely around to help as many young people as possible to find their individual purpose, to be funded, to be welcomed into a community where they feel like they have a purpose in life. Whatever that is—whether that's tackling climate action or solving the digital rights crisis—we will be there to support you in doing it.

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If you're a young person (or know of young people interested in these issues),


- Get involved in [Civics Unplugged](#).
- Check out how you can participate in the transition to an open, inclusive data economy that puts citizens in control through our work at [Project Liberty](#). Sign up [here](#).




## Other notable headlines

 **The inside scoop from Twitter.** From layoffs to printed code reviews to drama inside Twitter's offices, Musk has destroyed the equity value of Twitter and much of his personal fortune, while leaving employees disenchanted and searching for other jobs, according to an article from [The Verge](#). As you read it, check out the interactive tracker of his declining net-worth over the last 90 days.

 **Algorithms that bring people together.** In a [new working paper](#) shared with [The Washington Post](#), researchers are making the case for algorithms designed to elevate posts that resonate with diverse audiences. It's an approach intended to counteract the toxicity of social media feeds, which tend to highlight attention-grabbing content that is polarizing and incendiary. These new algorithms are considered “bridging systems” that bridge across lines of difference and steer users into “productive conflict.”

 **Screen time.** When we spend time on our devices, our sense of time is way off. We vastly underestimate the amount of time we spend on screens—by about 20%. [Julie Jargon of The Wall Street Journal](#) explores the drivers behind the phenomenon and what you (and your kids) can do about it.

 **Overestimating the power of misinformation?** In [this Vox Podcast](#), Peter Kafka interviews internet security expert Alex Stamos on whether we're too worried about misinformation. Key takeaway? According to Stamos, “I think what has happened is there was a massive overestimation of the capability of mis- and disinformation to change people's minds—of its actual persuasive power.” You can read the transcript [here](#).

## Thank you for reading.

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