



## The Fifth Element: Life for Learning, Learning for Life

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Out of engaging and fruitful conversations held with WAAS and other partners, the Club of Rome initiated in 2021 ‘The Fifth Element program’ (T5E). Its name is a tribute to Life and the weaving of many threads we will need to face the existential challenges we face today: as much ancient wisdom as modern science, as much everybody’s learning potential as expertise, as much arts, humanities, and social knowledge as natural sciences.

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**The Approach.** T5E is an invitation to co-create new processes to get out of the non-learning societies in which we live. Living systems reconfigure themselves by learning new patterns which replace older ones, and T5E is about shifting our patterns of relationship with other humans, Life at large, and Time. Climate emergency and loss of biodiversity, growing inequalities driven by technology, the persistence of exploitative and colonial mindsets, the exhaustion of non-renewable resources, global pandemics, and so on are all signs of a growing divorce of human logic from how Life works. This brings us to a threshold beyond which we do not know what will happen. And **the unknown cannot be taught; it requires exploration.**

Those challenges are not abstract: they disrupt the everyday life of billions of people feeling helpless to shape their own future. T5E bets on **the capacity of everyone to learn**, in an exploratory and pattern-changing sense. People of any place can grasp by themselves the knowledge relevant to the challenges they face, and start collectively building new responses and developing pathways to sustainable wellbeing in their own contexts.

**The Cracks.** Hundreds of millions of people are literally struggling for survival. Modern technology and economic processes are not addressing this issue—rather the contrary. And crises add new layers of inequalities. The complexity of the challenges may plunge many into denial, anxiety, helplessness, and apathy. This is why it makes sense to put existing knowledge and experiences first at the service of people directly facing the challenges, wherever they are: vulnerable communities, the dispossessed, women, youth, and activists engaged at the frontlines of transformative projects.

**The Grounding.** T5E proposes that new learnings can happen through innovative engagement in which people are more than experts, stakeholders or students. Not only the questions addressed must change, but the staging, the roles of learners and “teachers”, the processes of inquiry and evaluation, the exchanges across contexts and the responses to challenges will be different. Also, skills need to encompass all literacies, knowledge can be nurtured as much by African *Ubuntu* and *Ukama* and other indigenous worldviews as by leading-edge research on living systems, and the potential of attitudes can be liberated by co-design methods in lifelong and experiential learning in specific contexts. T5E is about embracing transdisciplinarity and complexity, not about teaching them.

**Finding Warm Ways...** Life inspires both a better understanding of the complex challenges of today and the competences people need to act on them. T5E intends to enable people of all ages and conditions to learn and act on humanity’s existential challenges in their own ways. The future is deeply unknown but its exploration can be warm or tragic. T5E claims that ingredients exist to make it warm, provided we make it together.

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