

# World Future Council

**"People are finally beginning to understand that disaster is going to hit us within the next few years if we don't act now. The economic aftermath of a collapse of financial systems can be overcome within a generation. The ecological aftermath of an environmental collapse won't be overcome within a thousand generations."**

*Jakob von Uexkuell*

## Mind a change?

A crowd of students surrounds Jakob von Uexkuell. The atmosphere bustles with energy. Questions fly through the air. Minds are focused on issues determining the fate of future generations. The theatre at Greifswald University in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, is exactly the kind of stage that gives Jakob von Uexkuell, founder of the World Future Council and father of the Alternative Nobel Prize, a sense of optimism about the fate of

the world. "There are students here from 45 countries ready to discuss the three core issues of our times: Ecology, economy and society," he says. "The organisers understand that without people's vision and desire to shape mankind's future across nations and cultures today, we remain accomplices in a process threatening our own future."

Von Uexkuell is patron of the fourth Greifswald International Student Festival GrIStuF. Under the heading, "Mind a change?" some 160 participants from four continents discuss the current state of affairs and work on globally acceptable solutions. "Asking Jakob von Uexkuell to be our patron was an obvious choice," says Anna Blanke of the GrIStuF. "He embodies our motto by living change and the devotion to the pursuit of alternative solutions."

For Jakob von Uexkuell, seeking change in the face of global challeng-

es has indeed been the driving force behind a lifetime of activity. Instead of continuing to enjoy the proceeds of his stamp business, he sold it and founded the Right Livelihood Award that has honored exceptional individuals for humanitarian, social and ecological achievements with the Alternative Nobel Prize since 1980. With his experience as a Green representative in the European Parliament, as a Greenpeace board member and as an active participant in organisations ranging from Friends of the Earth to the Global Commission to Fund the United Nations, he set out to found the World Future Council.

## Activating political wisdom

"How can we prevent climate change?" "How can we fight against international laws that allow corporate giants to copyright the genetics of our seeds and thus destroy the livelihood of millions?" "What can we do against the proliferation of nuclear arms?" These are just some of the questions Jakob von Uexkuell has heard over the decades. But he has also met individuals from around the world who are willing and able to provide platforms, concepts and ways to facilitate answers – often in the face of great adversity and against all odds.

And over time, an idea began to take shape: Why not gather the political wisdom available from the great thinkers in grass roots organisations like the World Social Forum, in research institutions such as the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, and from political and human rights activists to create an organisation unlike all the others. An organisation that, as the first and only one of its kind, understands itself as the voice of future generations: A voice that will focus on the issues that shape the kind of planet we'll leave

behind for our children. And a voice that will provide answers that can be implemented into laws and rules of ethical conduct – today.

## Better policies for a better world

Together with Herbert Girardet, a leading expert on sustainable cities and author of a number of books and documentaries on the issue, Jakob von Uexkuell set out to gather people about him who would participate in a "World Future Council." After five years of work, the World Future Council (WFC) was founded in May 2007 in Hamburg, Germany. While the WFC continues to seek partners in support of its work, seed funding was provided by the City of Hamburg and business leader Michael Otto.

As envisioned by Jakob von Uexkuell, the WFC consists of 50 international personalities who have already left an impact for future generations on politics, economics and the sciences.

One example is Vandana Shiva, physicist and expert on biodiversity. For decades, she has initiated campaigns against globalisation and the patenting of seeds and has thus become one of the most respected women in India and on the international stage. "In a time where businesses run on quarterly returns and politics run on



*Vandana Shiva, PhD, Founder, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, India and the Navdanya movement for biodiversity conservation and farmers' rights: "We are not shoppers in a global super market. We are citizens of the earth."*

four to five year election terms, the future is being sacrificed. A body that looks into the future and defends the future of our species and the future of our planet is vital," she says. "That is why I am a member of the WFC."

Another example is Herman Scheer, member of the German parliament and as president of Eurosolar an expert on renewable energy. Scheer fathered the idea of the German renewable energy law, which is now identified as one of the WFC's "best policies": It provides fixed rates for twenty years to producers of renewable energies and thus furnishes them with financial security. "The

most important issue is to get rid of the one dimensional thinking in the international debate about economy and ecology," he says. "They speak about the problems but not about who or what caused them, and that's what we have to overcome."

## Change can happen?

In order to inspire that kind of change, the WFC advises parliamentarians and experts worldwide about best policies such as the German renewable energy law. As a hands-on example, the WFC has created the online project PACT (Policy Action on Climate Toolkit). Via the internet, opinion leaders can download a toolkit with information about how to write the most effective laws. As one result, this has kindled an entirely new debate about climate legislation in England.

"This proves that change is possible if enough people summon the courage to insist on it," says von Uexkuell. "Therefore, our time calls for the wisdom to be courageous now. And for the strength to make this courage an everyday commitment to our children so they will not inherit destruction but a healthy, safe and just planet with all the riches that were once bequeathed upon us."

At the Greifswald Student Festival, Jakob von Uexkuell met young people from around the world who want to work together to overcome global problems. Like the thousands of decision makers, parliamentarians and civil society members, the WFC is already working with to promote best policies, these young people will return home inspired by the knowledge that change is possible. And they are ready to start making it happen – now.

*Regina Körner*

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*Herman Scheer (left), PhD, MP, President Eurosolar: "Over 30 countries have already copied the German renewable energy act. And there will be more. It is only a question of political will."  
 Jakob von Uexkuell (right), Founder of the World Future Council and the Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Prize): "Leadership defines Reality."*



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