

**Myths of the Future in a Post-Corona World: An Exploratory Study in Ecuador**

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## Abstract

When people contemplate the future, future archetypes, or future world states, shape how the future is constructed. Despite an assumed context-independence, the question arises if future image construction is indeed context-specific. One derivate of those future archetypes are myths of the future. Building on the work of Boschetti et al. (2016), this study explored how those myths of the future come to the fore in imaginations of a post-Corona future in Ecuador. The current study was based on an existing data set of the study “Will the World Never be the Same? Letters from a Post-Corona Future”, which asked participants to construct a narrative of a post-Corona future, using the methods “Letters from the Future”. Therefrom, a sample of 25 male and female Ecuadorians was selected for further qualitative analyses. Results largely replicated those myths of the future found by Boschetti et al. (2016) (i.e., eco-crisis, power and economic inequality, social crisis, social transformation, and techno-optimism), and offered two additional myths (i.e., eco-revolution, and Coronavirus-aftermath). The findings, in essence, support, the notion of universality of the myths of the future. Yet, they also point to some degree of context-specificity when viewed at the feature-level compared to myth-level. Future studies could expand on the findings by applying them to another context.

*Keywords:* Myths of the future, post-pandemic future, low-income country, Ecuador, letters from the future

## Introduction

When individuals imagine the future, they draw on archetypes. Archetypes can be considered a form of archetypal memory, rooted in the human psyche (Hunt et al., 2012). Such collective metaphorical representations of the imagined futures are common to every human and across different cultures and shape how the future is constructed (Fergnani &

Jackson, 2019). Foresighting literature suggests that any narrative about the future can be classified according to one of four fundamental archetypes, insensitive to the context (Bezold, 2009; Dator, 2009). Based on these archetypes, Boschetti et al. (2016) identified five myths of the future, which represent a set of beliefs about the future, assumed to be context-independent as well. Building on the idea of context-independence of myths of the future, this study explores how these apply in a different context, i.e., Ecuador. Gaining an understanding of this is particularly important to anticipate what is to come in the future. Precognizing and planning for potential future world states may, in turn, help to not get caught unprepared.

Futurist scholar Dator (2009) conceptually developed four main future archetypes by assembling and analyzing future images worldwide. He labeled these possible future scenarios (I) *continued growth*, (II) *collapse*, (III) *discipline*, and (IV) *transformation* (Dator, 2009). *Continued growth* depicts the most common future archetype and expects current development to continue in the same direction aiming for constant economic and individual growth. Everything that exists and has existed will change at some point, however, what remains are the same fundamental processes that enable this change. *Collapse* entails the fear that the current system will not be able to continue and will regress to a former state of development due to external influences. Notably, this alternative should not be considered a ‘worst case scenario’ as some individuals may favor a return to a status quo ante. Based on the notion that fundamental values derived from religion, culture, or politics must govern all human life, *discipline* rejects continued economic growth as a desirable goal. Individuals perceive it as either undesirable or unsustainable, advocating for an economic and societal reorientation towards survival and fair distribution of resources. Finally, *transformation* highlights the potential of technology, including artificial intelligence and robotics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and space settlement, to forge a ‘perfect’ society. This view assumes that all current forms of behaviors, beliefs, and norms are subject to development or

replacement by new fundamentals to overcome issues of today's society (Dator, 2009). Dator (2009) remarked that each future archetype is equally likely to arise, and can be found across cultures, independent of context. Consequently, one may expect high convergence between accounts of future images in, for instance, the Western world in contrast to the non-Western world.

Building on the conceptual work of Dator (2009) - the four future archetypes - Boschetti et al. (2016) delved into images, concerns as well as attitudes towards the future among the Australian population. Based on an analysis of statements about the future, representing so-called 'megatrends' (Naisbett, 1982, as cited in Boschetti et al. (2016), they empirically derived five discrete views of the future, called myths of the future (Boschetti et al., 2016). Those encompassed a set of beliefs about how the future will unfold and are thought to be largely generic and context-independent (Boschetti et al., 2016), such as future archetypes (Dator, 2009).

In their sample, the *eco-crisis myth* (I) entailed the decline of the environment and natural habitats caused by continued economic growth strived for by governments. Destruction of nature, in turn, was expected to cause civil disorder. The *power and economic inequality myth* (II) described the increase in power of both corporations and governments, which created economic crises and social inequality. However, the growing prevalence of surveillance installations to exert control over the public played an essential role as well. The decline of traditional moral values and social order, and predominantly virtual life was captured under the *social crisis myth* (III). Whereas the *social transformation myth* (IV) depicted the change of society and governments towards more collectivism and care at the expense of economic endeavors. Instead of governmental institutions, other people accounted for the unmet human needs of society. Eventually, the *techno-optimism myth* (V) centered around advancements in science and technology, supposed to improve the lives of many

people. However, those technological advances were accompanied by a decline in social equality, as well as an increase in social stratification (Boschetti et al., 2016).

Among those myths of the future, Boschetti et al. (2016) found weak positive correlations between the eco-crisis myth and the power and economic inequality myth, and the social transformation myth, and the techno-optimism myth. Moreover, they reported moderate negative correlations between the power and economic inequality myth and the social transformation myth, the techno-optimism myth and the power and economic inequality myth, the eco-crisis myth and both the social transformation myth and the techno-optimism myth, and the social crisis myth and the techno-optimism myth.

Furthermore, Boschetti et al. (2016) linked these myths of the future to a set of meta-archetypes, which included those developed by Dator (2009). They reported an overall convergence between the myths of the future and the future meta-archetypes. Particularly the techno-optimism myth and the technology drivers archetype, which described a similar technology-driven development, exhibited substantial commonalities (Boschetti et al., 2016). This may support the idea of context-independence of myths of the future. However, they also emphasized the relationship between the power and economic inequality myth and the markets dominate myth. They argued that, while the former clearly portrayed a pessimistic future scenario of power imbalances and economic crisis, the latter's nature was determined, as either pessimistic or optimistic, by the audience and the type of exercise (Boschetti et al., 2016), advocating for a degree of context-specificity.

Yet, both Dator (2009) and Boschetti et al. (2016) proclaimed a context-independence of the future archetypes and myths of the future, respectively. This assumption was also supported by the overall resemblance between the myths of the future and the future archetypes (Boschetti et al., 2016). However, since Boschetti et al. (2016) conducted their study in Australia, the question still can be raised how the myths of the future apply to

another context, that is Ecuador. Here, two contexts seem to be interesting: First, the local context with, among others, cultural and socio-economic differences between Australia as a high-income country and Ecuador as a low-income country. Second, the pandemic-context caused by the outbreak of the Coronavirus and associated consequences, which, albeit being a global event, particularly has affected low-income countries more compared to high-income countries (Ali & Ali, 2020). These two contexts may be of particular relevance because they may shape how myths of the future come to the fore in imaginations of the future in a different country.

### **Current Study**

Building on the work of Boschetti et al. (2016), this study explores how the myths of the future, found in Australia, apply to another context, that is Ecuador. Both the local and pandemic-context may point to differences in manifestations among countries despite an assumed context-independence (Boschetti et al., 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore the myths of the future in a different setting, thereby complementing existing literature by offering a qualitative overview of how the myths appear in future imaginations of Ecuadorian people and providing concrete examples of them. Knowing how the myths of the future apply to another context is of particular relevance to precognize and prepare for new future realities. The research question for this study is: “How do Boschetti et al.’s (2016) myths of the future come to the fore in imaginations of a desired post-Corona future by Ecuadorian participants?”.

## **Method**

### **Background of the Study**

An existing data set of the study “Will the World Never be the Same? Letters from a Post-Corona Future” served as a basis for this study. The original study explored how individuals envision what the future should look like once the Coronavirus outbreak is over.

A mixture of convenience and purposive sampling was applied, followed by a snowballing approach. Information about the study was publicized on personal and professional networks and mailing lists, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media, as well as regional newspapers. Recruitment information included the background of the study, eligibility criteria, reasons for participation, information about the transnationality of the study, and the research team.

### *Participants*

The participant pool was composed of individuals living in countries affected by the current Coronavirus outbreak and associated consequences. Participants were eligible for this study if: they were at least 16 years of age, resided in a region included in the study, possessed sufficient linguistic skills and technical fluency, and had access to a technical device (e.g., phone, PC) necessary for accessing the online survey in Qualtrics.

### *Materials*

**“Letters from the Future”.** The method “Letters from the Future” asks participants to write a short narrative of how they envision their future lives and future world once the Coronavirus outbreak ended. It is considered a creative writing exercise and has its roots in the field of health promotion (Bohlmeijer, 2007, as cited in Sools, 2020). Individuals are instructed to imagine traveling to the future in a time machine and write a letter to a self-chosen audience in the present. Commonly instructions consist of three prompts about the time and setting of the future scenario, the future world, and the audience, which serve as a guide to construct their narrative (Sools, 2020). For this study, adaptations were made to the original instruction. After a short introduction, participants were presented with five prompts: (I) “How far into the future and where did you travel?”, (II) “Describe your future world.” with an addition about how society and nature function after the Coronavirus outbreak, (III) “Describe yourself in the future.”, (IV) Path towards the future”, and (V) “Message to the



present.”. Each prompt was accentuated with some examples (for the full instructions, see Appendix A2).

**Questionnaire.** The survey was composed of ten sections with one to four items each, as well as fixed and non-fixed responses. Those covered the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on participants’ lives, participants’ attitudes towards the future, particularly hope and (un)certainty, and demographics. For instance, items looked like “Can you tell us your story of how the corona outbreak has affected your life? Please feel free to write whatever comes to mind, long or short.” or “I feel that I have control over the future.” (for the full survey, see Appendix A3).

### ***Procedure***

Via the homepage of the University of Twente (or other collaborating universities) participants could access the study. They could choose from nine languages, which to write the letter in (English, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Finnish, Estonian, Italian, and Greek). After selecting the appropriate language, they were redirected to the web-based tool Qualtrics. Initially, they were presented with the informed consent form, which specified the purpose, activities, confidentiality, and contact persons (see Appendix A1). On providing consent by selecting the appropriate button, participants received the instructions to write the letter as described above. Then, participants were asked to answer a brief survey as described above. Eventually, participants received the researcher’s contact details to reach out for additional questions and stay connected with the research team to contribute to subsequent studies. On average, it took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. At any time, participants had the opportunity to opt out of the study if they experienced stress, inconvenience, or discomfort. For participation, candidates did not receive any compensation. The survey was online from April to July 2020. Non-English data (e.g., Dutch, Spanish, French) was translated into English and encrypted. All names and personal data to identify

participants were removed to protect confidentiality. Data was then saved in Microsoft Teams (1.4.00.13073).

### **Current Study**

Prior to the study, ethical approval was granted by the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente. To answer the question at hand, an exploratory study with a qualitative research approach was carried out, exploring a subset of “Letters from the Future” from Ecuadorian participants. Since the study tried to comprehend the thoughts and feelings of participants in-depth, a qualitative approach is applicable (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

#### ***Selection of Ecuadorian Participants***

From a total sample of 38, a subset of 25 participants was selected. Twelve participants were excluded due to the length of their letters, which did not contain a minimum of 100 words, and one participant was excluded as the narrative did not depict a future scenario. Participants were both male (28%) and female (72%), which is similar to the gender distribution in the larger sample. The mean age was 40 years with an age range between 18 and 62 years. The large majority of participants possessed a higher educational degree. The average length of letters was 311 words ( $SD = 150.82$ ).

#### ***Development of Coding Scheme and Data Analysis***

The analysis of the letters and development of the coding scheme was executed in ATLAS.ti software (9.0.23.0), and generally, consisted of four consecutive steps: (I) development of the initial coding scheme, (II) application of the coding scheme to the selected letters, (III) refinement of the coding scheme, and (IV) analysis of co-occurrence (Buzydlowski, 2015).

The initial coding scheme (I) adopted the 23 statements condensed by Boschetti et al. (2016) as codes that comprise the corresponding myths of the future (i.e., eco-crisis, power and economic inequality, social crisis, social transformation, and techno-optimism). Each

code represented a concrete feature of the associated myth. After familiarizing with the data set by reading all letters twice, the coding scheme was applied (II) using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Relevant text fragments were allocated to the codes or marked if the initial codes did not capture their content. This was done in an iterative process of perusing the letters, and coding as well as re-coding text fragments, followed by a refinement of the coding scheme (III), based on the text fragments not captured by Boschetti et al.'s (2016) codes. Text fragments similar in content were conflated and received a label, representing the final code. New codes were then, based on their content, either added to an existing myth of the future of Boschetti et al. (2016) or merged into new myths. Subsequently, the codes were relabeled or combined, if required.

Eventually, an analysis of co-occurrence (IV) was performed, which focused on disclosing potential relationships among myths of the future by counting paired data within the letters (Buzydlowski, 2015). If a letter contained at least one feature of two or more myths, they were assumed to co-occur. This was done as the letters were, generally, difficult to categorize according to one single myth or groups of myths that may occur together as suggested by Boschetti et al. (2016).

## **Results**

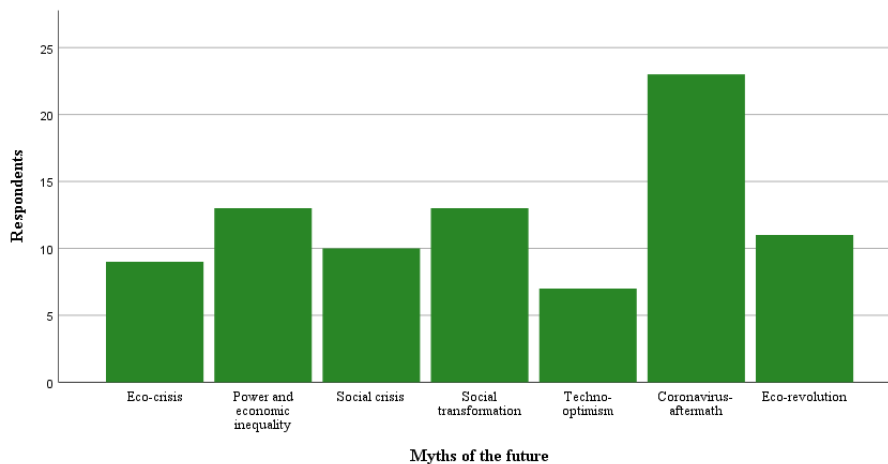
Analysis of the letters revealed seven myths of the future: (I) eco-crisis, (II) power and economic inequality, (III) social crisis, (IV) social transformation, (V) techno-optimism, (VI) Coronavirus-aftermath, and (VII) eco-revolution (for a full overview including codes, see Table 1). As mentioned beforehand, the first five myths were adapted from Boschetti et al. (2016) but required to be complemented by additional codes as novel features surfaced within the letters. The last two myths emerged from the data and exhibited substantial content differences compared to Boschetti et al.'s (2016) myths, thus, advocating for the need for additional myths. In sum, 33 codes or features accounted for the myths, 16 from Boschetti et

al. (2016), and 17 new codes. Seven codes from Boschetti et al. (2016) were not found (see Table 1) and are not discussed in this section. Furthermore, a total of 189 quotations was aggregated from the letters, whereof 72 (38%) were codable using Boschetti et al.'s (2016) myths, and 117 (62%) required new codes.

Among all myths, the Coronavirus-aftermath myth was the most prevalent as 92% of participants included features of it in their letters. Only two letters did not include any of the corresponding codes. Both the power and economic inequality myth and social transformation myth were mentioned the second most with 52% of the letters including at least one code of the myths, respectively. The techno-optimism myth was the least prevalent, only 28% of the letters exhibited codes of it (for a distribution of the myths, see Figure 1).

### Figure 1

*Distribution of Myths of the Future Among Participants*



*Note.* One letter could contain several myths of the future.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Myths of the Future, the Codes Comprising Them, and for Each Code, Its Description and Frequencies*

<b>Myth of the future</b>	<b>Code (Feature)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Grounded<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Density<sup>b</sup></b>
Eco-crisis (Boschetti et al., 2016)	Continued economic growth at the expense of the environment	This code entailed the belief that the environment will steadily be compromised resulting from governmental economic expansion.	6	4
	Decline or extinction of natural habitats, plant species or animal species	This code entailed the belief that nature and animal species will decline or become extinct.	4	4
	Deforestation for agriculture**	This code entailed the belief that forests clear the way for agricultural use to feed the human population.	0	0
	Environmental destruction causing violence in the developing world***	This code entailed the belief that continued destruction of the environment will cause people's uprising for the preservation of nature.	0	0
Power and economic inequality (Boschetti et al., 2016)	Rise in pollution, rubbish, and chemical contamination	This code entailed the belief that environmental pollution will increase due to growing industry and human misconduct.	8	7
	Alarming power of multi-national corporations	This code entailed the belief that large corporations will increase their power drastically and evade economic sectors, which denied cooperation beforehand.	1	1
	Collection of public data by governments and companies to control or influence people**	This code entailed the belief that governments' initiatives to collect public data will increase with the aim to exert control over people.	0	0
	Global economic crisis due to poorly regulated financial sector	This code entailed the belief that governmental mismanagement and a self-sufficient economy will lead to high levels of unemployment and a lack of opportunities.	10	7
	Growing difference between the rich and the poor	This code entailed the belief that poverty will increase substantially widening the gap between rich and poor.	10	8
	Social inequality due to continued economic growth	This code entailed the belief that the goal of economic growth will raise social inequality and will cause unfair, unequal living and working conditions.	6	6
	Migration to different areas of the world*	This code entailed the belief that people will migrate in search of better life opportunities.	3	3
	Social crisis (Boschetti et al., 2016)	Decline in law and order**	This code entailed the belief that the civil and orderly functioning of society will decline.	0
	Decline in traditional and family values	This code entailed the belief that traditional conservative values and moral standards will diminish.	2	2
	Excessive involvement in internet and virtual world	This code entailed the belief that due to technological advancements people predominantly live in and interact within an online environment abandoning real-life social contacts.	6	4

	Ignorance due to changes in technology and education	This code entailed the belief that a lack of awareness or education, or human indifference will promote the development of ignorant, egoistic mindsets and behaviors.	7	6
	Increase in crime and drug abuse**	This code entailed the belief that the crime rate and drug abuse will increase within the population.	0	0
Social transformation (Boschetti et al., 2016)	Importance of human values*	This code entailed the belief that people develop fundamentally new values, which are characterized by inclusivity, respect, and care.	11	8
	Increase in community-owned businesses**	This code entailed the belief that more businesses will be started, which are run by residents instead of profit-oriented corporations, and thus, benefit the public.	0	0
	Prioritization of national happiness over economic growth	This code entailed the belief that goals of economic growth will be deprioritized and people's well-being will be prioritized.	5	5
	Satisfaction of human needs by society instead of government	This code entailed the belief that people will compensate for the unmet human needs imposed by the government, enabled by and promoting communal spirit.	4	3
	Return to a simple life*	This code entailed the belief that people have adopted more simple lifestyles, living self-sufficient and on the exchange of goods.	5	4
Techno-optimism (Boschetti et al., 2016)	Education available for all due to internet**	This code entailed the belief that technological advancement increases global educational opportunities.	0	0
	Emergence of new economic markets	This code entailed the belief that new economic markets will be created.	4	4
	Improvement in medicine due to scientific innovations	This code entailed the belief that scientific research and advancement will improve medicine.	4	4
	More effective medicine and agriculture due to genetic technology**	This code entailed the belief that advancements in genetic technology improve medicine and agriculture.	0	0
	New and improved means for food production and distribution**	This code entailed the belief that technological advancements will improve and create new food production and distribution processes.	0	0
	Advanced technologies improve jobs and lifestyles*	This code entailed the belief that technological advancements will simplify and improve people's everyday life.	2	1
	Space settlement*	This code entailed the belief that other planets will be colonized.	1	1
Coronavirus-aftermath (NEW)	(Hygiene) measures against Coronavirus*	This code entailed the belief that measures (e.g. vaccination, social distancing, disinfection) to counteract the Coronavirus will be implemented into the daily	10	8
	Continued spread of Coronavirus*	This code entailed the belief that the Coronavirus pandemic will continue to exist.	2	2
	Decline in population (due to Coronavirus)*	This code entailed the belief that people have died (due to the spread of the Coronavirus) and new generations will not balance it through human reproduction.	15	12
	Emergence of new daily routines and habits*	This code entailed the belief that people will adapt their habits and routines due to the impact of the Coronavirus.	11	7

	Emergence of new infectious diseases*	This code entailed the belief that novel infectious diseases emerge and will lead to pandemic states.	5	5
	End of Coronavirus outbreak*	This code entailed the belief that the Coronavirus pandemic will come to an end and public life will be opened again (e.g. restaurants, concerts).	16	14
	Increase in health concerns*	This code entailed the belief that people will become more aware of health risks and react according to them.	7	6
	Increase in social isolation*	This code entailed the belief that people will live more withdrawn (as a result of the Coronavirus).	5	4
Eco-revolution (NEW)	Healthy environment for future generations*	This code entailed the belief that the environment will recover from man-made destruction and will be preserved for the future.	8	4
	Improvement in energy systems*	This code entailed the belief that the development of energy systems will be advanced that benefit the environment.	2	1
	Increase in sustainable transport*	This code entailed the belief that (new) environmental-friendly means for transportation will be implemented.	5	5
	Protection of nature for its own value*	This code entailed the belief that people will develop pro-environmental attitudes facilitating the protection of it.	8	6

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<sup>a</sup>Total number of quotations for the corresponding code. <sup>b</sup>Number of participants to include the corresponding code in their letters with n=25.

\*New code, which was not derived from Boschetti et al. (2016). \*\*Code derived from Boschetti et al. (2016), which was not found in the data set.

## Qualitative Description of Myths of the Future

In the following, each myth and associated codes are elucidated using quotations from participants. Examples are presented of quotations representing either typical characteristics of the corresponding code or unique aspects of the myths. All together the analysis aims to give an overview of the variation in the sample.

### *Eco-Crisis*

This myth encapsulates the beliefs of people that the environment and natural habitats will diminish due to continued economic growth on a national or global level. Growing companies, technological advancements, as well as human thoughtlessness are assumed to cause an increase in pollution and depletion of natural resources, promoting climate change.

**Continued Economic Growth at the Expense of the Environment.** The first feature ‘continued economic growth at the expense of the environment’ includes an awareness of natural resources being depleted: “While the planet's resources are destroyed, they will be more likely be to alter the climate with eminent catastrophes.” (Male, 55 years). In a similar vein, it entails the steady rise of climate change: “It seems that everyone has forgotten about global warming.” (Female, 36 years), which is also facilitated by the spread of major corporations:

The environment has recovered a bit, but the onslaught of large companies has sought to recover what has been lost, so there is no great change, we have tried to have organic gardens, recycle, but these are actions that do not achieve a great change, and the concern grows because big decisions are not taken to stop the debacle, water is an elemental resource but is being increasingly rationed. (Female, 38 years)

Even though measures against environmental pollution are undertaken, the damage caused by emerging companies cannot be compensated for, highlighting a lack of governmental initiatives pro-environmental protection.



**Decline or Extinction of Natural Habitats, Plant Species or Animal Species.** The second feature ‘decline or extinction of natural habitats, plant species or animal species’ describes the decay of the environment, both from a superficial view: “We will have less green areas.” (Male, 39 years) and a more pessimistic view: “Here nature seems dead, its skeleton-like trees and without leaves gives a gloomy and desolate aspect.” (Female, 36 years). Natural habitats are destroyed, and desert-like conditions eventuate, accompanied by growing cityscapes: “Other places continue with their typical city grayness.” (Female, 34 years). Cities tend to convey a cold, dreary image, deprived of green areas.

**Rise in Pollution, Rubbish, and Chemical Contamination.** The third feature ‘rise in pollution, rubbish, and chemical’ encompasses that environmental pollution will remain a major issue in the future: “The city awoke with a radiant sun, a clear sky, fresh air but the pollution cloud is still present although it has decreased its thickness considerably.” (Female, 34 years). In contrast to an evident reduction in pollution, other participants adopt a more dramatic outlook: “The city is much more polluted and grey than ever.” (Female, 35 years) and “More pollution, many factories and businesses other than a lot of garbage due to technological advances.” (Male, 39 years). While generally levels of pollution are expected to rise, one important contributor turns out to be the technological advancement and growing industry sector. Not only is the increase in pollution facilitated by the consumer society, but also human misdemeanor:

In these developed countries it is incredible the amount of garbage generated daily, which is also related to online shopping, where each product is covered in cardboard and plastic boxes, and with the pandemic, the face masks are lying around the corners, and the bottles of alcohol and anti-bacterial gel, all this seems to have no end, instead of advocating for the care and protection of nature we do the opposite. (Female, 36 years)

Both online shopping and the use of hygiene articles are byproducts of the Coronavirus outbreak and seem to exert a profound impact on pollution levels as well. People's lifestyles and associated attitudes, such as littering, equally contribute to the issue as the corporations, which simply supply the demand.

### ***Power and Economic Inequality***

This myth describes beliefs that social inequality and economic crisis are likely to rise further and create poverty. Governmental mismanagement and failure lead to high levels of unemployment, and a lack of basic services and education. One code is added to this myth as migration due to a lack of opportunities also played a role here, in contrast to Boschetti et al. (2016).

**Alarming Power of Multi-National Corporations.** The first feature 'alarming power of multi-national corporations' deals with the increase in power and influence of corporations operating on a global level:

As for the large technology companies, they have taken advantage during and after a health emergency, the technology industry has entered even in those corners where they were not welcome [...] (Female, 36 years)

Companies are able to invade all desired markets while disregarding the general population's will, underscoring the power imbalance between the people and corporations operating for profit.

**Global Economic Crisis Due to Poorly Regulated Financial Sector.** The second feature 'global economic crisis due to poorly regulated financial sector' is generally characterized by the economic recession: "The country's economy falters." (Female, 35 years), causing high levels of unemployment: "Also, there is almost no work and we have had to do activities that we never imagined doing." (Female, 35 years). Related to this, working conditions change to an inhumane level and labor exploitation is promoted: "There is more labor exploitation because the market is the one that puts the conditions." (Female, 38 years)

and a decrease in income: “This has caused havoc, especially at the economic level, the basic basket has increased in budget and the minimum wage has decreased.” (Female, 18 years).

**Growing Difference Between the Rich and the Poor.** The third feature ‘growing difference between the rich and the poor’ centers around the growing divide between rich and poor. Many people live in poverty and lack basic services and education, albeit they are not food-deprived: “Those people, although they may have food and access to water, lack basic services, the internet, basic education.” (Male, 39 years). Furthermore, poverty leads to a rise in homelessness, and cityscapes are shaped by people begging for money: “Some places I frequented as restaurants no longer exist and I wonder where all the people, who worked there, went, it saddens me to see more people begging on the streets.” (Female, 35 years). Not only adults but also children are dependent on the generosity of fellow citizens: “There are many children on the streets, asking for money because they lost their parents and family.” (Male, 39 years). The Coronavirus outbreak results in masses of people battling for their existence. At the same time, social stratification among the population is hardened, causing an increase in inequality:

We try by different means but what they call class unity and identifying ourselves as equals became much more complicated, the socio-economic classes or strata became much more marked and with it, they won the battle. (Female, 38 years)

Even though inequality is not considered the main theme here, it is catalyzed by the rise in poverty and efforts to create fixed societal classes.

**Social Inequality Due to Continued Economic Growth.** The fourth feature ‘social inequality due to continued economic growth’ entails the development of society towards a more uneven distribution of resources. Particularly, the healthcare and education sector are affected by maldistribution of subsidies: “Not in the incorporation of more inclusive proposals in all areas, and proposals that aim for investing in teacher training and education have not yet been heard or training for the professionals in the medical field.” (Female, 36 years).

Financial resources are allocated based on political interests instead of a perceived need in certain areas. Eventually, the governments are identified as the drivers of inequality because they have continuously pursued their self-sufficient economic interests: “The only problem we see is the country's politicians, who have not changed their behavior and corruption in any way that existed before the pandemic.” (Male, 39 years). Corruption remains a major issue impacting the development of a more equal society.

**Migration to Different Areas of the World.** The fifth feature ‘migration to different areas of the world’ is an addition to Boschetti et al.’s (2016) power and economic inequality myth and describes the phenomenon that people abandon their homelands in search of improved living conditions and opportunities: “People had to migrate in order to find better life opportunities.” (Female, 35 years). Whereas some migrate to rural areas of the country, leaving urban life behind: “But I also see people who have returned or immigrated to the countryside.”, others prefer the city for better chances: “There are fewer people in the country, but in the city, there are many people trying to resume their lives.” (Male, 39 years).

### *Social Crisis*

The social crisis myth encompasses a decline in traditional moral values and human competency. Due to the excessive involvement in technology, society becomes more ignorant and withdrawn and tends to act out of self-interest at the expense of humanity.

**Decline in Traditional and Family Values.** The first feature ‘decline in traditional and family values’ depicts a divergence from traditional values, towards the development of values, characterized by high levels of individualism: “People are increasingly individualistic, and the social fabric is increasingly broken.” (Female, 35 years). People focus more on their own needs instead of the group as a whole, and relationships and connections to other people in the community are subject to change:

In addition, now building interpersonal relationships is different, which are marked by individualism. (Female, 38 years)

People tend to act more out of self-concern and create an ‘elbow society’.

**Excessive Involvement in Internet and Virtual World.** The second feature ‘excessive involvement in internet and virtual world’ encapsulates the emergence of a public and social life, which predominantly happens in an online environment: “The digital revolution has arrived, there are new ways of working, teleworking, it is no longer necessary to go to the office, all the information is kept in the clouds and the meetings are done digitally, traditional jobs have disappeared.” (Female, 38 years). Not only does work-life occur solely online, but also traditional work images decline. Moreover, education is also be given online: “The children had to receive classes online and from here we could understand the value of a teacher.” (Female, 29 years). Constant online schooling underscores the qualities that teachers possess in contrast to computer-guided classes. In a similar vein, everyday life occurs more extensively in an online environment, and behaviors facilitated by the outbreak of the Coronavirus will intensify: “Many procedures and purchases are made online, although that was already uncertain before the pandemic, now it seems reinforced. The governments and municipal authorities seem more interested in investing in technological improvements and not in the incorporation of more inclusive proposals in all areas.” (Female, 36 years). Despite people’s satisfaction with the government’s direction, technological advancement is strived for. Eventually, people use technological means to handle interpersonal conflicts: “If someone tells me something that I do not like, I eliminate or block that person.” (Female, 38 years).

**Ignorance Due to Changes in Technology and Education.** The third feature ‘ignorance due to changes in technology and education’ entails the lack of awareness over the necessity of measures against the spread of the Coronavirus:

Another issue that I see really complicated is the lack of awareness and discipline of people because to this date there is still no definitive solution (vaccine) for this

disease, however, I can see that people do not take the basic precautions that we know were important. (Male, 39 years)

Similarly, people tend to treat the risk of the Coronavirus lightly based on the development of vaccination despite evidence for its effectiveness: “They believed that with the development of the vaccine the disease would end.” (Male, 47 years). Moreover, it includes an absence of activism against social injustice. Instead, there is a tendency to accept governmental campaigns without opposition.

### ***Social Transformation***

The social transformation myth describes beliefs that, on the one hand, corrupt and self-interested governmental structures decrease, and national happiness is prioritized over continued economic growth. On the other hand, a change of society towards more respect, open-mindedness, and inclusivity is likely to arise, advocating for a return to a ‘simple’ life. This study adds three additional codes to those of Boschetti et al. (2016).

**Prioritization of National Happiness Over Economic Growth.** The first feature ‘prioritization of national happiness over economic growth’ centers around the theme of corruption. Governments aim to shatter structures that formerly enabled corruption: “They offer to eliminate cumbersome bureaucratic processes to avoid corruption again.” (Male, 42 years). Economic and personal interests are neglected for integrity and people’s well-being: “In some countries, we saw with admiration how they overcame this crisis since both politicians and citizens respected the decision and strategies to overcome it.” (Female, 62 years).

**Satisfaction of Human Needs by Society Instead of Government.** The second feature ‘satisfaction of human needs by society instead of government’ encompasses the failure of governmental institutions to account for the needs of their citizens. Instead, certain segments of the population compensate for this lack: “The elderly take care of us. There are also meetings where we are the people of greatest importance due to our experience and

wisdom.” (Male, 52 years). A council of elders is formed based on the wisdom, which they acquired over their lifetime. Those take on the government’s responsibilities of guiding younger generations. Particularly in the healthcare sector, people continuously offer their help in the interests of humanity: “There will always be people who help, there will always be people who need in-hospital or palliative care homework will always be important, to restore the human right to live and die with dignity.” (Female, 56 years).

**Importance of Human Values.** The third feature ‘importance of human values’ represents an addition to Boschetti et al.’s (2016) social transformation myth and focuses on the development of novel core values among people. Those are characterized by mutual respect: “I look at people who are kind to each other, respectful.” (Female, 56 years), as well as open-mindedness and inclusivity: “Today’s society is much more open-minded, we no longer discriminate against people because of their skin color or way of thinking, and this has been given thanks that little by little we have eliminated the social stigmas that have marked us for centuries.” (Female, 18 years). Additionally, people place more value upon their family: “We have also learned to value many other things that we did not take into account before, the fact of being able to visit the grandparents, the family, makes us love and appreciate more today.” (Female, 34 years). Given a period of restricted social contacts, people learn to show appreciation for things, they have always taken for granted. In a similar vein, traditional family structures diminish, and laws are implemented that cater for equality for the LGBTQ community: “My generation no longer thinks about having children and prefers to adopt, and yes, finally the law passed, which allows gay couples to adopt.” (Female, 18 years). It also includes striving for personal and spiritual growth in a process of creating awareness for human nature:

With the commitment to grow as beings of love, we meditate, pray, and communicate to participate in such education projects, in order to raise awareness of the HUMAN BEING. (Female, 62 years)

People likely expand their spirituality and emphasize the importance of love and kindness in interpersonal relations.

**Return to a Simple Life.** The fourth feature ‘return to a simple life’ is an addition to Boschetti et al.’s (2016) social transformation myth and involves the regression towards lifestyles, marked by simplicity: “We are all in pain now, all living simpler lives, more human lives, as it should have always been.” (Female, 62 years). Here, minimalism is equated with more humanity, uttering discontent with the development of society towards complexity and excess. Moreover, people begin to fend for themselves again by growing their own food, pursuing an autarkic way of living: “But I feel calm working in a field in nature, and producing food with my family, fortunately, they continue to live.” (Male, 39 years). Eventually, money is replaced as a payment method by the exchange of goods, and supermarkets are not relied on anymore:

People live on the exchange of products and on the weekends a fair is established for people who visit Pueblo Blanco in search of fruits and vegetables for their homes.

(Male, 52 years)

### ***Techno-Optimism***

This myth illustrates beliefs that advancement in science and technology leads to an economic upswing. Consequently, new economic markets emerge, which, in turn, create employment. Those innovations further improve medicine and people’s lives in general. Two codes complement Boschetti et al.’s (2016) myth.

**Emergence of New Economic Markets.** The first feature ‘emergence of new economic markets’ depicts the inventiveness of people as a result of the ramifications of the Coronavirus outbreak. A lack of perspective, as well as difficult conditions to start a classic business, encourages people to devise novel ways of making a living: “New forms of business also emerged, and everyone had to reinvent themselves.” (Female, 29 years). Facilitated by creativity and entrepreneurship, people change the traditional structures of the economic



market: “Others have instead been creative and the merchandise, the services, [...] have changed.” (Female, 62 years).

**Improvement in Medicine Due to Scientific Innovations.** The second feature ‘improvement in medicine due to scientific innovations’ covers efforts to spurring medicinal research: “Technology has evolved in the medical field, and more time and resources have been invested in researching new diseases.” (Female, 19 years). Such advancements promote the development of new medical instruments and training programs for workforces: “Hospitals also have new equipment and personnel that are in training.” (Female, 62 years). Eventually, nanotechnology is advanced as a means of counteracting the Coronavirus:

Now the development of nanotechnology is the hope of returning to normal. (Male, 47 years)

Regular cures for the Coronavirus seem to not have worked, relying on nanotechnological advances as a long-term solution.

**Advanced Technologies Improve Jobs and Lifestyles.** The third feature ‘advanced technologies improve jobs and lifestyles’ is an addition to Boschetti et al.’s (2016) techno-optimism myth and encompasses technological improvements for the daily lives of people. On the one hand, smart buildings are developed that are reactive to the behavior of people: “The buildings are super smart and controlled without touching them.” (Male, 55 years). On the other hand, tools are provided that account for safety at the workplace: “People have devices to breathe and better protect themselves on their heads.” (Male, 55 years). Lastly, new means of transportation are implemented, which deviate extensively from those used by the current society: “There is a lot of technology, you no longer have to get on a plane and you only teleport, wow.” (Female, 18 years). Traditional transportation is likely substituted by novel means, that neglect recent physical laws of moving physical matter.

**Space Settlement.** The fourth feature ‘space settlement’ is an addition to Boschetti et al.’s (2016) techno-optimism myth and describes human endeavors to planting colonies on

other planets than the earth: “We have plans to continue colonizing other planets.”. (Male, 55 years)

### ***Coronavirus-Aftermath***

The high prevalence and density of Coronavirus-related codes advocate for the need for a novel myth. This is underscored by the fact that the only letter to include a single myth, addresses the Coronavirus outbreak. Further, it is argued that due to the large similarity across codes, both beliefs that the Coronavirus outbreak ends or extends can be grouped under one myth rather than two distinct myths. In either of them, death and a population decline are mentioned. Besides two possible outcomes for the Coronavirus, this myth also entails the emergence of new routines and measures against the still-existing Coronavirus or new infectious diseases.

**(Hygiene) Measures Against Coronavirus.** The first feature ‘(hygiene) measures against Coronavirus’ includes the means on the part of the governments and people to combat the spread of the Coronavirus. Besides increased vaccination campaigns: “A large percentage of the population of the city and Ecuador has been vaccinated against Coronavirus.” (Male, 39 years), and the continued use of face masks: “When I arrive, I still see people with face masks.” (Male, 42 years), new approaches emerge, such as laws: “Many countries created laws and became aware to avoid new health problems.” (Male, 39 years). Also, the acquisition of knowledge about the Coronavirus is promoted, enabling precautionary behaviors:

People can recognize the coronavirus more easily, as soon as the symptoms begin and they know that they should go to the doctors, hospitals, and doctors, they know more about the disease and how to treat it. (Female, 38 years)

Having researched the Coronavirus helps to create awareness of and tailor adequate treatment plans for it.

**Continued Spread of Coronavirus.** The second feature ‘continued spread of the Coronavirus’ entails that the Coronavirus, despite the measures against it, does persist, and maintain the pandemic state: “The Coronavirus pandemic did not stop, on the contrary, the virus mutation has allowed its existence for a long time.” (Male, 47 years). Not only does the Coronavirus continue to spread, but also it mutates further, exacerbating a containment of it: “This disease continues to exist and change.” (Female, 38 years).

**Decline in Population (Due to Coronavirus).** The third feature ‘decline in population (due to Coronavirus)’ deals with the shrinkage of the population as a consequence of the Coronavirus: “With a tiny virus that will end with a quarter of the population.” (Female, 35 years) or “I am in a place where loved ones are no longer here.” (Female, 56 years). Although certain groups of people are more vulnerable to the Coronavirus than others, all age groups are affected and are be at risk of losing their life: “Not only vulnerable people are dying but also of all ages.” (Male, 47 years). Those deaths are facilitated by the government’s failure to contain the spread, and people’s misbehavior, ignoring safety measures:

Many died ... some innocent victims of the recklessness and disobedience of people.  
(Female, 34 years)

Eventually, human reproduction is able to compensate for this decline: “I see problems with the younger generations because there is no genetic exchange with other people.” (Male, 52 years). Social distancing and other means to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus introduce new ways of living that endanger the survival of the human race due to the absence of offspring.

**Emergence of New Daily Routines and Habits.** The fourth feature ‘emergence of new daily routines and habits’ entails the development of new habits of the daily lives of people. In the first place, working conditions change towards earlier starts of work and less face-to-face interactions: “They all work very early.” (Male, 52 years) and “Face-to-face jobs are solely in the medical field and for certain professions that require that they be necessarily

face-to-face.” (Female, 35 years). Furthermore, Corona-related measures, such as wearing a mask and reduced social contacts, persist since, even though there is no need for: “Still covering the face with a face mask, but more out of habit than necessity.” (Female, 38 years). On the contrary, the confinement leads to a desire to prefer real-life contacts among the youth instead of online: “In the case of the youngest it seems that their social dynamics have changed, the confinement tired them and led them to look for to more open places where to have physical contact and not just virtual.” (Female, 36 years). Having endured a period of isolation increases the urge to have real-world interactions.

**Emergence of New Infectious Diseases.** The fifth feature ‘emergence of new infectious diseases’ depicts that novel virus diseases, such as the Coronavirus, continue to emerge, and sustain the pandemic state: “Strange diseases continue to appear.” and “Now we are going for the 17th pandemic that has taught us new things.” (Male, 52 years). This extreme example assumes a permanent pandemic, which forces people to the continued adaptation of their lifestyles. Eventually, mutations promote the emergence of more severe viruses: “The mutations have determined much more aggressive viruses.” (Male, 47 years).

**End of Coronavirus.** The sixth feature ‘end of Coronavirus’ entails that the Coronavirus outbreak comes to an end: “It seems unbelievable to be able to say that the nightmare is over, and we are safe.” (Female, 34 years). Some do not specify the time needed to contain the spread. Others, however, imagine the Coronavirus to persist for several years until it finally vanishes: “It has been several years after we passed the chaotic wave of the Covid-19.” (Female, 29 years). One factor for the successful containment is knowledge about the disease: “A virus that took most of us by surprise but that decreased once we understood its consequences.” (Female, 62 years). Here, the role of research in combatting the Coronavirus is underscored. Furthermore, it includes the re-opening of restaurants and shops, and the hosting of public events like concerts: “It is possible to attend public events again.” (Male, 39 years). Eventually, people will not have to adhere to countermeasures anymore,

such as the wearing of masks: “Sitting in a public place without having to wear a mask, with people around me and without feeling the fear of being infected or putting my loved ones at risk.” (Female, 34 years).

**Increase in Health Concerns.** The seventh feature ‘increase in health concerns’ encompasses a general development of people towards placing higher importance on physical health and being more of associated risks: “People care more about their health.” (Female, 35 years). The outbreak of the Coronavirus does only motivate people to exercise to counteract the physical consequences of the confinement: “Others running and working out since the lockdown has made them gain weight.” (Female, 34 years) but also introduces new ways of behaving. Those are characterized by a constant fear of contracting the Coronavirus and also dying of the consequences: “After overcoming the pandemic we are afraid of an affectionate greeting on meetings with many people, people greatly limit their expenses to what is excessively necessary.” (Female, 35 years).

**Increase in Social Isolation.** The eighth feature ‘increase in social isolation’ comprises the development of lifestyles marked by social isolation and withdrawal, as forced upon by governments: “Everyone locked up.” (Female, 62 years). Although a product of the continued pandemic state, there is a decrease in interactions among people: “Pandemics forced us to shut ourselves in and decreased cultural and social exchange.” (Male, 52 years). Moreover, people tend to prefer being alone instead of mixing with people, likely permitted by the outbreak of the Coronavirus and associated social distancing: “But we all have changed, we know that we are alone.” (Female, 38 years). Eventually, social isolation occurs as a result of new working conditions, requiring people to work overtime: “Many are self-absorbed due to the workload they have, it would seem that the confinement is not over for them.” (Female, 36 years).

### ***Eco-Revolution***

Several letters exhibit pro-environmental content, however, Boschetti et al. (2016) does not feature a myth related to such beliefs. Thus, a new myth is presented, which entails beliefs about the recovery of nature. Improvements in sustainable energy and transport are likely to combat environmental pollution, all enabled by a shift of attitude in individuals.

**Healthy Environment for Future Generations.** The first feature ‘healthy environment for future generations’ depicts that nature including plant and animal species are preserved from man-made destruction:

I see around me and I feel nature, I am in Ecuador, in the countryside, I can see that life has returned and how green it was, there are animals, plants and lots of sun and very little noise, I can breathe deeply. (Female, 62 years)

Recovery of nature is, on the one hand, achieved by a reduction of pollution: “There are new policies implemented in the reduction of plastics that various sectors have found difficult to adapt to but have been implemented.” (Female, 62 years). Governmental initiatives aim at creating policies to combat environmental pollution, which, despite difficulties, are effectuated by the corresponding industrial branch. On the other hand, the outbreak of the Coronavirus has enabled nature’s recovery instead of human action: “Forcing the human being to confinement allowed the planet and all living things to breathe in peace.” (Female, 60 years).

**Improvement in Energy Systems.** The second feature ‘improvement in energy systems’ entails that advancements are made to the current energy systems. High value is placed upon electric and renewable energies: “The energy that drives most machines and systems is electric or renewable. Many areas with wind turbines are seen.” (Male, 55 years). Additionally, the installation of wind power plants is promoted.

**Increase in Sustainable Transport.** The third feature ‘increase in sustainable transport’ encompasses a general reduction in traffic density: “People have reduced traffic.” (Female, 35 years). Furthermore, bicycles replace cars on the road: “Cars are scarce, people

on bicycles abound.” (Female, 38 years) and “They prefer to walk or ride bicycles.” (Female, 56 years). People tend to take the bicycle instead of the car, enabled through a pro-environmental mindset. Eventually, laws are passed that regulate traffic, and aim at reducing noise pollution: “Less noise from traffic, finally we adapt to vehicle circulation restrictions.” (Female, 35 years).

**Protection of Nature for Its Own Value.** The fourth feature ‘protection of nature for its own value’ centers around the development of pro-environmental attitudes, which stem from the realization of the damage done to and importance of nature: “We learned that society took excessive advantage of nature and we learned that there is always a balance, and animals and natural resources are an important part of the planet just like us.” (Female, 29 years). Being aware of man-made environmental destruction promotes the view of a balanced co-existence of nature and human beings. Specifically, people exhibit respect and responsibility towards nature: “People have more awareness and respect towards nature and animals.” (Male, 39 years). Not only plants but also animals are preserved from extinction. Those attitudes manifest in recycling behavior: “All people sort and recycle garbage, they do not dirty the streets.” (Female, 56 years) and also a more deliberate use of resources that run the risk of being depleted: “Today, we take much more care of water than in days gone by. The water service is more expensive and sometimes the vital liquid is scarce.” (Female, 35 years). Having experienced a lack of water supply, people change their wasteful use of water or other resources.

**Table 2**

*Count of Co-Occurrences Among Myths of the Future*

	Eco-crisis	Power and economic inequality	Social crisis	Social transformation	Techno-optimism	Coronavirus-aftermath	Eco-revolution
Eco-crisis	-						
Power and economic inequality	9	-					
Social crisis	5	6	-				

Social transformation	3	6	3	-			
Techno-optimism	3	3	3	4	-		
Coronavirus-aftermath	9	12	9	11	7	-	
Eco-revolution	4	7	3	6	4	10	-

*Note.* For a co-occurrence, at least one code (or feature) of each myth of the future must be present within one letter.

### **Analysis of Co-Occurrences**

In the current study, only one letter exhibited a single myth, that is the Coronavirus-aftermath myth (see Appendix B). All other letters featured a combination of aspects of two to six myths, which justified an analysis of co-occurrences. 92% of the letters that included the power and economic inequality myth, and 85% of the letters that included the social transformation myth, also contained the Coronavirus-aftermath myth (for an exemplary letter, see Appendix B). The eco-crisis myth always appeared in combination with the power and economic inequality myth (for an exemplary letter, see Appendix B) but not vice versa, and 55% of those letters also comprised the social crisis myth. Moreover, the techno-optimism myth always emerged together with the Coronavirus-aftermath myth, and 60% of these entailed the eco-revolution myth, too, albeit a disregard for environmental issues in the former (for a full overview of co-occurrences among myths, see Table 2). In summary, the letters predominantly contained a set of between two and six myths of the future in diverse combinations with supposedly opposed myths to co-occur.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the myths of the future found by Boschetti et al. (2016) come to the fore in imaginations of a desired post-Corona future in Ecuadorian people. The results indicate that Ecuadorian letters exhibited features of all five myths of the future, i.e. (I) eco-crisis, (II) power and economic inequality, (III) social crisis, (IV) social transformation, and (V) techno-optimism. Furthermore, two new myths emerged from the data, namely eco-revolution, and Coronavirus-aftermath, with the latter being the



most dominant myth overall. Considering the co-occurrences of the myths, all letters contained a combination of two to six myths of the future. Even myths, which were found to negatively correlate, such as the power and economic inequality myth and the social transformation myth ( $r = -.57$ ) (Boschetti et al., 2016), appeared together. A particularly interesting finding is that the eco-crisis myth was always present with the power and economic inequality myth, advocating for a strong relationship among those myths. The findings, on the one hand, support the idea of context-independence of myths of the future as all myths essentially were present within the letters. On the other hand, however, it may be assumed that how these myths precisely take shape is context-specific. Rather than advocating for a one-dimensional explanation, we offer a multi-layered view with the cultural, socioeconomic, and pandemic-context to be of particular relevance.

In this Ecuadorian sample, the eco-crisis myth encapsulated that the environment including animal and plant species will be destroyed by human's strife for economic growth, which will further increase pollution levels. The power and economic inequality myth centered around the rise of poverty and inequality among people caused by governmental mismanagement and economic endeavor. The development of a society characterized by individualism and ignorance, and predominantly virtual life, was captured by the social crisis myth. Whereas the social transformation myth encompassed a change towards collectivism, simplicity, and care for others. The techno-optimism myth portrayed the improvement of life and the creation of new opportunities through technological advancements. Considering the myths that newly emerged, the eco-revolution myth emphasized the protection and recovery of nature enabled by a shift in attitudes towards pro-environmentalism. People have taken a stand for nature as they realized the importance of it for human beings, which also promoted the development of sustainable transportation and energy systems. Eventually, the Coronavirus-aftermath myth entailed how the outbreak of the Coronavirus has shaped the lives of people, ranging from the emergence of new habits and implementation of measures

against the spread to the psychological impact. Here, both a positive (i.e., containment of the Coronavirus spread) and negative (i.d. continuation of the Coronavirus spread) were summarized under one myth as the focus of the researcher's analytical framework predominantly laid upon the associated consequences. Referring to Dator (2009), one scenario may be favored by one part of the population but not the other. Although an end of the Coronavirus is globally longed for, the myth was conceptualized as centering around the change of, among others, lifestyles and habits, in contrast to simply a positive or a negative ending.

All five myths of the future, condensed by Boschetti et al. (2016), were present in this set of Ecuadorian letters, which essentially supports the idea that myths of the future are indeed generic. However, there were several features (or codes) that did not surface. Out of 23 original features, nine were not identifiable, for instance, "Collection of public data by governments and companies to control or influence people" or "Decline in law and order". Concomitantly, the letters exhibited new aspects that were not captured by Boschetti et al.'s (2016) myths of the future, which called upon the addition of new codes to existing myths, as well as the development of entirely new myths. This partially provides support for the notion of context-specificity of how these myths take shape. Here, both the cultural and socioeconomic context could play a role in shaping myths of the future. Research, for instance, suggests that people in low-income countries, such as Ecuador, express more concern for environmental (Dornhoff et al., 2019) and social issues (Levy & Patz, 2015) compared to high-income countries. This could explain the high prevalence of both environmental and social topics within this set of letters and how they particularly take shape, which may be transferred to other topics of concern. To conclude, it may be assumed that contextual differences may lead to differences in manifestations of the myths of the future, for instance, countries with a high emphasis on technological advancements may comprise related topics more in futures imaginations.

The fact that novel myths emerged, could have two explanations. First, supporting the aforementioned notion, contextual differences could even promote the creation of new myths besides shaping them. This is of particular relevance for the eco-revolution myth, which will be discussed in a later section. Second, the overview offered by Boschetti et al. (2016) could be flawed because of its methodology. Not only may their statements, which make up the myths, not reflect the ever-changing zeitgeist, with, among others, growing pro-environmentalism (Grandin et al., 2021), but also the focus on possible compared to preferable futures. This could lead to large differences as one's preferred future may deviate substantially from a possible future, based on, for instance, an evaluation of social or governmental conditions.

This study revealed that myths of the future may be shaped by context, advocating for a greater context-specificity when viewed on a feature-level. Given that the Coronavirus-aftermath myth was the most dominant, these assumptions require to be dealt with scrutiny. The outbreak of the Coronavirus exerted a substantial impact on the lives of people all over the world (Yu et al., 2021), and particularly low-income countries tend to be affected more heavily by the consequences than high-income countries (Hevia & Neumeyer, 2020). This could imply that the Coronavirus marginalized other topics of concern for the future. This finding can be supported by the fact that 92% of all letters and the only letters to contain a single myth centered around the Coronavirus, advocating for the magnitude of the event, not only in the present moment but also for the future or imagination of it. Even though, among others, social and economic nuisances may have been increasingly revealed by the pandemic (e.g., Hanspal et al., 2020; Mazzucato & Kattel, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020), the event and associated consequences have occupied a major portion of people's lives. However, events like the Coronavirus, despite the negative impact, may also become a driver for change. Societal inequalities, already existent before the pandemic, were accelerated and disclosed (Leotti, 2020), but have now reached the end of their legitimacy, mobilizing people to rise

against. Referring to Habermas' (1975, as cited in Leotti, 2020) concept of 'legitimation crisis', the outbreak of the Coronavirus depicts an event, which could bring an end to structural inequality, when collective action is called for rather than accepting the conditions. This may also be supported by the high co-occurrence between the social transformation myth and the Coronavirus-aftermath myth. Yet, even before the pandemic, studies have reported concern for the global-political direction towards continued economic growth at the expense of human rights (Edelman, 2020, as cited in Yamin, 2020), catalyzed by the pandemic, but creating space for contemplation about, and, in turn, the uprising of people against the system.

Moreover, this study found another new myth among the data, which is the eco-revolution myth. Instead of being labeled a positive variant of the eco-crisis myth, here the emphasis is placed on the shift in attitudes of people that enabled not only recovery but also the preservation of nature. People have understood the importance of nature for their existence and vouched for protection, given that people's values and attitudes play an increasingly crucial role in preserving nature (Nisbet & Zelenski, 2013). Also, the development and improvement of green energy production systems and transportation are of relevance. People tend to prefer bicycles over cars, again alluding to a mindset characterized by pro-environmentalism. In accordance with available literature (Dornhoff et al., 2019), young Ecuadorian people exhibit a higher relatedness towards nature compared to Germany, and also laws to protect nature have been implemented by the Ecuadorian government, following the indigenous idea of a peaceful togetherness between nature and human beings (Lalander, 2016). This may explain the importance of nature-related themes in this sample as Ecuadorian people have developed a much stronger bond to nature in contrast to high-income countries with less biodiversity. Consequently, Ecuadorians may also be more aware of environmental destruction and its associated consequences, which, in turn, may enhance the importance of this topic for the future. This notion is further supported by the fact that low-

income countries, such as Ecuador, often rely on agriculture and extractivism to a large extent (Moore & Diaz, 2015).

Another interesting observation was that technological aspects of the future or the techno-optimism myth, in general, did not play an important role in this Ecuadorian sample. Only 5% of the data concerned technology and only two of three features of Boschetti et al. (2016) were present. One explanation could be the lack of access to and frequency of use of the internet and technology, which despite advances cannot keep pace with high-income countries (Bilbao-Osorio et al., 2014, as cited in Tirado-Morueta et al., 2017). Since people have not been used to technology as much as in Western countries, they may remain unaware of the benefits that advancements in this field can bear, and thus, may place higher importance on more proximal issues. The nature of the techno-optimism myth as endorsing technological advancements at the expense of social equality could also imply that people do not perceive it as beneficial and consciously position themselves against the continued implementation of technology. Most people in Ecuador have suffered from substantial equality and poverty issues (Luna Luna et al., 2020), which, for instance, has manifested itself in a weakened healthcare sector (Lopez-Cevallos & Chi, 2010). Hence, they may feel saturated with issues about socio-economic conditions, and disregard forms of development, which, neglect social and economic security.

In a similar vein, it was observed that Ecuadorian people highlighted the social conditions in the country, framed in a pessimistic view with the power and economic inequality myth, and in an optimistic view alongside the social transformation myth. The high prevalence and long duration of socio-economic deficiencies among the population have empowered the desire for justice and an improvement of conditions, also underscored by the occurrence of corruption-related themes. This emphasized the contribution of economic mismanagement and a self-sufficient economy by the government to the socio-economic conditions of the country. Interestingly, even though much value was placed upon power and

inequality issues, the collection of public data did not play a role at all compared to Western countries, where increased surveillance and data collection is a topic of growing concern (Maras, 2012). This could again be explained by the absence of a proper technical infrastructure within the country, which cannot sustain such endeavors.

Considering the co-occurrences among the myths it was found that the eco-crisis myth solely appeared together with the power and economic inequality myth, which supports the correlation found in Boschetti et al. (2016). Individuals, who expressed concern for the destruction of natural territory, always held concerns about growing inequality too. This could imply a close relationship between those topics, particularly in low-income countries like Ecuador, and research supports this notion since socio-economic inequalities demand socio-economic development, which, however, is primarily accompanied by the destruction of the environment (Panayotou, 2016, as cited in Dornhoff et al., 2019). Consequently, socio-economic improvement cannot be achieved without environmental degradation, and vice versa, advocating for a strong relationship between the topics, and a dilemma for progress in both directions.

### **Strengths & Limitations**

This study has several strengths. First, this study exhibits the potential to complement and refine established myths of the future proposed by Boschetti et al. (2016), which were quantitatively derived. The findings enrich existing literature by providing concrete examples for the different features of the myths of the future. Those can help to shape the nature of each myth respectively and disclose cultural differences among those myths when compared to other samples. In turn, quantitative research could expand on the findings by validating the findings, both in a similar (i.e., low-income country) and different (i.e., high-income country) context.

Another strength is the uniqueness of this study. Research in this field has predominantly focused on the creation of generic myths of the future and did not include the

context of a global pandemic. One may argue that an event like this has never occurred before, nonetheless, existing literature does not account for unforeseen incidents, which, as reported by this study, possess the magnitude to suppress other future concerns.

The findings of this study have to be seen in the light of some limitations. The first limitation concerns the sample, which predominantly consisted of female participants (72%). Moreover, the mean age was around 39 years with only four participants below 30 years. Most importantly, however, the sample was dominated by higher educational degrees including ten individuals with a doctoral degree. Taken together, those characteristics do not depict the general Ecuadorian population well since a majority lives in poverty and do not possess educational achievements (The World Bank, 2020). This sample exacerbates the generalizability of the findings and implies that parts of the population with lower education may place more emphasis on other issues. The method applied here could also explain this limitation as it requires a certain level of linguistic ability, which is not present among the broad population. Future studies could focus on the development of methods that are suitable for lower educational segments to create a more generalizable picture of the topics that play a role in the future for those people. For instance, methods from generative research could be applied to this context (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005), as in the sense of asking participants to create a future image using pictures, symbols, colors, or drawings. Such methods may help to generate accounts of future images in lower educational segments, but also children as another target group for future exercises.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the myths of the future proposed by Boschetti et al. (2016) come to the fore in another context, that is Ecuador. The findings point to a two-fold conclusion. The fact that all five myths essentially were present within Ecuadorian letters supports the idea of context-dependence. On the contrary, however, the findings also partially support the idea of context-specificity of these myths for two reasons:

(I) albeit all myths were identifiable, their concrete shape was context-specific since multiple features of the myths did not emerge here but in another context, and relevant literature fuels this assumption, and (II) the eco-revolution myth, due to the high level of nature relatedness in low-income countries, generally, and Ecuador particularly, may not, or certainly to a lesser degree, emerge in a different context, for instance, ruled by technology and industry. We conclude by partially supporting the idea of context-independence and partially the idea of context-specificity of myths of the future. While myths of the future essentially come to the fore in different contexts, how these particularly take shape may be context-specific, as in this case, potentially shaped by the cultural and socioeconomic context, and most dominantly, the pandemic-context. We highlight the importance of future studies to extend this analysis of myths of the future to different contexts to aid the process of anticipating what is to come in the future.



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## Appendix A

### Appendix A1: Information Letter and Informed Consent

Will the Future Never be the Same? Letters from a Post-Corona Future

Welcome to this research study!

How do we envision our future lives and the future world once the current coronavirus outbreak is over? How do our present actions and decisions ensure that the new world to come will be a world we would like to be living in? Thanks to your contribution, this study will explore these questions.

For this study, you will be asked to:

1. Write a letter from the viewpoint of the future back to the present. You will receive more detailed information about how to write this the letter via a time machine exercise.
2. Answer 10 questions about yourself.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential and processed anonymously.

The study should take you around 20-30 minutes to complete, but feel free to take as long as you need. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point from the study. The project leaders of this study are located at the University of Twente in the Netherlands and can be contacted at:

Anneke Sools: a.m.sools@utwente.nl

Yashar Saghai: y.saghai@utwente.nl

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

Your participation in the study is voluntary. You are at least 16 years of age. You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time while taking this survey without giving a reason.

O I consent and begin the study.

O I do not consent, I do not wish to participate.

## **Appendix A2: Letters from the Future Method**

### ***Instructions: How to write your letter from the future***

In this exercise you will imagine traveling to the future with a time machine. You will travel to a moment in time when the current coronavirus outbreak had ended. It may be the time just after the dust has settled or a longer time ahead when the longer-term impact of the corona outbreak has become clear. Once arrived in the future, you will write a letter about that future and send it back to the present.

The following suggestions give you an idea about what your own letter from the future might look like. Feel free to use these instructions as a basis for writing the letter your own way. Don't worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar but simply write anything that comes to your mind. There is no right or wrong answer.

Keep in mind that it is a letter that is written backwards from the future to the present, so you imagine the future situation as if it is already realized. Feel free to use your full imagination: Remember that it is about a future which has not occurred yet. Consider it an opportunity to think about possibilities to transform your own life and the world around you for the better.

Ready to travel to the future? Then start writing your letter with the following guidelines. Imagine the following points as vividly as possible, giving a detailed description so that others reading your letter will be able to see the future you imagined as if they were watching a movie.

**(1) How far into the future and where did you travel?**

Imagine traveling with a time machine to the future. Once arrived, you step out of the time machine and start living in this new time. Do you have a sense of where and when this future will take place? This time may be a week, a month, half a year, one full year, many years, decades or even centuries or millennia ahead of us.

## **(2) Describe your future world**

Now that you're familiar with your future world, can you describe it? Look at your immediate surroundings. What do you see, feel, hear and smell? Do you for example see nature, buildings, people, technology? Are you in a city or in the countryside? Are you in your own country or elsewhere? Are you inside a building or outside? Is it noisy or quiet? Now turn to look at your future world at large (community, society, humanity, the planet). Do you notice anything about how society or nature are functioning now that the corona outbreak is over (such as, social relations, the environment, schools, hospitals, employment, businesses, industries, transportation, technology, the concrete effects of laws, regulations, policies)? What positive changes do you notice in what matters to you? What has disappeared that you're glad has not returned?

## **(3) Describe yourself in the future**

Consider now yourself. What are you feeling, thinking, and doing? If there are other people, what can you tell about them? What is happening in your future life?  
How are you dealing with opportunities and setbacks on a specific day, moment or event?

## **(4) Path towards the future**

Now think about the path that led to the future you just described. How did this future come into being, who or what has contributed to making those changes possible? How do you look back on this path to the future?

### (5) Message to the present

You decide to whom you want to write the letter and give a message to this person in the present. This could for example be yourself in the present, another person, group or organization (for example, your child or grandchild, friends, the next generation, the minister of Health etc.).

Thank you for your letter! To complete the survey, please answer the following 10 questions.

**Q1** Can you tell us your story of how the corona outbreak has affected your life? Please feel free to write whatever comes to mind, long or short.

### Appendix A3: Surveys

#### *4-item Brief Hopefulness Scale*

**Q2** Indicate on a scale from 1 (very fearful) to 5 (very hopeful) your present attitude towards the future

	Very fearful	Fearful	Neutral	Hopeful	Very hopeful
My outlook on my personal future life is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My outlook on the future of the country where I reside is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



My outlook on the future of  
humanity is

My outlook on the future of  
the planet is

### ***3-item Certainty Scale***

**Q3** Slide the bar from left to right to describe your present attitude towards the future

Not at all

Sometimes

All the time

0

25

50

75

100

I feel certain about the future

I feel I have control over the future

I feel comfortable not knowing what the future will hold

### **Demographic Information**

**Q4** What is your age?

**Q5** What is your gender?

Female

Male

Other

I prefer not to answer

**Q6** In which country do you currently reside?

**Q7** What is the highest level of school you have completed or the higher degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent, including GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree (2-years)
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD)
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

**Q8** Which statement best describes your employment status just before the corona outbreak started?

- Working (paid employee)
- Working (self-employed)
- Not working (looking for work)
- Not working (retired)
- Not working (disabled)

- Not working (other)
- I prefer not to answer

**Q9** How did your employment situation or income change because of the corona outbreak?

- No change
- Loss of employment
- Cuts to employment or income
- Change of position or field of employment
- No immediate change, but cuts to employment or income in the coming months is likely
- Increased hours and/or income
- I prefer not to answer

**Q10** What is your household situation?

- Single
- Together with partner
- Together with partner and children
- Together with children no partner
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

### **Debriefing**

Inspire others and share your story

Thank you for filling out the questionnaire! We have two more options for you before you leave. Do not forget to complete and submit your contribution to this study by clicking >> below.

### **1. Share your story**

Make your story available to others by giving permission to publish your Letter from the Future on the public website of the project. We may slightly edit your letter to remove any identifying information to fully anonymize it. Please note that it may take a while to make a selection of letters for the website.

### **2. Join our follow-up study**

We are looking for volunteers who would like to participate in a longer study where you will be asked to reflect on how your outlook on the future develops as the outbreak evolves. We are currently looking for funds so that we can give long-term participants some compensation for their efforts.

Please fill in your e-mail address in case you agree to be contacted for a follow-up study. The e-mail address will only be used for this purpose.

## Appendix B

*Example letter for co-occurrence between the eco-crisis myth and the power and economic inequality myth. Female, 34 years - Grey city*

Dear Quiteños: The city awoke with a radiant sun, a clear sky, fresh air but, the pollution cloud is still present although it has decreased its thickness considerably. There are places where the vegetation has invaded spaces, other places continue with their typical city grayness. Despite being very early, I already see people in a rush heading to their jobs, others looking for a new one because they lost their livelihood during the pandemic, others only walking in deep - thought because they lost many family members, others running and working out since the lockdown has made them gain weight. Hours go by in my city, with a sun you can feel more and more, the number of people on the streets increases and become flooded by people looking for work, or some activity in which they can feel useful. We suffered so much in the pandemic, the country's rulers stole so much that now we only have a slight hope that in the elections citizens will know how to choose correctly so as not to fill us with people who in the harshest situations do not know how to help those who need it the most. Sincerely, MJCCH

*Example letter for co-occurrence between the power and economic inequality myth, the social transformation myth, and the Coronavirus-aftermath myth. Female, 56 years – Hope*

Hello everyone, I am incredulous looking at so much wonder, I am in the year 2021, in my beloved country Ecuador. I look at people who are kind to each other, respectful, children running and nature in all its splendor, you feel an air of freedom, a conscious freedom, to help others, that is to say, a humanized solidarity, to see another person, and to nature with a unique respect. All people sort and recycle garbage, they do not dirty the streets, there are no whistles or pollution, they prefer to walk or ride bicycles, they do not paint the walls, we have a clean and harmonious city. I, am working, helping people with terminally ill diseases, the economic situation is difficult, but there will always be people who help, there will always be

people who need, in-hospital or palliative care home work will always be important, to restore the human right to live and die with dignity. We have solved so many needs, we have had to fire people from the institution, lower salaries, expenses, but we have come out of that horrible pandemic that ended many people, companies and the world. This experience is an immense teaching for all humanity, to Who I ask for conscience with nature, with others, everything depends on each one of us. LULA

*Example letter for the multitude of myths of the future in single accounts. Female, 62 years – Today, that life has changed*

Dear grandson, I am happy to take advantage of this meeting to tell you about how the pandemic was when, when you were barely old, it hit the whole planet. It is called covid 19, a virus that took most of us by surprise but that decreased once we understood its consequences. I remember being almost 62 years, trying to embark on the world of real estate. However, this pandemic paralyzed this activity and while on lockdown I only meditated on my life and on human consciousness. I did not know if this virus arose as a spontaneous manifestation of the environmental circumstances, of the excessive damage to our planet, or as a creation of power groups with excessive ambition and lust. I think the latter is the most likely. I reflected on how the human species and in others too, inhuman scientific situations emerged, such as creating a pharmaceutical industry without the smallest sense of ethics or solidarity towards people. The car insurances and of everything else, which were Machiavellically controlled through fear, like the illnesses, to consume them. At the same time, the states, the politicians, the church and more leaders supported the paradigm, they are not even understanding it, because they either did not see reality or they did not accept it blinded by their economic interests. Between these and the others I think that this war of economic powers took place so subtly that it was difficult to understand it, simply the state of ignorance, lack of enthusiasm and need to promote ethics, intensified at all levels and the implementation of the laws of consumerism, simplism, and individualism. With this I do not want to tell you, beloved

grandson, that the ethical and religious values of that time were of my liking. However, the innate sense of bonding and belonging became more opaque every day. Sometimes the people who abided by the tendencies of the common good, simplicity and solvency, were even considered fools and naive ... how stupid, right? Look at how the pandemic marked a new epoch, an epoch that revealed to all of us: the fearful manifested themselves more anxious than ever, the solis more distressed than ever, because they continued to face their reality, the loving relationships grew stronger and the others once they were unmasked, derailed, or perhaps improved ... In some countries we saw with admiration how they overcame this crisis, since both politicians and citizens respected the decisions and strategies to overcome it, whereas here, humanitarian aid, public funds, and also certain individuals take advantage of to feast on the human pain. We almost felt that the cost of behaving properly was like swimming against the current in a fast-flowing river ... Today that life has changed, and that above all, we stay in silence and meditation in our homes, we have learned to recognize that we all we belong to each other, that what is public is also ours, and that we are also responsible for allowing the disgraceful public administration for not participating or monitoring it ... So many lives were lost!! We are all in pain now, all living simpler lives, more human lives, as it should have always been, but look how ignorant we were. Now we will no longer be able to enjoy the sun, nature, air, physical exercises outdoors, etc. Etc. Etc. Everyone locked up ... There is no doubt that we will obtain some benefit, after spoiling God's gifts, and that is how unconscious people take advantage of this scenario to extend their hands and harm, others have instead been creative and the merchandise, the services, the ways of relating to each other have changed, we have also many people, many who paralyzed the commitment to grow as beings of love, we meditate, pray and communicate to participate on such education projects, in order to raise awareness of the HUMAN BEING. Look more precious little grandson as we are rising in time, people, it seems that it always takes hard blows to redeem

ourselves and grow ... Certain that you lovingly and prosperously multiply the new coexistence, I bring you kisses of light love and happiness. I love you, your Grandma.

*Example letter for the Coronavirus-aftermath myth. Female, 56 years – A very difficult test*

We finished living a very difficult test. I have arrived alive but scared, like never before in my life, I don't know if because of my age, I am 56 years old, but I thought a lot about death!! I am in a place where loved ones are no longer here, I feel sad about that, but I hope the worst is over and I am looking forward to this new beginning. I hope I have the joy and hope to continue with what I have left to live, I need to take good care of my health. I learned from the pandemic that a healthy lifestyle is vital to face viruses that may continue to appear! I learned that the human race is very selfish and that is why we could not defend ourselves better from the pandemic, there was no collaboration and understanding of the degree of complexity that we live as a human race. I hope to continue to be strong and be more disciplined with myself and with my environment.