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**The Finnish Climate Corps:
Designing Ecological Care Work as Dignified Labour
for an AI-transformed Economy**

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Abstract

AI displacement is often understood as job loss. This thesis examines what happens before or without formal job loss, when people begin to lose the meaning, recognition, and professional identity they draw from work. It asks whether ecological care work could help restore what income replacement alone cannot.

Using Research through Design, the study combined netnographic analysis of 202 firsthand accounts with interviews, surveys, precedent analysis, design probes, and service blueprinting. It compared 342 instances of ecological work required by Helsinki policies with labour-market data, national skills forecasts, and vocational qualifications.

In the netnographic dataset, only 15% of accounts described job loss. The rest described quieter erosion while employed, freelancing, or seeking work. The thesis calls this broader pattern *quiet displacement* and identifies nine co-occurring conditions. The most common condition, *hollowing out*, describes the erosion of meaningful work inside a continuing role.

The policy-to-labour comparison exposed gaps in workforce planning and qualifications. The largest cluster comprised restoration, planting, invasive species control, and habitat management, yet neither of Finland's two nature-based services qualifications covered this work. These findings shaped the Finnish Climate Corps, a speculative cohort programme combining ecological care work with peer support, reflection, training, and competence recognition. It was designed to fit within existing employment services and could operate without new legislation. The next steps are co-design with affected workers and piloting.

The thesis contributes a vocabulary for quiet displacement, a way to test whether policy commitments have a workforce behind them, and a service concept for dignified transition.

Keywords: AI displacement, quiet displacement, knowledge work, ecological restoration, Research through Design, service design

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To my friends and family back home, thank you for believing in me and for supporting the choices and changes that brought me here. To my husband, my person, Spencer: thank you for doing this—all of it, all of it, all of it—together. We're just getting started.

Dedication

For the innumerable beings who share their world with Wren.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research problem, establishes the motivation for the study, presents the research aim and questions, defines key terms, summarises the methodology, and outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background of the research problem

The conversation about AI-driven displacement has focused, understandably, on economics (see, e.g., Richmond, 2026; Sajadieh et al., 2026). Emerging discourse investigates which jobs are exposed, how earnings might change, and whether mechanisms such as universal basic income or retraining subsidies could limit the economic harm. These are urgent questions, and they remain unresolved. But another dimension remains even less developed in public and policy discussions.

Work, for most adults in post-industrial societies, is the primary structure through which they experience purpose, daily rhythm, social belonging, and a sense that what they do matters. A growing body of scholarship argues that modern societies ask work to carry too much of the weight of human meaning (Frayne, 2015; Gorz, 1999; Graeber, 2018). Yet work remains the dominant arrangement, and any realistic response to AI displacement must reckon with what it provides beyond income.

If AI-driven transformation erodes the knowledge work around which millions of people have built their professional identities, the fallout will not be limited to lost income. The damage will extend to the central concept this thesis grapples with: dignity. Work plays a pivotal role in people's sense of meaning and purpose, of social recognition, of identity. Whether work can and does provide these was already fraught and contested. As AI enters the scene, it is putting new pressure on an arrangement that was already under strain.

The scale of change is becoming visible. Stanford's 2026 AI Index reports that employment for software developers ages 22 to 25 has fallen nearly 20% from 2024, and that one-third of surveyed employers expect workforce reductions over the coming year (Sajadieh et al., 2026, p. 173). OpenAI's Jobs Transition Framework, analysing over 900 occupations covering 99.7% of US employment, classifies 18% of jobs as facing relatively higher short-term automation risk and another 24% as likely to see declining employment

as task composition shifts (Richmond, 2026, p. 3). The data does not yet show mass unemployment. What it shows is that the nature of knowledge work is shifting: how it is valued, who does it, and how much of it remains.

These findings come predominantly from the United States, where AI adoption in knowledge work is most advanced and displacement effects are surfacing fastest. This thesis draws on US evidence and firsthand accounts for that reason: the experiential record is richest there. But the question is not only American.

In Finland, the IMF estimates that one-fifth of Finland's workforce is at risk of job displacement from AI, with AI adoption highest in information and communication (70% of firms) and professional, scientific, and technical services (50%) (Renault, 2026). Yet ETLA's 2026 replication of the US analysis found no evidence of displacement among young Finnish workers so far, and suggests that structural and policy factors, including stronger employment protection than in the United States, may help explain the difference (Kauhanen & Rouvinen, 2026). Finland may be buffered. Buffered is not immune. Sitra's 2026 Megatrends report identifies AI as transforming "the foundations of society" and warns that society's capacity to adapt may be tested at an entirely different scale than in previous technological shifts (Dufva, Kiiski-Kataja, & Lähdemäki-Pekkinen, 2026). Finland's institutional buffers may be buying time. This thesis argues that time should be used to prepare.

Very little academic research to date focuses on what displacement feels like for the people living through it. Most research measures exposure, labour market effects, and economic impact. One of the few large-scale studies to approach the question differently is Huang et al. (2026), who used AI to conduct open-ended interviews with 80,508 people across 159 countries about their visions and fears around AI. Twenty-two percent cited concerns about jobs and the economy as their primary worry (Huang et al., 2026). But the study's more striking finding emerged when interviewers probed the underlying hopes behind people's productivity aspirations. What surfaced was not a desire for better work performance. It was a desire for more time with family, for personal freedom, for a different relationship to work entirely. As the authors note, even among those who initially talked about efficiency, the underlying hope was often about quality of life outside of work (Huang et al., 2026). A companion analysis of the same dataset found that the workers reporting the largest productivity gains from AI also expressed the highest concern about displacement,

suggesting that speed and threat are not opposites but correlated (Massenkoff & Huang, 2026). The gap between what AI research and policy focus on and what people actually articulate when given space to speak is the territory this thesis enters.

The urgency, however, is not only about work. Biodiversity loss and climate destabilisation are accelerating. The window for meaningful action before critical tipping points are crossed is narrowing. Restoring habitats, building nature-based solutions for climate resilience, rewilding urban areas to support biodiversity: this work is urgent, and the existing workforce cannot deliver it at the scale and pace the crisis requires. Every pair of hands matters. Sitra identifies the environmental crisis as among the most significant risks facing Finland in the coming decade (Dufva et al., 2026). And the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and Helsinki's own biodiversity and nature conservation programmes have translated this urgency into binding commitments that require sustained ecological work (Regulation 2024/1991; City of Helsinki, 2021; Nieminen, 2025).

This convergence carries a possibility. A large and growing population of skilled knowledge workers may be losing work that, for many of them, had already ceased to provide a sense of purpose or tangible contribution to the world around them. Ecological care work has the potential to provide both. Whether it can, and what that would require, is the question this thesis investigates.

The same economic logic that has treated ecosystems as externalities is now treating knowledge workers as replaceable inputs. This thesis responds to both crises through a single design. The Finnish Climate Corps is a speculative employment programme, designed through this research, that connects AI-displaced knowledge workers with ecological care work in Helsinki. It asks whether a programme built around care can restore what displacement destroys while doing work the planet urgently needs. The design itself is the research instrument, shaped by eight empirical methods and five theoretical lenses.

1.2. Motivation for the study

Finland is a productive site for this exploration. Its welfare state provides established employment infrastructure, including work try-outs, labour market training, and earnings-related unemployment benefits. The country has ambitious ecological policy commitments at both the EU and municipal level, and above-average AI exposure relative

to other advanced economies (Renault, 2026). Finland's institutional buffers may be creating a window that other countries, further along in the displacement process, may not have. Finland has already experimented with unconditional basic income for unemployed workers (Kela, 2020), demonstrating institutional willingness to test new approaches to income and employment. The experiential dimension of displacement remains underexplored.

Helsinki specifically offers a designable system. Since January 2025, employment services have been organised at the municipal level (Act 380/2023), making the city both a policy actor and a service provider. Its ecological mandates, employment services, and knowledge-worker population are specific enough to design for.

The author is a service designer and American. As a knowledge worker watching AI reshape my own profession, and as someone working to build a life in Finland, the convergence of AI displacement and ecological need feels urgent and personal. Design, in this thesis, is a form of inquiry. The Climate Corps is not a policy recommendation appended to the research. It is the means through which the research asks its questions. The full positionality statement appears in Chapter 3.

This thesis does not predict the pace or scale of AI displacement in Finland. The evidence reviewed in Chapter 2 shows that displacement effects are emerging unevenly and remain difficult to detect in aggregate data. But the cost of designing a programme and not needing it is low: the ecological work needs to be done regardless. The cost of not having designed one and needing it is high: institutional responses built under pressure risk serving administrative efficiency rather than human need. Sitra frames this as “preparedness and renewal” that “go hand in hand” (Dufva et al., 2026, p. 47). The Climate Corps is designed as one such preparation.

At its core, this thesis sees the current moment of potential upheaval as also carrying potential for renewal. It asks: what does work provide that we want to hold on to? What might we want to move on from? And can a transition programme be designed that takes both questions seriously?

1.3. Research aim and questions

This thesis designs and analyses a Finnish Climate Corps to examine how attentive ecological care work can provide meaning, social recognition, and professional identity for knowledge workers displaced by AI. The thesis uses Research through Design (RtD), a design research approach in which knowledge is generated through the process of creating design artefacts (Frayling, 1993; Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014).

The main research question is:

In the context of an AI-disrupted Helsinki labour market, how might ecological care work be designed to restore knowledge workers' dignity and professional identity?

Three sub-questions structure the investigation. Each addresses a gap identified in the literature review (Chapter 2) and is answered through specific methods described in Chapter 3.

SQ1: How are knowledge workers in AI-affected sectors experiencing changes to the meaning of their work, their professional identity, and their sense of occupational security?

SQ1 addresses the experiential gap. It investigates what AI-driven displacement actually feels like for the people living through it, and what it reveals about what is being lost beyond income. Findings are presented in Chapter 4, Sections 4.1–4.3.

SQ2: What gaps exist between Helsinki's ecological work mandates and its ability to deliver them?

SQ2 addresses the institutional gap. It examines whether Helsinki's ecological policy commitments have corresponding workforce provisions, and whether the ecological sector could absorb displaced knowledge workers. Findings are presented in Chapter 4, Sections 4.4–4.5.

SQ3: How might an ecological care work programme be designed to address both the experiential needs of AI-displaced knowledge workers and the ecological workforce gaps identified in Helsinki?

SQ3 addresses the design gap. It asks what a programme would need to look like if it were shaped by what displaced workers actually experience (SQ1) and what Helsinki's institutions can actually deliver (SQ2). The Climate Corps design is presented in Chapter 5.

1.4. Definitions of key terms and limitations

This section defines the key terms used throughout the thesis and establishes the scope of the research. Terms are presented in a sequence that reflects how they relate to one another within the thesis, beginning with the technology and moving through its effects to the designed response.

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers broadly to computer systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence (Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence [Stanford HAI], n.d.). This thesis is primarily concerned with one subset: **generative AI**, meaning AI systems that can produce new content, including text, images, code, and video, by learning patterns from training data (Stanford HAI, n.d.). The generative AI systems most relevant to this thesis are **large language models (LLMs)**, AI systems trained on large amounts of text data to understand and generate human-like language (Stanford HAI, n.d.). LLMs underpin the occupational exposure research reviewed in Chapter 2 (Eloundou et al., 2024). A related and rapidly emerging development is **agentic AI**: AI systems capable of autonomous, multi-step task completion, including planning, tool use, and decision-making with minimal human oversight (Stanford HAI, n.d.). While this thesis focuses on generative AI's current effects on knowledge work, agentic AI's potential to automate entire workflows rather than individual tasks may significantly accelerate the dynamics this thesis describes.

AI exposure refers to the degree of overlap between the tasks performed in a job and the tasks that AI systems are capable of performing. AI exposure indicates the potential for task-level change, but it does not by itself predict whether a job will be displaced, transformed, or retained (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; Manning & Aguirre, 2026).

Knowledge worker refers to a worker with a high degree of expertise, education, or experience whose job primarily involves the creation, distribution, or application of knowledge (Davenport, 2005).

Quiet displacement is a concept proposed and developed by this thesis. In common usage, and in much of the labour-market literature, displacement means the loss of a job. This thesis uses the term more broadly. A worker can be displaced from the substance of their professional life, from the skill, recognition, and sense of purpose their work provided, long before, or entirely without, losing the job itself. The thesis characterises these displacements as a landscape of nine co-occurring and compounding conditions, ranging from outright job loss to a hollowing out of meaning and professional identity that occurs while people remain formally employed. It is “quiet” because much of it is invisible to employment statistics, and because the people living through it often cannot name what is happening to them. The concept draws on Beck’s (1992) theory of individualisation, where people absorb structural change as personal biography. The *quiet displacement* landscape is presented fully in Chapter 4.

Dignity, as used in this thesis, is shorthand for what people stand to lose when meaningful work is taken away or hollowed out. Jahoda (1982) specifies five latent functions that employment provides beyond income: time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and regular activity. Honneth (1995) adds recognition, the experience of being valued for one’s contribution to shared social life. This thesis argues that the latent functions and social recognition are critical components of dignified work. Chapter 4 extends this empirically, finding that professional identity (theorised through Ibarra, 2003/2023) constitutes a third register of dignified work. The full theoretical basis is developed in Chapter 2.

Ecological care work refers to skilled, attentive, and ongoing work that maintains, restores, or enhances ecological systems. The framing draws on Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) ethics of care, which positions care as a practice of sustained attention to living systems. Developed in Chapter 2.

Prefigurative space describes an environment where people practise the values of a desired future within the constraints of the present (adapted from Boggs, 1977). This thesis applies the concept to the Climate Corps design in Chapter 5, where the programme functions as a prefigurative space within Helsinki’s existing institutional infrastructure.

Scope and limitations. This research focuses on Helsinki. The Climate Corps is designed for one city’s institutional context and does not claim to be transferable without adaptation.

The Climate Corps is a speculative design that has not been tested or piloted. It is a design proposal grounded in empirical evidence. The thesis does not constitute a policy recommendation; it proposes and analyses a design. The design is illustrated through a single composite persona (Anni) representing an optimised pathway; Chapter 5 acknowledges the range of possible outcomes.

1.5. Summary of the methodology

This thesis uses Research through Design (RtD), a design research approach in which knowledge is generated through the process of designing and interpreting artefacts (Frayling, 1993; Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014). The Climate Corps is the design artefact through which the investigation is conducted. Eight research methods and five theoretical lenses inform the design of the Climate Corps. The full methodological description, including ethical considerations and the author's positionality, appears in Chapter 3.

The eight methods are:

1. Netnographic analysis of 202 firsthand accounts of AI displacement across Reddit communities
2. Semi-structured interviews with eight knowledge workers experiencing AI-driven changes to their work
3. Two anonymous surveys collecting responses from 33 knowledge workers on their experiences and perceptions of ecological work
4. Semi-structured interviews and correspondence with five Helsinki institutional actors and ecological experts
5. A policy-to-labour crosswalk mapping 342 ecological work instances across seven Helsinki policy documents to workforce systems
6. Precedent analysis of four programmes creating pathways into ecological or climate service
7. Service design methods, including composite persona development, journey mapping, and service blueprinting
8. Futures and speculative design methods, including Three Horizons framework, design probe (Climate Corps role cards tested with knowledge worker participants), and design fiction

Five theoretical lenses operate across the research: Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model, Honneth's (1995) recognition theory, Ibarra's (2003/2023) identity transition framework, Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory, and Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) ethics of care. The first three function as analytical instruments applied across multiple methods. The latter two function as design criteria, explaining why ecological care work specifically suits this population.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2. Theoretical background and gap identification examines the AI displacement research landscape, Helsinki's ecological mandates and workforce planning provisions, and the case for a designed response. It identifies three research gaps and introduces the five theoretical lenses this thesis employs.

Chapter 3. Methodology presents the research philosophy, disciplinary positioning, and Research through Design approach. It provides the author's positionality statement, details each of the eight methods, and addresses ethical considerations and limitations.

Chapter 4. Findings presents findings from each method. It maps the quiet displacement landscape through netnographic analysis, reports knowledge worker interview and survey findings, presents expert insights on Helsinki's institutional context, and details the policy-to-labour crosswalk and precedent analysis results.

Chapter 5. The Finnish Climate Corps presents the design through two narrative-analytical cycles. A composite character, Anni, first experiences displacement through the existing system, then enters the Climate Corps. Both pathways are analysed through simplified service blueprints. The chapter presents the Climate Corps's design rationale and institutional mechanisms as a design fiction grounded in empirical evidence, and acknowledges the design's limitations.

Chapter 6. Discussion discusses findings in relation to each sub-question, assesses whether the Climate Corps credibly addresses the main research question, and examines cross-cutting themes and limitations.

Chapter 7. Conclusions answers the main research question, states the thesis's contributions, and identifies directions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND GAP IDENTIFICATION

This chapter identifies three gaps that the thesis research aims to address. It also introduces a theoretical toolkit the author has assembled to analyse the design problem those gaps create. Each of the following sections establishes one research gap and the theoretical lenses needed to understand it.

Section 2.1 examines existing research on AI and work: what it covers, what it misses, and why that missing dimension matters. Section 2.2 turns to Helsinki's ecological policy mandates and asks whether anyone has assessed the workforce needed to deliver them. Section 2.3 argues that the speed and breadth of AI-driven transformation demand new approaches to employment services, and that ecological care work and displaced knowledge workers are a match worth exploring through design.

This thesis works with five theoretical lenses. The author selected them because together they answer the five questions the Climate Corps design must get right: what is being lost, why meaning alone is not enough, how identity actually changes, why ecological work specifically, and why care specifically.

Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model, confirmed by Paul et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 81 studies, specifies what employment provides beyond income: time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and regular activity. Without Jahoda, the thesis can describe displacement but cannot name what it destroys or design to restore it.

Honneth's (1995) recognition theory adds the social dimension Jahoda's psychological model does not reach. People need their work to feel purposeful, but they also need society to value it. Without Honneth, the thesis would design a programme that feels meaningful to participants but fails to build the social esteem that makes the work dignified.

Ibarra's (2003/2023) working identity framework, updated in her recent review of career transition and professional identity (Ibarra et al., 2026), explains that professional identity changes through practice, not planning. New identities are built by trying out provisional selves in real settings, not by deciding what to become next. Without Ibarra, the Climate Corps would be structured as career counselling rather than field work with embedded reflection.

Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory, supported by Stevenson et al.'s (2018) systematic review and meta-analysis, explains why ecological work specifically. Knowledge workers are depleted of directed attention, the cognitive resource most consumed by sustained screen-based work. Natural environments restore it. Without Kaplan, the choice of ecological work over healthcare, construction, or any other sector would be arbitrary.

Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) care ethics explains why caring for a living system is qualitatively different from being outdoors. Care involves labour, affect, and ethical engagement together. Without Puig de la Bellacasa, the Climate Corps is an outdoor employment programme. With her, it is a practice that changes how people relate to the living world.

This chapter does not attempt a comprehensive survey of the meaningful work literature. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) provide that broader mapping. This thesis selects five lenses for what they do together that none can do alone: explain what AI displacement destroys, why it matters at both the personal and social level, how identity can be rebuilt, and why ecological care work is the right vehicle for rebuilding it.

2.1. The experiential gap in AI displacement research

This section examines research on how AI is affecting knowledge work: what it covers, what it overlooks, and why the overlooked dimension matters for design.

2.1.1. What the research covers

Research on AI and work has grown rapidly since 2023, but most of it operates in economic and occupational dimensions. Several distinct streams have emerged.

The most developed research stream looks at occupational exposure. It asks: which jobs and tasks can AI perform, and to what degree? Eloundou et al. (2024) estimated that around 80% of the US workforce could have at least 10% of their tasks affected by large language models, while roughly 19% could see at least half of their tasks affected. Webb (2019), Felten, Raj, and Seamans (2023), and Hampole et al. (2025) have developed related but methodologically distinct approaches to measuring AI exposure and its labour-market implications. Across this literature, exposure is generally highest in higher-paid, more educated, white-collar occupations. While these studies map how AI

capabilities overlap with human work, they do not address the psychological or experiential effects on the people in those roles.

A second stream tracks observed labour market effects in real time. Massenkoff and McCrory (2026) developed a measure of “observed exposure” combining O*NET task data, real-world usage data from the Anthropic Economic Index, and task-level exposure estimates from Eloundou et al. (2024). So far, they find no significant increase in aggregate unemployment among exposed workers, though the framework is designed to detect effects as they emerge. Brynjolfsson et al. (2025), in “Canaries in the Coal Mine?”, found substantial employment declines among 22–25 year old workers in occupations most exposed to AI, including software development and customer service (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025, p. 3). And Stanford’s recently published 2026 AI Index Report shows similar findings for youth in exposed occupations (Sajadieh et al., 2026, p. 173). This research stream paints a picture of slowly emerging displacement effects that are still difficult, though not impossible, to detect in aggregate data.

A third stream assesses adaptive capacity. It asks: who bears the greatest costs when displacement occurs? Manning and Aguirre (2026) measure this through four factors: net liquid wealth, skill transferability, geographic density, and age. Their framework is useful for identifying vulnerability, but it defines adaptive capacity mainly in terms of workers’ ability to find new jobs and limit earnings losses after displacement. It does not capture the range of losses people may experience beyond income, such as meaning, identity, or a sense of professional standing. Even Manning and Aguirre’s comprehensive review of the AI displacement literature acknowledges this.

A fourth stream examines whether AI complements or substitutes for human labour. Autor (2024) argues that AI could extend the reach of human expertise and rebuild middle-skill work, rather than simply replacing it. Mäkelä and Stephany (2025), analysing 12 million US job vacancies from 2018 to 2023, find empirical support for complementarity: AI-focused roles are nearly twice as likely to require skills like analytical thinking and resilience, and complementary effects are up to 1.7 times larger than substitution effects. This work analyses the economic relationship between AI and human tasks. It does not ask what people actually experience as their work changes around them.

These four research streams measure which jobs are exposed, what happens to employment numbers, who can recover economically, and whether AI replaces or augments specific

tasks. Yet they leave out how AI-driven displacement affects knowledge workers' sense of purpose, their professional identity, or how they are viewed by the society around them.

2.1.2. What is missing

A small but growing body of work has begun to address the psychological and experiential dimension. Three contributions are worth examining.

Sharma et al. (2025) conducted a phenomenological study of 24 Indian IT professionals who experienced AI-induced job loss or reassignment. Through semi-structured interviews and a Delphi validation process with 20 domain experts, they identified six core themes: emotional shock, erosion of professional identity, chronic anxiety, social withdrawal, adaptive and maladaptive coping, and perceived organisational betrayal. The findings describe a layered loss that goes well beyond income. One systems analyst reported: "I was the go-to person for backend architecture. Now I'm just a name on the bench list. It's not just a job—they've taken my confidence" (Sharma et al., 2025, p. 10). Sharma et al. reference Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model and describe AI-driven displacement as producing "layered psychological disruptions" (Sharma et al., 2025, p. 12). This is the only published empirical study the author found that examines the lived experience of people who have actually undergone AI-induced job displacement.

McNamara and Thornton (2025) proposed "AI Replacement Dysfunction" (AIRD) as a clinical construct for the psychological distress associated with AI-driven displacement, describing "symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, depression, or identity confusion symptoms that may reflect deeper fears about relevance, purpose, and future employability" (McNamara & Thornton, 2025, p. 1). Thornton described AI displacement as "an invisible disaster" (as cited in Hancock, 2026). AIRD is a proposed framework, not yet a recognised diagnosis. But it signals that clinical professionals are beginning to see AI displacement as a source of psychological harm that existing categories do not adequately capture.

Huang et al. (2026) took a unique approach to this question of how people are experiencing AI in their lives. In what they describe as the largest qualitative study of its kind, Anthropic used an AI interviewer to conduct open-ended conversations with 80,508 people across 159 countries and 70 languages over one week in December 2025. The study did not ask about displacement directly. It asked what people want from AI and what they fear. Huang

et al. found that beyond productivity, people hope AI will free up their time for family and personal connection. Meanwhile, 22.3% cited job displacement and economic impacts as a concern, spread fairly evenly across occupational categories. The gap between what most AI displacement research measures (exposure, earnings, employment) and what people articulate when given space to speak freely (purpose, time, relationships, fear of obsolescence) is visible in this data.

These contributions confirm that the experiential dimension matters. They also point to what remains to be done.

Sharma et al. (2025) studied people who had already been laid off or reassigned. Their sample captures one form of displacement: people who lost or were reassigned from their roles. It does not reach the quieter forms that may be more prevalent, like roles gradually hollowing out while the person remains employed or freelancers watching their pipelines thin without a single dramatic event. These are forms of displacement that do not register in employment statistics.

Sharma et al. (2025) and McNamara and Thornton (2025) also ask a different question from the one this thesis poses. They ask what damage displacement causes and how to treat or support people experiencing it. These are necessary questions. This thesis asks something adjacent: given what displacement destroys, what would an intervention need to provide to repair it? That question requires connecting experiential evidence to theoretical frameworks that can specify what “repairing it” means in practice: what functions of employment need restoring, how identity actually changes, and why personal meaning alone is not sufficient without social recognition.

Ibarra et al. (2026, pp. 153–154) identify this territory explicitly. They note that “despite the numerous reports about how advanced technologies are transforming work, occupations, and organizations, we know little about how these changes affect people’s career decisions and transitions,” and that “still understudied is the role that these identities play in how people navigate such shifts.” They also identify a related gap: the experiences of people who face mounting push factors (overwork, burnout, toxic conditions) but cannot mobilise the time or emotional resources to search for alternatives. This is the territory in which AI-driven displacement may unfold.

2.1.3. Theoretical lenses and the dignity argument

Chapter 1 described how the work society colonised identity (Frayne, 2015) and was already struggling to deliver on its promise of meaning (Graeber, 2018). AI accelerates that failure. To design a response, this thesis needs to specify what exactly is being lost, how identity changes, and why personal meaning is not enough. Three lenses do this work.

Jahoda's latent deprivation model

Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model identifies what employment provides beyond income: time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and regular activity. Paul et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 81 studies confirms that employed people report significantly higher levels on all five dimensions compared to unemployed people, with latent and manifest functions together explaining 19% of the variance in mental health (Paul et al., 2023, p. 8).

Jahoda's model was originally formulated to explain the effects of unemployment. V. Beck et al. (2025) extend it to underemployment, arguing that even having a job is insufficient if that job fails to provide the latent functions of employment. This thesis asks whether the model can be extended further still. A knowledge worker whose role has been hollowed out by AI may still be employed, still earning, and still invisible to labour market statistics while experiencing the progressive loss of purpose, status, and meaningful activity that Jahoda's model predicts. Whether latent deprivation can begin inside the job is a question the netnographic analysis explores. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

Ibarra's working identity framework

Ibarra's (2003/2023) working identity framework explains how professional identity actually changes. It is not through planning or analysis. It changes through practice: trying on "provisional selves," testing new roles in low-stakes settings, gradually revising the internal narrative of who you are (Ibarra, 2003/2023). Ibarra's original sample consisted of people who had already started their transitions (Ibarra, 2003/2023, p. 190), which means the framework describes how identity transition unfolds when it is already in motion. Whether and how it begins under conditions of AI displacement is a separate question, and one Ibarra et al. (2026) flag as understudied.

Honneth's recognition theory

Honneth's (1995) recognition theory adds the social dimension that Jahoda's psychological model and Ibarra's identity framework do not reach. Honneth identifies three forms of recognition: love in intimate relationships, legal respect as a citizen, and solidarity, the experience of being valued for what you contribute to shared social life. It is this third form, social esteem, that AI-driven transformation most directly threatens.

Social esteem depends on what a society decides to value. For much of the late twentieth century, knowledge work came to occupy a privileged position in accounts of the emerging "knowledge society." Drucker (1993) argued that knowledge had become the primary economic resource and that knowledge workers would become the leading social group. In many advanced economies, knowledge-intensive and professional work did come to occupy a central economic and cultural position. Today, AI has the potential to challenge that standing by demonstrating that machines can approximate cognitive skills at lower cost. Consider a graphic designer who watches their boss generate a rough logo concept in a few minutes using AI and present it to the client directly. The design is not as good, but it was free and fast. The designer does not just face a threat to their income. They face the implication that what they spent years learning to do well does not matter as much anymore.

The dignity synthesis

A recession can take away many people's income, but it does not usually call into question the value of entire categories of work. AI-driven transformation has the potential to do precisely that. As AI systems become more capable, many knowledge workers face the possibility that core parts of their work may be replicated, approximated, or devalued.

This thesis argues that dignified work should provide the latent functions Jahoda identifies—time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and regular activity—and be recognised as socially valuable through what Honneth terms social esteem. The Climate Corps is designed to provide both.

Readers familiar with self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) will recognize some shared terrain. SDT's three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) overlap with several dynamics this thesis investigates. The thesis nevertheless uses more targeted lenses because each research question demands a level of specificity

that SDT, on its own, does not provide. It asks what people would lose even if income were replaced through mechanisms such as universal basic income; Jahoda's latent deprivation model identifies psychosocial functions of employment that income replacement does not restore. It asks whether such losses can begin before a job disappears; Beck et al. (2025) make this extension possible by showing that the mere existence of a job may be insufficient protection against unemployment-like harms. It asks whether the society around a person values the work they do, which moves beyond social connection to recognition and esteem for one's contribution, as theorized by Honneth. And it asks how professional identity changes as people move from one domain to another, for which Ibarra's practice-based account is a better fit. ART and Bellacasa, meanwhile, address a question SDT does not address directly: why ecological care work, specifically, for this population. SDT helps confirm the broad terrain; these lenses map it precisely enough to design from.

2.1.4. Quiet displacement

The emerging experiential research confirms that AI displacement causes psychological damage beyond income loss. What's still largely absent is a systematic account of the full range of forms that displacement takes, particularly the quieter ones that do not involve formal job loss and that existing studies have not reached.

This thesis proposes the concept of *quiet displacement* (presented fully in Chapter 4) to describe the myriad ways that AI-driven transformation is beginning to displace knowledge workers from and within their professional lives. The thesis characterises these conditions as a landscape because they do not sit in tidy categories. They co-occur, compound, and shift over time. People move between and among conditions in no predetermined sequence: someone whose role is hollowing out may find themselves frozen in place, then lose their job, then be locked out of reentering the market.

The quiet displacement landscape reflects Beck's (1992) theory of individualisation, in which structural transformations are increasingly experienced and managed as matters of personal biography. People think they just had a bad quarter, or that their boss is dismissing their expertise, or that the market feels tighter than it used to be. They do not necessarily attribute their experiences to a structural transformation of the labour market, nor is it always clear that such an attribution would be correct in the first place. The quiet displacement landscape is foggy.

AI-driven displacement is quiet not only because much of it is invisible to employment statistics (though it is), but because the people living through it often cannot name what is happening to them. And even when they can, they experience it alone, cut off from the collective structures that previous generations relied on for solidarity and organised response.

A netnographic analysis (presented in Chapter 4) reveals nine conditions that comprise the quiet displacement landscape, ranging from outright job loss to a hollowing out of meaning, recognition, and professional identity that occurs while people remain employed. The majority of firsthand accounts describe conditions that employment statistics and policy detection mechanisms are not currently equipped to identify. SQ1 investigates this landscape empirically.

2.2. Ecological mandates and workforce planning

Section 2.1 examined how AI displacement is affecting knowledge workers. This section asks a different question: while some knowledge workers may be losing forms of work that provide purpose, recognition, and identity, is there urgent work that society already needs done?

2.2.1. The ecological work mandate

Helsinki is not facing a shortage of necessary work. It is facing an expanding ecological work mandate. Over the coming decade, the city is committed to a wide programme of biodiversity protection, restoration, monitoring, and ecological management, some of it driven by legally binding obligations and some by city-level policy commitments.

The EU Nature Restoration Regulation (Regulation 2024/1991) requires member states to put restoration measures in place across at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and across all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. These are collective EU-level targets to which each member state contributes through a national restoration plan. Finland must submit its draft plan within two years of the regulation's entry into force in August 2024.

At the municipal level, Helsinki's LUMO biodiversity programme contains 95 measures spanning habitat restoration, species monitoring, green infrastructure, invasive species management, and the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations into city operations

(City of Helsinki, 2021). The Helsinki Nature Conservation Programme 2025–2038 adds 98 new land and inland water areas and 22 marine areas for protection across the city (Nieminen, 2025, p. 6).

These policies call for specific, skilled work. For Helsinki to meet its ecological goals, policy commitments must be translated into practical labour. That labour includes monitoring indicator species across dozens of sites, removing invasive lupins and Himalayan balsam before they spread further, building and maintaining stormwater swales and constructed wetlands, analysing land cover datasets to track ecological change, writing environmental impact assessments for development projects, and preparing the recurring reports these programmes require. This is only a sliver of the work involved. It is ongoing, skilled, and essential.

2.2.2. The workforce planning landscape

Finland has institutional systems designed to match workforce supply with labour market demand.

The Labour Force Barometer, maintained by the Employment, Administration and Development Agency, classifies over 400 occupations and assesses whether each faces a labour shortage, oversupply, mismatch, or equilibrium. It is published annually and draws on the assessments of regional labour market experts (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.).

The Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH) manages vocational qualifications and has conducted skills foresight to anticipate future competence needs, most recently through the National Forum for Skills Anticipation (2017–2024), which produced sectoral forecasts through expert surveys and workshops (Finnish National Agency for Education [OPH], n.d.). OPH qualifications define specific competences a worker must demonstrate.

The question is whether these systems account for the ecological work described above.

2.2.3. The analytical gap

No prior systematic analysis was identified connecting Helsinki's ecological policy mandates to its workforce planning systems.

Helsinki is not entirely silent on staffing and capacity. The city's Environmental Protection Targets 2040 specify that divisions with significant environmental impacts should have dedicated environmental sustainability experts (City of Helsinki, 2024b, p. 15). The Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Programme 2026–2029 links green transition to skills development and labour-market matching in broad strategic terms (Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, 2026). While these documents provide important direction, a detailed analysis that starts from mandated ecological work, identifies the specific jobs that work requires, and maps those jobs to existing labour pools and education pathways does not appear to have been undertaken.

This matters because Helsinki's ecological policies create real obligations, and if the workforce to deliver them has not been systematically planned, the gap may only become visible when targets are missed.

SQ2 investigates the gap between Helsinki's ecological mandates and its workforce provisions. Chapter 3 describes the crosswalk method designed to perform this analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

2.3. The case for a designed response

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 identified two gaps: a need for research into how AI displacement affects knowledge workers' sense of purpose, identity, and recognition, and a lack of systematic analysis connecting Helsinki's ecological mandates to its workforce planning. This section argues that the nature of AI-driven transformation calls for new approaches, and that ecological care work and displaced knowledge workers are a match worth exploring through design.

2.3.1. Why existing systems may not be enough

Previous economic shocks displaced large populations of workers, and the damage was often severe and long-lasting. In the United States, Pierce and Schott (2020) found that communities exposed to trade liberalisation experienced significant increases in fatal drug overdoses alongside deteriorating labour market conditions. In Finland, Maczulskij (2025) found that workers displaced during the 1990s recession still carry a 10–20% higher mortality risk three decades later, concentrated in alcohol-related deaths, suicide, accidents, and violence. These shocks were devastating. They were also more legible than what

AI-driven displacement may produce, because many of those affected could be identified through plant closures, mass layoffs, and specific policy shifts.

AI-driven transformation may lack even that legibility. The exposure research reviewed in Section 2.1 shows that AI capabilities overlap with cognitive tasks across many occupations simultaneously (Eloundou et al., 2024). A paralegal, a graphic designer, a market researcher, and a software developer could all find their work affected by the same wave of generative AI tools. This cross-sectoral breadth could make it harder for displaced workers to reskill into adjacent fields, because adjacent fields may be changing at the same time.

Since January 2025, employment services in Finland have been organised at the municipal level (Act 380/2023). Helsinki's employment services offer labour market training, work try-outs, career guidance, and job search workshops to support re-employment (City of Helsinki, n.d.). The system is oriented toward connecting jobseekers with existing labour-market demand. If entire professional categories were to contract and adjacent categories contract too, that matching logic would face a problem it was not designed for. Finland's 2024 abolition of the adult education allowance (Finnish Government, 2024), which ended access for new studies beginning on or after 1 August 2024, removed a rare earnings-replacing support for mid-career retraining and further narrowed the options available to workers attempting a domain transition. If the current institutional toolkit was not designed for cross-sectoral, cognitive-work displacement, then new kinds of responses need to be designed. That is part of the motivation for SQ3.

2.3.2. Why ecological care work

Why ecological work rather than some other form of alternative employment? And why might it suit this particular population? Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory (ART) identifies directed attention as a finite cognitive resource that becomes fatigued through sustained use. Knowledge work runs on directed attention: concentration, sustained focus, complex problem-solving across long hours.

Kaplan argues that natural environments are "particularly rich in the characteristics necessary for restorative experiences" (Kaplan, 1995, p. 169). Many natural features are what he calls "soft" fascinations: features like passing clouds, shifting light, falling snow, or foliage moving in the breeze. They hold attention effortlessly, leaving room for the

reflective thinking that supports recovery from directed-attention fatigue (pp. 172, 174). Stevenson et al.'s (2018) systematic review and meta-analysis of 42 articles found evidence consistent with measurable restorative effects of natural environments on cognitive performance.

Kaplan's framework also identifies *compatibility* as a feature of restorative environments: a "special resonance between the natural setting and human inclinations" (p. 174), in which the setting supports the activity the person is undertaking within it. Compatibility distinguishes purposeful activity in a natural setting from passive nature exposure, and suggests that work that fits its setting is more restorative than work that simply happens outdoors.

A reader might reasonably ask: could a displaced knowledge worker simply spend more time in parks? ART explains why natural environments help, but it does not provide what Jahoda's (1982) framework identifies as the other things employment provides beyond income: time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and identity, and regular activity. Walking in a park restores attention. Ecological care work has the potential to restore attention while also providing the latent functions of employment. The Climate Corps is designed to do both.

Drawing on feminist care ethics and more-than-human thought, Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) speculative ethics of care argues that care for ecological systems involves the same intertwined dimensions that feminist scholars identified in human care work: labour, affect, and ethics (p. 5). Caring for a wetland or a meadow isn't just physical maintenance. It involves affective engagement (you come to care about what you care for) and ethical positioning (tending a living system changes how you relate to it).

This is what distinguishes ecological care from outdoor employment more broadly. A construction job provides income, physical activity, and time outside. Ecological care work adds sustained, attentive engagement with living systems, what Puig de la Bellacasa describes as a practice combining doing, feeling, and ethical orientation together (p. 5). It can change how people understand their relationship to the living world.

Bellacasa is equally insistent, however, that care should not be romanticised. Drawing on Hochschild and others, she argues that emotional and relational labour can drain those who perform it, and that under structural inequality this burden often falls most heavily on those

already in marginal positions (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 162–163). Her permaculture chapters reframe this as a design problem: any practice asking people to care for living systems over time must protect the energies of those doing the work, and joy must be intentionally fostered as part of the work rather than expected as its byproduct (pp. 158, 163). Bellacasa therefore functions as a criterion as much as a justification: any programme proposing ecological care as a response to displacement must be designed so that the affective and ethical dimensions of care are supported, not extracted.

Beyond the theoretical case, there is also a recent empirical signal worth noting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many studies documented increased interest in gardening and other forms of near-home nature engagement (Egerer et al., 2022; Theodorou et al., 2021). Because remote work was concentrated among professional and knowledge-intensive occupations, knowledge workers may have been especially well positioned to take up such activities. This is not conclusive evidence, but it is suggestive: when some workers were released from commuting and office routines, many turned toward embodied, nature-based practices.

2.3.3. What exists and what SQ3 will examine

Programmes connecting people with ecological, climate, or environmental service already exist. The Civilian Conservation Corps (United States, 1933–1942), the California Climate Action Corps (2020–present), the European Solidarity Corps (2018–present), and Germany’s Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (1993–present) each created pathways into environmental or climate-related work for different populations and purposes. SQ3 examines these precedents for design intelligence: successes, lessons learned, and opportunities for what comes next.

SQ3 also draws on the theoretical framework assembled across this chapter to derive design principles. It uses service design methods to propose a programme that addresses both the experiential needs of displaced knowledge workers (Gap 1) and Helsinki’s ecological workforce gap (Gap 2). SQ3 asks: how might an ecological care work programme be designed to address both the experiential needs of AI-displaced knowledge workers and the ecological workforce gaps identified in Helsinki?

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design and methods used to investigate the three sub-questions. It begins with the philosophical positioning, then describes each method, and closes with ethical considerations and limitations.

3.1. Research philosophy

Chapter 1 set out the research aim, main research question, and three sub-questions that structure this thesis. This chapter describes how the research was designed and conducted to address them.

Figure 1 shows the thesis’s methodological choices using the research onion framework (Saunders et al., 2023). This section starts at the onion’s outer layer and moves inward.

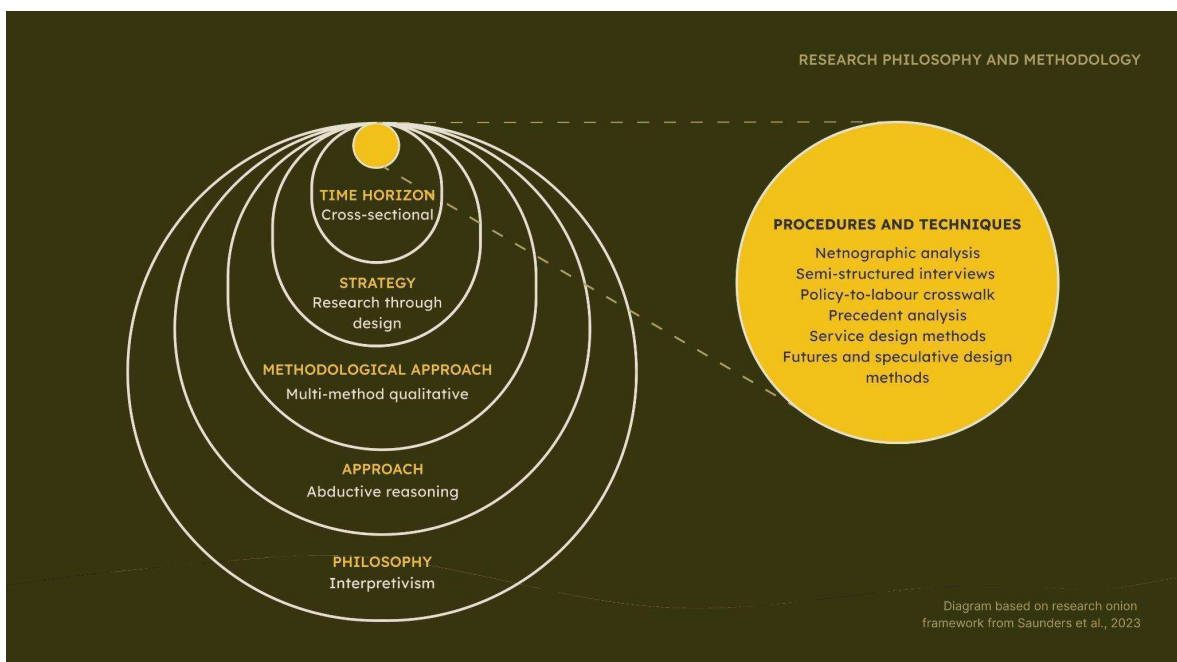


Figure 1. Research philosophy and approach.

Philosophy: Interpretivism. The thesis interprets how people experience AI-driven displacement through theoretical lenses (Jahoda, 1982; Honneth, 1995; Ibarra, 2003/2023; Kaplan, 1995; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) and constructs a design response that embodies those interpretations. The Finnish Climate Corps does not exist in the world yet. It is a constructed artifact, and the act of designing it is how the thesis generates and tests arguments about what dignified ecological work could look like. The concepts this thesis works with, “meaningful work,” “dignity,” “quiet displacement,” are not fixed categories

waiting to be measured. They are interpretive constructs shaped by the frameworks brought to the data and by what emerged when data and frameworks met.

The research also has a pragmatist orientation: it cares about producing something stakeholders could engage with and policymakers could evaluate. But this is secondary to the interpretive commitment. The thesis asks whether the Climate Corps holds together as a credible, evidence-grounded design response, a question more about coherence and interpretation than measurable effectiveness.

Approach to theory development: Abduction. The research is designed to move between theory and evidence iteratively. Theoretical frameworks shaped what the research looked for in the data, and what the data revealed in turn reshaped how those frameworks were applied. The research began with five analytical lenses, but the patterns that emerged from the data were not fully predicted by any of them and required new interpretive structures. Section 3.14 describes how each lens functioned across different methods.

Methodological choice: Multi-method qualitative. The eight methods described in Section 3.5 are all qualitative in their logic. Two surveys (N=33 combined) provide descriptive patterns that contextualise the qualitative findings but do not drive them.

Strategy: Research through Design. Saunders et al.'s (2023) framework lists strategies from the business research tradition (case study, action research, ethnography). This thesis instead draws its strategy from design research: Research through Design (RtD), in which designing is part of the inquiry process and knowledge is generated through the creation and interpretation of artefacts (Frayling, 1993; Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014). Section 3.3 develops this in full.

Time horizon: Cross-sectional. All data were collected between January and April 2026. The Climate Corps design proposes a 2027/2028 pilot, but the research itself captures a snapshot of conditions in early 2026.

Procedures and techniques are described individually in Sections 3.6 through 3.13.

3.2. Disciplinary positioning

This thesis sits at the intersection of three design fields: systems-oriented service design, futures design, and sustainable transitions design. Each contributes a different way of framing the problem and shaping the response.

Systems-oriented service design gives this thesis its disciplinary way of seeing the problem. Rather than focusing only on a single user journey or service interaction, the thesis requires analysis of a wider institutional ecosystem: the relationships among Finnish employment law, municipal services, ecological policy, host organisations, and credential systems. Suoheimo (2020) argues that service design needs stronger ways to engage with complexity and wicked problems, moving beyond tools developed for relatively contained challenges. *Systemic Service Design* (Suoheimo et al., 2025) extends this line of thinking by showing how systems theories can be integrated into service design to address complex socio-economic-technological challenges. Meadows (2008) provides the systems thinking foundation, particularly the concept of leverage points: places within a complex system where a small shift can produce large effects. Manzini (2015) offers a complementary frame through design for social innovation, showing how design can help support new configurations of actors, relationships, and resources when no single organisation can address the problem alone.

Futures design allows the thesis to work productively with uncertainty. AI's impact on knowledge work is contested, unfolding, and unpredictable. The Three Horizons framework (Sharpe et al., 2016) treats change as emerging from the present rather than arriving from outside it. It asks where “pockets of the future” already exist within current conditions and how they might grow through a transitional second horizon. The Climate Corps can be understood as a Horizon 2 intervention: one that works within present institutional rules while opening a pathway toward something different. Candy and Kornet's (2019) work on experiential futures adds a methodological dimension, showing how possible futures can be made visible and tangible enough for people to respond to. Section 3.12 describes how the thesis applies this approach.

Sustainable transitions design provides the thesis's core proposition. Transition Design, as developed by Irwin (2018), brings together systems thinking, futures orientation, and design practice to support transitions toward more sustainable futures. This thesis argues

that AI displacement and ecological breakdown share a common root in an economic logic that mobilises human effort toward profit and struggles to mobilise it toward sustaining life. The Climate Corps is designed at that intersection: it asks how a moment of labour market upheaval could redirect human energy toward ecological and climate work. That argument is the thesis’s own. Transition Design provides the tradition within which it makes sense. Table 1 describes the three disciplines and how each contributes to this thesis.

Table 1. Disciplinary positioning.		
Field	Contribution to thesis	Key scholars
Systems-oriented service design	Systemic analysis of stakeholder relationships, institutional structures, and leverage points for intervention	Suoheimo (2020); Suoheimo et al. (2025); Manzini (2015); Meadows (2008)
Futures design	Working with uncertainty; Three Horizons framing; experiential futures	Sharpe et al. (2016); Candy and Kornet (2019)
Sustainable transitions design	Framing displacement and ecological breakdown as connected systemic problems; leveraging upheaval for ecological transition	Irwin (2018)

3.3. Research through design

The overarching research strategy is Research through Design (RtD), a design research tradition often traced to Frayling’s distinction between research into, through, and for art and design (Frayling, 1993). In the more specific methodological sense used here, RtD treats artefact creation as part of the inquiry itself: insight emerges through the design decisions, iterations, and reflections involved in making, not only from the finished output (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014). An artifact can embody choices and demonstrate possibilities, but without framing and interpretation its research contribution remains unclear to others.

This thesis set out to design a Finnish Climate Corps. That might look like assuming a solution before asking the question. In Research through Design, it’s the method: the concept is the vehicle for exploration.

The design artifacts produced across the research shifted function as the process progressed. Some documented findings; some surfaced unanticipated questions; some did both at different stages. Section 3.12 describes the individual artifacts and what each contributed.

Quality in this research is not assessed through prediction or statistical generalisability. Instead, it draws on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative trustworthiness: credibility, in the sense that the design is grounded in evidence and theory, and transferability, in the sense that its design principles are clear enough to be adapted to other contexts. The thesis adds a further criterion drawn from RtD: pragmatic utility, asking whether the artefacts generate productive questions about what dignified ecological work could look like.

3.4. Positionality

An outsider

I am an American studying service design at a Finnish university, proposing a programme for a Finnish city. That makes me an outsider to the institutional landscape this thesis works with. Everything I know about how Helsinki organises its ecological work and employment services, I learned during the research process.

The outsider position carries both advantages and risks. The main advantage is distance. I have potential to see connections between Helsinki's ecological mandates and its employment system that people inside those systems might not see, partly because I am not constrained by institutional habits. The main disadvantage is not knowing what I do not know. As an outsider, I am likely to make incorrect assumptions about how Finnish institutions operate.

An insider

I am a knowledge worker. I have spent my career doing cognitive tasks, mostly in front of a screen. I have built my identity around my expertise and capabilities. Things like strategic design, systems thinking, analytical reasoning. I entered the SDSI programme in September 2024, and over the seventeen months since, I have watched AI systems develop capabilities I did not expect to see this soon. When I started, large language models could produce passable text and answer questions. By early 2026, they could hold extended,

analytically complex conversations. In the span of my graduate programme, AI became so capable that I, like so many others, had to start asking myself: wait, can it do my job?

A few months ago, AI strategy leader Paul Roetzer (2025) gave a talk that is formative to my thinking on this topic. It is called “The Move 37 Moment for Knowledge Workers.” In 2016, Google’s AlphaGo defeated world Go champion Lee Sedol with a move so creative and unexpected that expert commentators initially thought it was a mistake. Move 37 became shorthand for the moment machines demonstrated capabilities humans did not think they had. Roetzer’s argument is that knowledge workers are approaching their own Move 37: the moment you realise AI can do the cognitive work you have built your career around. My Move 37 moment happened in early February 2026. Before it, AI displacement was a research topic. After it, displacement was something I could feel in my own professional identity.

A parent

My child is three. I think constantly about the world my child will inhabit that I will not live to see. It is what drives this research.

3.5. Methods overview

The research uses multiple methods, each chosen for what it can contribute to one or more sub-questions. Table 2 shows each method, which sub-question(s) it serves, data collected, and data analysis approach. The three sub-questions are:

SQ1: How are knowledge workers in AI-affected sectors experiencing changes to the meaning of their work, their professional identity, and their sense of occupational security?

SQ2: What gaps exist between Helsinki’s ecological work mandates and its ability to deliver them?

SQ3: How might an ecological care work programme be designed to address both the experiential needs of AI-displaced knowledge workers and the ecological workforce gaps identified in Helsinki?

Table 2. Research methods, associated SQs, data, and analyses.

Method	SQ	Data collected	Analysis approach
Netnographic analysis	SQ1	663 comments from 3 Reddit threads; 202 firsthand accounts hand-coded (April 2026)	Hand-coding against the quiet displacement framework; Jahoda/Honneth/Ibarra theoretical coding; 45 emergent codes
Semi-structured interviews: knowledge workers	SQ1, SQ3	8 interviews, 45–60 min each (March 2026)	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); Jahoda/Honneth/Ibarra theoretical coding; design probe analysis (Climate Corps role cards)
Surveys	SQ1	33 responses across 2 anonymous online surveys (February–March 2026)	Descriptive statistics; cross-tabulation
Policy-to-labour crosswalk	SQ2	342 ecological work instances identified across 7 Helsinki/regional policy documents	Bespoke method: ecological work identified, categorised, then checked against occupational barometer and OPH qualifications framework
Semi-structured interviews: experts	SQ2, SQ3	3 interviews + 2 email correspondences with institutional actors and ecological experts	Thematic analysis focused on institutional enablers, barriers, and design-relevant intelligence
Precedent analysis	SQ3	4 programmes creating pathways into ecological, climate, or environmental service (1933–present)	Comparative analysis; design principles derived from cross-case assessment against Jahoda/Honneth/Ibarra frameworks
Service design methods	SQ3	Stakeholder mapping, composite persona, journey mapping, service blueprinting	Design synthesis: research findings translated into service artifacts that stakeholders could engage with and respond to
Speculative and futures design methods	SQ3	Three Horizons framework; design probe; design fiction (Anni’s journey, a narrative grounded in research findings)	Contextual analysis; speculative positioning of the Climate Corps within existing and emerging conditions

Several methods serve more than one sub-question. The expert interviews provided both institutional knowledge about Helsinki's ecological and employment landscape (SQ2) and design-relevant intelligence that directly shaped the Climate Corps proposal (SQ3). The knowledge worker interviews explored experiences of AI-driven work transformation (SQ1) in their first half, and used Climate Corps role cards as a design probe (SQ3) in their second half.

SQ3 draws on both its own evidence sources (precedent analysis, expert interviews, design probes) and the cumulative findings of SQ1 and SQ2. The design is informed by everything the research found.

The Jahoda/Honneth/Ibarra theoretical framework functions as an active analytical instrument across multiple methods, not only as contextual framing in Chapter 2. Kaplan's attention restoration theory and Puig de la Bellacasa's care ethics function as design criteria applied to the Climate Corps proposal, explaining why ecological care work specifically is the right match for this population.

3.6. Netnography

Netnography adapts ethnographic techniques to the study of online communities (Kozinets, 2020). It involves observing naturally occurring conversations in digital spaces to understand how people think and talk about topics in their own language, without prompting from a researcher. The method is well suited to this thesis because the knowledge worker interviews can only reach a small purposive sample. Online communities offer access to a much larger range of situated accounts, including people in experiential categories who would be difficult to recruit through conventional sampling: freelancers watching their client pipelines thin, people feeling stuck in hostile job markets, recent graduates locked out of entry-level pathways.

This analysis examines how AI's effects on work are discussed across multiple threads and communities. It does not attempt a full ethnographic immersion in any one community's norms or interactional dynamics. The unit of analysis is discourse across threads. It sits closer to netnographically informed discourse analysis than to community-immersive netnography in Kozinets' fullest sense.

3.6.1. Thread selection

Candidate threads were identified using ChatGPT (GPT-5.4 Thinking). The full prompt, a summary of the three GPT responses, researcher review notes, and the final selection decision are recorded in Appendix A.

The prompt described the range of ways AI might affect knowledge workers' own work, from explicit job loss through subtler changes in work's character. It did not use the analytical categories of the quiet displacement framework. It specified inclusion criteria: English-language, posted between January 2025 and April 2026, minimum 100 comments, diversity of subreddits, and at least some threads not framed around job loss specifically. It also instructed ChatGPT not to pre-filter for any particular outcome or category of experience.

The prompt was run three times in independent ChatGPT conversations. Three runs, for two reasons. First, a single run's output depends on which threads the model surfaces in that instance; a second or third run may surface threads the first missed. Second, threads recommended across multiple independent runs offer a weak form of corroboration that the candidate is active and well-matched to the framing. The three runs produced thirteen unique candidate threads. Two threads appeared in all three runs. One appeared in two runs. Ten appeared in just one.

I reviewed each of the thirteen candidates against the inclusion criteria and judged whether the thread was likely to contain substantive firsthand accounts. Six threads passed the review. The remaining seven were excluded: four had original posts that invited speculation, two had responses that were mostly use-case discussion with little experiential content, and one had only two visible comments (the GPT comment-count figure appeared to be in error). The six were sorted by comment count (high to low) and by date (newest to oldest). Threads appearing in the top three positions of either sort were selected. Table 3 shows the four threads that met this criterion.

Table 3. Selected threads.

Subreddit	Thread title	Comments	Date	Framing
r/AskReddit	“Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?”	~1,774	Oct 2025	Firsthand displacement narratives, broad professional range
r/antiwork	“AI has absolutely ruined my life”	~987	Feb 2026	Work intensification under AI-justified understaffing
r/cscareerquestions	“is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?”	~230	Mar 2026	Emotional labour and enthusiasm performance
r/cscareerquestions	“Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?”	~190	Apr 2026	Neutral survey of day-to-day AI impact on software engineers

All four threads were parsed and screened. Three were hand-coded against the full codebook. The fourth (r/cscareerquestions, “Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?”) was screened but not hand-coded due to time constraints; initial screening indicated its patterns were confirmatory of findings from the other three threads. Section 4.1 reports this decision. A fifth thread stood out as a strong candidate: r/AskIreland’s “How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI in your workplace?” (~177 comments, November 2025). Its causal-ambiguity framing maps onto the laid-off-cause-uncertain and collateral-casualty conditions underrepresented in the first exploratory analysis. It was reserved as a conditional addition if time permitted after the first four were complete. Time did not permit; the thread was not analysed.

3.6.2. Gathering the comments

Reddit offers two interfaces to the same underlying content: the current design at reddit.com and a legacy design at old.reddit.com. Both display identical posts and comments from the same database. The old interface renders comments as plain, copyable text; the new interface renders them as interactive components. The old interface was used for the approach described below.

For each selected thread, I opened the old.reddit.com version, sorted comments by Reddit’s “Best” ranking (Reddit’s algorithm for community-validated contributions), and expanded all collapsed replies. I copied the top 200 comments as displayed by Reddit’s ranking into a markdown file, expanding all nested replies beneath them, or the entire thread where it contained fewer than 200 top-level and nested comments combined. This produced between 180 and 267 comments per thread depending on thread size and reply depth. A parsing script then converted the file into a structured CSV. The CSV preserved each comment’s text, score, parent–child relationships, and depth in the thread. The four parsed datasets contained 184, 267, 212, and 180 comments respectively (843 total).

Two features of this process deserve acknowledgement. First, Reddit’s “Best” ranking is not neutral. It prioritises comments with high community engagement, which may overrepresent contributions that are dramatic or rhetorically polished at the expense of quieter or more ambiguous ones. For the two larger threads in the sample (~1,774 and ~987 comments), the top-200 cap means the dataset is a purposive subsample of the full thread. For the two smaller threads (~230 and ~190 comments), the top 200 covers nearly all of or the entire thread. The 200-comment cap reflected feasibility of close reading and coding within the thesis timeline. Each thread’s access date was recorded in the dataset. Second, the parsing script was mechanical. After I had sorted and copied the comments, no AI tool filtered or excluded them.

3.6.3. Screening

The selected threads produced 843 comments. Many were short reactions, jokes, advice, comments on other people’s situations, or general opinions about AI. Before coding could begin, the analysis needed to separate the comments that described a firsthand experience from those that did not, so that coding effort focused on the experiential material the study set out to analyse.

I defined “firsthand” in advance: a firsthand account is a comment where the commenter describes a specific experience of AI affecting their own past or present work. Accounts describing someone else’s experience, even when the commenter witnessed it closely, do not count as firsthand for this analysis. My focus is the experience from the inside. Speculative, advisory, or consumer-observation comments also do not count.

Claude Opus 4.6 (Anthropic) was used to apply this definition to each comment as a binary screen: firsthand (Y) or not firsthand (N). Ambiguous cases went into the Y column so I could review them. The screening appeared as a column in the spreadsheet alongside the original comment text.

After screening the first thread, I noticed that several comments described someone else's displacement in enough detail to be analytically useful as context, even though the commenter was not the person affected. I added a third code (S) for these substantive secondhand accounts and applied the revised screening to the remaining three threads, then retagged qualifying comments in the first thread. In practice, the S code was used sparingly: six comments in Thread 1 and none in the remaining threads. Most secondhand accounts in those threads lacked the specificity required for the S classification. S-coded comments are not coded against the codebook, which requires the first-person perspective. They appear in Chapter 4 as contextual corroboration where relevant. The parsing-script prompt and firsthand-screening prompt are provided in Appendix B.

I reviewed all firsthand-flagged (Y) comments in full, correcting where I disagreed with Claude's call. I also read many of the not-firsthand-flagged (N) comments during coding, though not all of them and not systematically. Where I encountered an N-flagged comment that contained a firsthand account, I reclassified it. Across the three hand-coded threads, I reclassified 12 comments from N to Y and 10 from Y to N, producing a final set of 202 firsthand accounts. This means some firsthand accounts may remain in the N column unrecovered. My goal was to ensure the comments taken forward for coding were genuinely firsthand, accepting that the screening was not exhaustive in the other direction.

3.6.4. Coding

I coded each firsthand account myself using a structured codebook. The codebook drew on categories developed through immersion in the subject matter and refined through the earlier exploratory analysis (described below). Each coding decision was my own. The codebook specified six decisions per entry.

Primary quiet displacement condition. The quiet displacement landscape (introduced in Chapter 2 and presented in full in Chapter 4) identifies nine conditions describing the forms AI-driven work transformation takes from the worker's perspective. Each entry was assigned one of the nine: *job loss with AI attributed*, *job loss with cause uncertain*,

collaterally displaced, hollowing out, frozen in place, downwardly mobile, eroding freelancer, locked out of entry, or pushed out for resisting. A tenth option (unclear/does not fit) was used for entries that did not map to any of the nine or that contained insufficient information for confident coding. Where a second condition was clearly present, the entry received a secondary code.

Extractive displacement. A binary flag for whether the person described building, training, or documenting the AI system that then replaced them.

Jahoda's most depleted latent function. The coding identified which of Jahoda's (1982) five latent functions of employment (time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and identity, regular activity) appeared most depleted in the account, selecting the single most prominent. I preferred single-response coding to multi-response. Single-response produces interpretable patterns about which function appears most prominently depleted; multi-response would have produced a distribution of "functions present somewhere." Where multiple functions appeared equally depleted or where no function was discernible, I recorded N/A.

Honneth's third sphere. A binary flag for whether the entry showed the person's professional contribution being devalued, dismissed, or rendered invisible by others (Honneth, 1995, social esteem). This was coded only where the entry contained explicit textual evidence of such treatment. Inferred emotional register was not enough. Where relevant, a brief note was recorded about what was being devalued.

Ibarra's identity transition phase. Each person's apparent position was located using three categories operationalised from Ibarra (2003/2023): holding on to a previous professional identity, between identities, or experimenting with new possible selves.

Notes. Brief observations for my own reference. During coding, I also developed emergent codes to track recurring patterns not captured by the six dimensions above, such as *quality concern*, *pretending*, and *phone it in/work less*. These 45 codes and their frequencies are reported in Chapter 4 and listed in Appendix F.

3.6.5. Relationship to the earlier exploratory analysis

I developed the quiet displacement framework in stages. Before any netnographic analysis, I had identified an initial set of eight conditions through several months of sustained

immersion in the subject matter: secondary research, theoretical reading, and close attention to how knowledge workers describe AI's effect on their working lives. These eight conditions formed the analytical starting point for the first netnographic analysis.

That first analysis, conducted in March 2026, used AI-assisted comment gathering and coding. Two changes to the framework occurred during the process. First, a ninth condition emerged abductively from the data: *pushed out for resisting*, describing displacement as a consequence of refusing to adopt AI or compromising professional ethics. Second, I renamed the eighth condition from *never started* to *locked out of entry* and expanded its definition beyond recent graduates to include mid-career workers unable to re-enter their field after the requirements shifted. I also identified a cross-cutting mechanism: *extractive displacement*, where workers whose knowledge, expertise, or voice became the training data for the AI that replaced them.

The AI-assisted comment gathering (an AI tool applied a firsthand filter during scraping) and the coding process (conducted with AI-assisted discussion) were productive for framework development. But they raised methodological concerns about verifiability and independence of judgement once the framework was stable enough to test. The second analysis, described earlier in this section and conducted in April 2026, addressed those concerns through mechanical parsing of the source threads after sorting, visible AI-assisted screening with researcher review, and hand-coding against a structured codebook. Chapter 4 reports findings from this second analysis. I treated specific patterns from the exploratory analysis as findings to test against the second dataset. The *extractive displacement* mechanism was confirmed (Chapter 4, Section 4.1.1). The 4+5 compound (a co-occurrence of *hollowing out* and *frozen in place* identified in the exploratory analysis) appeared in the hand-coded data as a secondary-code pattern but was not frequent enough to warrant dedicated discussion.

3.6.6. Ethical considerations

The analysis was observational throughout. I did not post, comment, or participate in any community. All platforms are public forums where posts are visible without authentication. Because the study analysed publicly accessible discussion threads without interaction, I did not seek individual informed consent (Kozinets, 2020; Langer & Beckmann, 2005). Public visibility does not eliminate ethical responsibility, however. The subject matter (job loss,

professional vulnerability, identity threat) is emotionally sensitive. Users may perceive Reddit as technically public but socially semi-private.

The thesis uses direct quotation selectively, with light editing where necessary. Because online posts can often be traced through exact-text search, usernames are removed and identifying details are altered. Non-essential phrasing is lightly edited in some quotations to reduce traceability while preserving experiential meaning and emotional register. This approach follows a context-sensitive understanding of netnographic and internet-mediated research ethics rather than a fixed rule for all public forum data (Kozinets, 2020; Langer & Beckmann, 2005; British Psychological Society, 2017).

3.6.7. Limitations

Reddit skews younger, US-based, technology-literate, and male. Two of the four screened threads come from r/cscareerquestions, though only one of these was hand-coded for the final analysis. The sample still concentrates technology-worker voices. The r/AskReddit and r/antiwork threads partially but not fully offset this concentration. Finnish and Nordic voices are not identifiable in the sample. The threads are English-language general forums; I did not search Finnish-language communities. Self-reported experiences cannot be independently verified. Reddit's "Best" ranking shapes which comments appeared in the dataset. The AI-assisted screening may have missed some firsthand accounts despite spot-checks. These limitations are addressed by treating the netnographic analysis as one source within a multi-method design and by being explicit about what the data can and cannot show. Some coding decisions were identified during analysis as potentially conservative, particularly around the frozen-in-place condition, where several accounts coded under other conditions displayed frozen characteristics in their emotional register. A second coding pass would likely have produced a higher count for this condition. The findings identify experiential patterns and conditions. They do not claim to represent the distribution of those conditions in any broader population.

3.7. Semi-structured interviews: knowledge workers

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with knowledge workers between March 4 and March 20, 2026. All participants were recruited through the follow-up volunteer option attached to the two surveys. The sample is purposive: all participants are knowledge workers who are experiencing or anticipating AI-driven changes to their professional roles.

Interviews were conducted online (Microsoft Teams) and in person, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each. Participants were based in Finland, Denmark, Estonia, and the United States. Professions represented include environmental consulting, design, programme management, project management, educational services, and marketing and communications, spanning early-career to senior professional.

The interview followed a four-part structure. The first part explored how AI is showing up in participants' work and around them: concrete workflow changes, team restructuring, hiring patterns, and whether the current moment feels qualitatively different from previous periods of technological change. The second explored identity and recognition: what makes participants good at what they do, whether AI has changed their relationship to that expertise, what signs they would watch for to know whether their skills are still valuable, and what they would lose beyond income if those skills became less valuable. The third turned to meaning: what makes work feel good, whether those ingredients are currently present, and whether participants engage in any physical or outdoor activity that provides a different kind of satisfaction.

The fourth part introduced the Climate Corps concept and used role cards from the Climate Corps card deck as a design probe. I showed all participants the same nine cards, spanning deeply embodied roles (peatland restoration, stormwater garden construction) to technology-enhanced roles (biodiversity monitoring, ecological data analysis), and asked which they were drawn to, which they would never do, and what was driving those reactions. Section 3.13 describes the card deck and the probe method in detail.

The protocol was designed to work across the quiet displacement landscape. The same questions produced useful data whether a participant was thriving with AI, sensing gradual erosion, or visibly displaced. I did not use the term "quiet displacement" during interviews. It functions as an analytical lens applied during coding, not as a prompt given to participants. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix J.

Analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Three theoretical lenses are applied to each interview: Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model identifies which of the five latent functions appear present, depleted, or at risk; Honneth's (1995) recognition theory identifies whether the participant's experience reflects a gap between personal meaning and social esteem; Ibarra's (2003/2023) working identity framework

locates the participant's apparent stage in career transition. Ethical procedures are described in Section 3.14.

The sample is small and purposive. It does not claim to represent the knowledge worker population. Its value is in the depth and texture of individual accounts and the ability to probe experiences that surveys and netnographic data can identify but not explore in real time.

3.8. Surveys

Two anonymous online surveys were deployed during the research period, each designed at a different stage and serving a different purpose. Both were built in Google Forms and distributed through LinkedIn and professional networks. Neither achieved a large sample. The first received 17 responses. The second received 16. Both are treated as supplementary instruments within a qualitative-dominant design, providing descriptive patterns that contextualise the richer netnographic and interview data.

The first survey, "What makes work meaningful in the age of AI?", went live on February 16, 2026. It had two parts. The first asked about industry, experience level, perceived AI exposure, feelings about AI's growing professional role, and what respondents would miss most if AI automated parts of their work. The second bridged to nature and ecological engagement: what respondents enjoy about spending time in nature, what makes it feel meaningful, what would matter most in environmental work, and what prevents them from doing more of it. The instrument was designed to test whether people experiencing AI disruption are also people who might find ecological work meaningful. Respondents came from Helsinki (6), elsewhere in Finland (3), and outside Finland (8), spanning business services, education, public sector, technology, finance, and tourism.

The second survey, "How is AI changing your work?", went live on February 26, 2026. Where the first asked what people value, the second asked what people are living through. It asked about current professional situation, sense of professional security, confidence in finding comparable work, and dominant emotional response to AI. It also asked what kinds of work sound appealing now, whether respondents have considered leaving desk-based work, and what the biggest barrier to ecological work would be. One question asked specifically about experiences in the past 12 months: team shrinkage, AI absorbing responsibilities, frozen hiring, role downgrading, freelance pipeline changes. I designed

these response options around Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model and Honneth's (1995) recognition theory, specifically to surface quiet displacement experiences that standard employment surveys sometimes miss. Respondents came from the Americas (6), Europe outside Finland (5), Finland outside Helsinki (3), the EU outside Finland (1), and Helsinki (1).

Both surveys combined single-select, multi-select, and open-ended questions. Appendix H reproduces the survey instruments. Both surveys ended with an option to volunteer for a follow-up interview via a separate Google Form, preserving survey anonymity. All eight knowledge worker interviewees (Section 3.7) were recruited through this route.

The low response rates reflect distribution, not design. Both surveys were shared through LinkedIn and personal contacts, without paid promotion or institutional distribution. Both were analysed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation. Given the sample sizes, no statistical significance is claimed. Ethical procedures are described in Section 3.14.

3.9. Semi-structured interviews: experts

The expert interviews investigated SQ2 and SQ3. They were aimed at understanding how the Climate Corps concept might operate within Helsinki's institutional landscape and how to design the programme to ensure displaced knowledge workers could do meaningful and valuable ecological care work. I selected five people based on the institutional roles the Climate Corps would need to work with or through. Each occupied a position that gave them specific knowledge the research needed. Table 4 shows the experts, interview details and focus areas.

Table 4. Expert interviewees.

Name	Role and org	Date	Format	Focus
E1	Environmental leader, City of Helsinki	March 26, 2026	Video: MS Teams	Ecological planning, monitoring capacity, LUMO programme implementation
E2	Employment services leader, City of Helsinki	April 1, 2026	Video: Google Meet	Employment-promoting service classification, benefit mechanics, institutional requirements
E3	Biologist and biodiversity expert	April 7, 2026	Video: MS Teams	Ecological practice, situated judgement, ecological workforce realities
E4	Public maintenance workforce leader in Helsinki	April 9, 2026	Email exchange	Operational model, funding constraints, feasibility of hosting external teams
E5	Finnish governmental education agency specialist	March 24, 2026	Email exchange	Vocational qualification pathways, competence-based recognition

The three video interviews lasted 25–30 minutes each and were recorded. Tailored questions were prepared for each interviewee based on their institutional position and expertise. The questions for E1 focused on how ecological work is organised within the city and what the biggest resource constraints are. E2’s questions revolved around whether and how a cohort-based programme might fit within the employment services framework. The questions for E3 were about the challenges and complexities of ecological care work that requires attention and expertise. Debrief notes were written after each interview, capturing key findings and design implications.

For the two email correspondences, specific questions were sent and written responses received. I asked E4 about the ecological workforce staffing and the practical constraints of hosting external teams. I asked E5 about whether competence acquired outside traditional routes could count toward vocational qualification completion.

The interviews were analysed by reading the debrief notes and recordings against SQ2 and SQ3, identifying institutional enablers, barriers, and intelligence that would directly shape the Climate Corps design. Each expert contributed a distinct piece of the institutional picture. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

3.10. Policy-to-labour crosswalk analysis

Section 2.2 identified Gap 2. Helsinki has committed to extensive ecological work through binding EU regulations and its own municipal and regional policy architecture, and no prior systematic analysis appears to have checked whether Finland's workforce planning and credentialling systems account for that work. SQ2 asks what gaps exist between Helsinki's ecological mandates and its ability to deliver them. The policy-to-labour crosswalk is the bespoke method I designed to answer SQ2 empirically.

A crosswalk is a structured mapping between two bodies of information that are each authoritative on their own side but have not been compared to one another. On one side: the specific ecological work Helsinki's policies mandate. On the other: the occupational categories, labour market data, and vocational qualifications that constitute Finland's formal workforce planning and credentialling infrastructure. The crosswalk produces a row-by-row record of the mandated work and a category-by-category assessment of whether the workforce systems are organised to deliver it.

3.10.1. Starting from policy

The method starts from the policy documents outward, not from the Climate Corps design inward. Searching the policy documents for evidence that supported a provisional Climate Corps structure would have produced confirmation bias: evidence that the design is justified, whether or not it accurately reflects what Helsinki's policies actually require. Starting from the policies themselves, and letting the categories of work emerge from the analysis, produces an evidence base independent of the design it eventually informs. The Climate Corps' work domains are the product of this analysis. They were not assumed in advance.

3.10.2. Policy-side sources

I selected seven Helsinki and regional policy documents that together constitute Helsinki's principal policy commitments to ecological work over the coming decade. The selection

aims to cover the core governing framework. It is not exhaustive. Additional national, EU, and sectoral documents govern aspects of ecological work in Finland. Table 5 provides details about the selected policy documents.

Table 5. Policy-side sources.			
Name	Source	Year	Language
2030 Climate Neutrality Action Plan for Helsinki	City of Helsinki	2024	English
Helsinki City Strategy 2025–2029	City of Helsinki	2025	English
Helsinki Environmental Protection Targets 2040	City of Helsinki	2024	English
Helsinki Nature Conservation Programme 2025–2038	City of Helsinki	2025	Finnish
Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Programme 2026–2029	Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council	2026	English
LUMO Programme, Helsinki biodiversity action plan	City of Helsinki	2021	Finnish (full); English (abridged)
Sallitusti villi, Helsinki biodiversity enrichment programme	City of Helsinki	2024	English

These documents span municipal and regional scales. They include both operational programmes with specific measures and strategic documents with broader targets. Some are legally binding; others are programmatic commitments.

3.10.3. Identifying the mandated work

The identification process was AI-assisted, using Claude Opus 4.6 (Anthropic). Seven policy documents, several in Finnish and most running to hundreds of pages, could not have been read in full within the thesis timeline without it. The identification was conducted across three separate Claude conversations. Each covered a thematically coherent subset of the documents: LUMO and Sallitusti villi in one; the climate plan, environmental protection targets, and city strategy in another; the nature conservation programme and regional programme in the third. The three-conversation split was scope

management, not an independence protocol between conversations. Each conversation was simpler to run and review when it handled a coherent subset.

Each conversation followed a detailed set of instructions I wrote in advance (included in Appendix C). The instructions specified what to capture (any instance where specific ecological work is named), what format to use (a standardised table with columns for source, section reference, work description, scale or target, and timeline), and what to exclude (vague aspirational statements, administrative measures, and policy principles without operational specificity). Each conversation worked only from the policy documents assigned to it and the instructions provided. This prevented the identification from being shaped by existing ideas about what the Climate Corps' work structure should be. One source required a preparatory step. Sallitusti villi is an image-based Finnish PDF set that is not text-extractable. Claude was used to prepare an English summary from the Finnish original. Identification for that source worked only from the summary.

The work produced a catalogue of 342 rows. Each row identifies a specific instance where a policy document names work that needs to be done: a habitat to be restored, a species population to be monitored, a green infrastructure element to be constructed, an invasive species to be removed, a community to be educated. My role was to design the method and write the instructions. Though I did not verify every row against source material, I did review the outputs for apparent consistency across the three conversations and spot-checked rows where translation uncertainties were flagged.

3.10.4. Synthesis

The synthesis step checks the catalogued work against two questions. First, does Finland's labour planning system account for the workforce to do this work? Second, does Finland's vocational qualification system recognise competence in it? Table 6 details the labour planning and credentialling instruments consulted in the synthesis.

Table 6. Labour planning and credentialling instruments consulted.

Instrument	Source	Date
Labour Force Barometer, Uusimaa data (243 occupational categories filtered for relevance to ecological and ecological-adjacent work from over 400 total)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (maintained by Employment, Administration and Development Agency from March 2025)	January 2026
Skills Cards, national sectoral skills foresight to 2035	Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), through the National Forum for Skills Anticipation	2017–2024
Further Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services (luontoalan ammattitutkinto, NQF 4)	Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH)	In force August 2025
Specialist Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services (luontoalan erikoisammattitutkinto, NQF 5)	Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH)	In force August 2026

The Labour Force Barometer assesses each listed occupation as facing shortage, oversupply, mismatch, or equilibrium, and provides figures for open jobs, employed, and unemployed. The Skills Cards identify sectoral skills priorities foreseen for 2035. The two vocational qualifications specify mandatory and optional units of competence that a candidate must demonstrate.

An email correspondence with E5 with OPH (E5, personal communication, March 24, 2026), supplemented these instruments. E5 confirmed that competence acquired through a non-traditional pathway can count toward vocational qualification completion through Finland's competence-based recognition system.

The synthesis was conducted in a separate Claude conversation with no access to the thesis or Climate Corps design documents. The conversation was given the catalogue, the Labour Force Barometer data, the OPH skills foresight, and the vocational qualification specifications, with instructions to read the full catalogue, build a categorisation of the work bottom-up from the 342 rows before making any analytical claims, and document its boundary criteria and judgement calls transparently. For each category it built, it then assessed the two questions. The full prompt is provided as Appendix D.

The synthesis produced 15 categories of ecological work and 5 emergent clusters. Chapter 4 reports what that assessment found.

3.10.5. Limitations

Three limitations deserve acknowledgement.

The work relied on AI-assisted reading in both stages: identification and synthesis. I designed the method, wrote the instructions, established the isolation protocols, and reviewed outputs. But the scale of the source material meant I could not read every document line by line myself. Some content may have been missed or misinterpreted, particularly in Finnish-language sources.

The crosswalk checks catalogued work against specific instruments: the Labour Force Barometer, the OPH Skills Cards, and the two vocational qualifications in nature-based services. It does not claim to have surveyed every labour planning or credentialling document in Finland. I did not access Helsinki Employment Services' internal workforce plans, for instance; whether such plans exist in a form that could have been checked remains unclear.

Any clustering of categories into larger groupings is an analytical judgement. The synthesis is designed to make those judgements transparent rather than eliminate them. Another analyst working from the same 342 rows could reasonably arrive at different categories or different clusters.

What the crosswalk does claim is bounded. Across seven major policy documents governing ecological work in the Helsinki region, I identified 342 specific instances of ecological work. The workforce and credential systems that should deliver this work have been assessed against explicit criteria. Chapter 4 presents what that assessment found.

3.11. Precedent analysis

Programmes placing people in ecological, climate, or environmental service work already exist in several countries. Table 7 shows the four selected for comparative analysis.

Table 7. Precedent programmes analysed.

Program	Country	Dates	Description
Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	United States	1933–1942	New Deal work-relief programme placing unemployed young men in conservation projects at national scale
California Climate Action Corps (CCAC)	United States	2020–present	Statewide AmeriCorps fellowship placing participants in urban greening, wildfire resiliency, and food recovery
European Solidarity Corps (ESC)	European Union	2018–present	EU programme supporting cross-border volunteering for young people aged 18–30 in areas including environmental protection
Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (FÖJ)	Germany	1993–present	Year-long youth voluntary service in the environmental field, legislatively embedded in federal law

These four were selected because they span different eras, scales, institutional architectures, and compensation models. Together they cover the main structural variations in how ecological or climate service has been organised: emergency federal mobilisation, state-level workforce development, supranational solidarity volunteering, and nationally legislated ecological service.

ChatGPT (GPT-5.4 Thinking) was used to compile verifiable source material on each programme’s structure, scale, compensation, duration, target population, credentialling, and legislative basis. I verified factual claims against the sources provided. The comparative analysis is my own.

For each programme, I applied three theoretical lenses. Using Jahoda’s (1982) latent deprivation model, I assessed which of the five latent functions of employment each programme provided and which it left unfulfilled. Using Honneth’s (1995) recognition theory, I assessed whether participants gained social esteem for their work and whether that esteem persisted after they left. Using Ibarra’s (2003/2023) working identity framework, I

assessed whether the programme's structure supported identity transition, and whether this was a design intention or a secondary effect.

The cross-case comparison produced design principles and shared gaps. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

3.12. Service design methods

Section 3.3 described how the thesis uses Research through Design as its overarching strategy: the Climate Corps is a constructed artifact, and designing it is how the thesis generates knowledge. This section describes the service design artifacts produced during the research.

The thesis produced five service design artifacts: stakeholder mapping, a composite persona, journey maps, service blueprints, and a service model canvas. These were not produced all at once. The process was not linear. Each artifact raised questions that sent the research in directions the previous one hadn't anticipated. The stakeholder mapping, for example, was first drafted from secondary sources and revised after each expert interview.

The **stakeholder mapping** identified the institutional actors the Climate Corps would need to work with or through: Helsinki Employment Services, Stara, OPH, the Urban Environment Division, training partners, and host organisations. It is presented as a table in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2.

The **composite persona**, Anni, synthesised findings from the netnographic analysis, knowledge worker interviews, and survey data into a single character whose trajectory could be followed concretely through displacement and into ecological work. Anni is introduced in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1.

The **journey maps** follow Anni's trajectory at two levels: an existing state (from meaningful employment through restructuring, unemployment, and descent into long-term unemployment) and a future state (from learning about the Climate Corps through cohort formation, skill development, and ecological employment). These visual maps show the emotional and financial arc across each pathway.

The **service blueprints** sit underneath the journey maps, analysing the same two states at an operational level: backstage processes, support systems, institutional touchpoints, and

the points where the existing system fails and where the Climate Corps would step in. The blueprinting process directly shaped the expert interview questions. Working through the existing-state blueprint exposed gaps in my understanding of how Helsinki's employment services function, how biodiversity strategies are implemented in practice, and where institutional disconnections sit. These questions became the basis for the expert interviews.

The **service model canvas** bridges the research findings and the blueprints. It describes what the Climate Corps does and why each feature exists, translating design principles from the precedent analysis and institutional intelligence from the expert interviews into a programme structure. The canvas served as the design document from which Chapter 5's design section (Section 5.3) was written.

These artifacts were designed without direct input from service users or stakeholders. A participatory co-design process, planned for a pilot phase following the thesis, would strengthen and evolve the design. The artifacts are still informed by participant and expert perspectives. The Climate Corps role cards elicited reactions from knowledge workers during the second half of each interview (described in Section 3.7 and Section 3.13). And the expert interviews provided institutional intelligence that directly shaped the blueprints, the service model canvas, and the stakeholder mapping.

3.13. Speculative and futures design methods

The Climate Corps does not yet exist. Designing a not-yet-existing service system requires methods that can place it within emerging conditions while making it specific enough for people to interpret, question, and respond to.

This methodological orientation aligns with the theoretical framing established in Section 2.3.2. Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) speculative ethics treats speculative engagement not as detachment from present conditions but as a way of opening them to "as well as possible" reconfigurations (p. 6). The Three Horizons framework, the Climate Corps card probe, and the design fiction all work in this register: each begins from present conditions and makes a possible next arrangement concrete enough to examine.

The **Three Horizons framework** (Sharpe et al., 2016, described in Section 3.2) positioned the Climate Corps within a temporal structure: Horizon 1 as the present system under pressure, Horizon 2 as transitional intervention, and Horizon 3 as the longer-term future the

intervention opens toward. The Climate Corps sits in Horizon 2. This positioning is presented in Chapter 5.

The **Climate Corps card deck** served two functions across the research. As a speculative design artifact, the 62 cards made the range of possible Climate Corps work roles tangible. Each card named a specific ecological role and described the work. As an elicitation device drawing on design probe logic (Mattelmäki, 2006), nine cards were selected to span deeply embodied roles and technology-enhanced roles, then used in the second half of each knowledge worker interview to generate reactions: which roles attracted participants, which repelled them, and what drove those responses. Appendix E provides the nine interview probe cards in full, lists all 62 cards with their titles and taglines, and describes an additional research instrument, the Climate Corps Role Explorer swipe game, that was designed but not deployed due to time constraints. Figure 2 shows a knowledge worker engaging with the role cards.



Figure 2. Interviewee using Climate Corps role cards.

Anni's journey is a design fiction (Candy & Kornet, 2019) grounded in research findings. It narrates a single knowledge worker's pathway through displacement and into the Climate Corps. The narrative's institutional and experiential elements are grounded in evidence gathered through the methods described in this chapter. The displacement conditions draw on the netnographic and interview findings (SQ1). For the institutional pathway (how Anni enters the programme, what benefits she receives, how she is placed), the narrative draws on the crosswalk and expert interview findings (SQ2, SQ3). The programme design itself comes from the precedent analysis and service design synthesis (SQ3). Anni's journey is presented in Chapter 5. It lets the reader follow one person through the Climate Corps and see what the proposal would actually feel like from the inside.

3.14. Ethical considerations

This research follows the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity's guidelines for ethical review in the human sciences (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity [TENK], 2019), the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (All European Academies [ALLEA], 2023), and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR; Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 2016). The University of Lapland's ethical review process was not required for this study because the research does not involve vulnerable populations, physical intervention, or exposure to harmful stimuli.

The eight knowledge worker interviews were conducted with written informed consent. The consent form explained the research purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and data handling procedures. Interviews were recorded with permission. Recordings from interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams are stored on the University of Lapland's cloud system. Recordings from interviews conducted in person are stored as audio files on the researcher's local drive. All recordings will be deleted after thesis approval. All participants are anonymised in the thesis: names, employers, and specific job titles are replaced with pseudonyms. No identifying details appear in the findings.

The five expert interviewees are named in the thesis with their verbal consent, given at the start of each interview or correspondence. Three interviews were recorded: two on

Microsoft Teams (stored on the university cloud system) and one on Google Meet (stored on personal cloud).

The two surveys were anonymous by design. Respondent identification was not enabled in Google Forms, and no identifying information was collected. A link to the researcher's data management statement was included in both surveys.

The netnographic analysis was observational throughout. Section 3.6 describes the ethical approach in detail: publicly available data, no interaction with communities, usernames removed, identifying details altered, non-essential phrasing lightly edited to prevent exact-text search while preserving experiential meaning.

AI tools were used as research instruments across several methods. Claude (Anthropic) assisted with policy document identification, crosswalk synthesis, and netnographic screening. ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used for thread discovery and precedent source compilation. Each method section in this chapter describes what the AI tool did, what constraints were applied, and what the researcher did independently.

There is an environmental tension in this research that deserves to be acknowledged. AI inference and training require large quantities of energy and water. A thesis that argues for ecological care while relying on AI tools is contributing to the very ecological harms it seeks to address. For this reason, I endeavoured to use AI for activities where it provided significant value that would be difficult for me to achieve without its use. I see it as an ethical obligation to use AI responsibly and in service of bringing about desirable futures for people and more-than-human worlds.

3.15. Limitations

The knowledge worker sample is small: eight interviews and 33 survey responses. The netnographic dataset is larger but carries its own biases. Reddit skews younger, US-based, technology-literate, and male. Two of the four threads come from r/cscareerquestions, which further concentrates technology-worker voices. Finnish and Nordic voices are not identifiable in the sample. The research does not claim to represent the distribution of displacement experiences in any broader population. It identifies experiential patterns and conditions. The surveys provide descriptive context, not statistical evidence.

Helsinki is a single case. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that the single case study is widely misunderstood as incapable of contributing to broader knowledge, when in practice it produces valuable context-dependent understanding. Helsinki functions as an information-rich case: a city with an ambitious ecological agenda, strong social welfare infrastructure, and a service economy that is exposed to AI disruption. The design principles that emerge from this case are intended to be adaptable to other contexts facing similar conditions.

The Finnish Climate Corps does not yet exist, so it cannot concretely demonstrate operational feasibility or show measurable participant outcomes. Instead, the value of the Climate Corps is to take an abstract concept (dignified ecological labour) and make it tangible. It is something people can imagine, critique, and improve.

Several of the policy documents in the crosswalk were in Finnish, and I relied on AI-assisted translation and summary to work with them. Section 3.10 describes how this was handled, including the preparation of an English summary of Sallitusti villi from the Finnish original. Analytical claims based on Finnish-language sources carry this limitation.

The research was conducted between January and April 2026. This compressed timeline limited the depth of engagement possible with each method and ruled out longitudinal data collection, participatory co-design, and a pilot test of the Climate Corps concept.

AI and its effects on work are moving fast. Between the start of this research and its completion, new models were released, new displacement patterns emerged, and the public conversation shifted. Any study of AI's labour market effects captures a moment. This thesis captures early 2026. Some of what it describes will have already evolved by the time it is read.

The multi-method design allows the thesis to hold together despite these constraints. Its claims rest not on the authority of any single method, but on convergence across eight methods: interviews, netnography, precedent analysis, policy and document analysis, systems mapping, service blueprinting, design probes, and speculative design artefacts.

4. FINDINGS

Chapter 2 identified three gaps: no systematic account of what AI displacement does to knowledge workers' sense of purpose, identity, and recognition (Gap 1); no analysis connecting Helsinki's ecological mandates to its workforce planning (Gap 2); and no designed response that bridges the two (Gap 3). This chapter presents the findings from six research methods that investigate those gaps.

Sections 4.1 through 4.3 address Gap 1 from three angles. The netnographic analysis (Section 4.1) documents *quiet displacement* at scale through 202 firsthand accounts from online communities. The knowledge worker interviews (Section 4.2) explore displacement in depth with eight individuals, surfacing what the netnography structurally cannot: the unfolding quality of the experience as people live it. The surveys (Section 4.3) provide structured corroboration of both.

Sections 4.4 and 4.5 address Gap 2. The expert interviews (Section 4.4) describe what five institutional actors and ecological practitioners can see from inside Helsinki's employment, qualification, and ecological systems. The policy-to-labour crosswalk (Section 4.5) checks whether those systems are organised to deliver the ecological work Helsinki's own policies mandate.

Section 4.6 addresses Gap 3 by examining four precedent programmes that have placed people in ecological or environmental service work. It derives design principles from what worked and identifies the shared gaps the Climate Corps aims to fill.

Chapter 5 takes up the design response directly.

4.1. Netnographic analysis

What people said when they talked about AI and work

The netnographic analysis examined three Reddit threads, each from a different community and each asking a different question about AI and work. Across these three threads, 663 comments were parsed, screened for firsthand accounts of AI-affected work, and hand-coded against the quiet displacement framework and the Jahoda/Honneth/Ibarra theoretical lenses described in Section 3.6.

The coding produced 202 firsthand accounts, each coded across six dimensions: primary quiet displacement condition, secondary condition where applicable, *extractive displacement*, most depleted Jahoda function, Honneth recognition withdrawal, and Ibarra identity transition phase. During coding, I developed 45 emergent codes to track patterns not captured by the framework columns. Examples: *quality concern*, *pretending*, *phone it in/work less*. I also assigned emergent codes to 71 comments that did not meet the firsthand threshold if they contained relevant observations, advice, or community framing. Appendix F shows all emergent codes and their frequencies. The full dataset comprises 279 coded entries. Table 8 summarises the three threads and their composition.

Table 8. Netnographic dataset overview.				
	Thread 1	Thread 2	Thread 3	Total
Subreddit	r/AskReddit	r/antiwork	r/cscareerquestions	
Thread title	“Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?”	“AI has absolutely ruined my life”	“is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?”	
Total comments	184	267	212	663
Firsthand accounts coded (Y)	80	34	88	202
Additional comments coded (N)	22	35	14	71
Total coded entries	108	69	102	279
Dominant population	Displaced workers across creative, editorial, tech support, etc.	Employed workers describing intensification and burnout	Employed software engineers describing how AI has changed their daily work	
Dominant QD condition	Job loss with AI attributed (34%)	Hollowing out (85%)	Hollowing out (71%)	

A fourth thread (r/cscareerquestions, “Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?”, 180 comments, 109 screened Y) was screened but not hand-coded due to time constraints. Initial screening indicated it was confirmatory of patterns identified in the coded threads, particularly the *hollowing out* pressures and the positive counter-narrative discussed in Section 4.1.5.

The three coded threads complement each other in ways that were not planned. Thread 1 captures people who have already lost their jobs. Thread 2 captures people in the middle of being overwhelmed. Thread 3 captures people watching their work transform around them while they remain employed. Together, they document different stages and forms of what this thesis calls quiet displacement.

4.1.1. The quiet displacement landscape

Chapter 2 introduced quiet displacement as a concept. This section presents the empirical landscape that emerged from the data.

Quiet displacement, as this thesis defines it, describes the range of ways that AI-driven transformation severs knowledge workers from their professional lives. Displacement here means more than the loss of a job. A worker can be pushed out of the skill, recognition, and purpose their work provided long before, or entirely without, being pushed out of the job itself. Some of this is visible, as when a person loses their job and knows AI was the reason, but most is not. A person’s role empties of meaning while they continue to hold the title. A freelancer’s clients stop calling, one by one, without explanation. A person can see the change coming but has nowhere to go and no way to prepare. In each case, something that mattered, skill, purpose, recognition, security, a sense of professional future, has been displaced. The displacement is quiet because much of it does not look like displacement at all, and because the people living through it often cannot name what is happening to them.

The coding identified nine conditions, each describing a distinct form that this displacement takes from the worker’s perspective. Figure 3 presents the quiet displacement framework.

The quiet displacement landscape

- | | |
|----|--|
| 01 | Job loss with AI attributed |
| 02 | Job loss with cause uncertain |
| 03 | Collaterally displaced |
| 04 | Hollowing out <small>(most common condition)</small> |
| 05 | Frozen in place |
| 06 | Downwardly mobile |
| 07 | Eroding freelancer |
| 08 | Locked out of entry |
| 09 | Pushed out for resisting |

Figure 3. The quiet displacement landscape.

Job loss with AI attributed describes people whose jobs have been explicitly eliminated and who attribute that elimination to AI. Twenty-eight accounts describe this as a primary condition, with an additional three as secondary. “I was an SEO copywriter until I was laid off last week,” one person wrote. “The company demolished the entire content team and is forcing everyone to use AI.” These accounts are the most visible form of displacement. They are also the minority: 14% of all firsthand accounts.

Job loss with cause uncertain describes people who have lost their jobs during a period of AI adoption but cannot confirm AI was the reason. Three accounts. A 3D artist described being “recently let go and looking for jobs” and that his former boss was “obsessed with trying to find AI tools to help with parts of the job.” The person who no longer has a job is not sure if AI is to blame. The uncertainty compounds the injury: when you cannot identify what displaced you, you cannot construct a narrative about what happened, and the identity transition that Ibarra (2003/2023) describes has no identifiable starting point.

Collaterally displaced describes people displaced not because AI replaced their specific role but because AI disrupted their industry or client base one or more steps removed. Five accounts appeared with this code in either primary or secondary position. A government paperwork specialist whose entire niche collapsed when AI tools convinced the small businesses that employed specialists to try doing the work themselves. They could not, but by the time that became clear, 80% of the businesses had gone under, taking the jobs with

them. An illustrator who did not lose clients to AI directly but lost them when the self-published authors who hired her also lost their market to AI-generated books flooding platforms. The causal chain passes through an intermediary. The person may not identify as “displaced by AI” at all, because the connection is indirect. This makes being *collaterally displaced* the least self-legible condition in the landscape.

Hollowing out describes people who remain employed but whose work has been drained of skill, meaning, autonomy, or purpose by AI adoption. This is the dominant condition in the dataset: 108 accounts as a primary code, with an additional 10 as a secondary. A costume designer whose directors now “design” costumes in Midjourney and hand her explicit instructions to reproduce their output, “essentially stealing the one part of my job I signed up for.” A marketing director whose professional judgment has been superseded: “The response has become, ‘what does ChatGPT say?’ It’s frustrating. I miss brainstorming and concepting and reworking an idea until it’s right.” A software engineer who spent an entire day “prompting a machine to make more prompts” and felt “no sense of accomplishment, no real challenge.” These people still hold their job titles. The title persists. The substance has been displaced.

Frozen in place describes people who can feel the displacement coming but find themselves unable to move. Nine accounts as a primary code, with six as a secondary. Some can see what is approaching but have no clear path out: “My leadership team started developing [AI systems] and now we’re expecting half or more of us to be eliminated.” Some want to move but the labour market traps them. Some do not know what to turn to: “Everything I can think of is also likely to be replaced in the next few years.” And some are frozen because their professional identity is so bound to one set of skills that they cannot imagine an alternative: “Coding is the only thing I know how to do well. I’d be terrified of losing my job.” What these variants share is a future loss experienced in the present. Several accounts coded as hollowing out also carried Frozen as a secondary, and the primary count of 9 likely underestimates the condition’s prevalence: several accounts coded hollowing out or N/A displayed Frozen characteristics in their emotional register.

Downwardly mobile describes people who have found new work but at a substantially lower level of pay, status, or skill utilisation. Five accounts, all in Thread 1. A tech support worker who was making \$135,000 four years ago at a large tech company: “I work part-time at a mall and need to find a second job if I’m going to survive. I lost my house,

my car, my mental health, and most of my stuff.” A marketing copywriter with a career that included writing a Super Bowl commercial: “I have an absurd number of accolades and degrees for my age. I can’t find work. I’m an OnlyFans content creator now.”

Eroding freelancer describes independent professionals whose client pipelines have thinned as organisations replaced external contracts with AI tools. Ten accounts. Graphic designers, copywriters, voice actors, illustrators, translators. “I was a full-time visual artist. The commissions dried up when people started using ChatGPT to make all their images, flyers, posters, everything.” Nobody fires a freelancer. The work just stops arriving. The displacement is mediated entirely through the market, which connects it directly to Honneth’s (1995) recognition framework: every freelancer in the dataset was coded Honneth = Y.

Locked out of entry describes people who cannot enter or re-enter their field because the requirements have shifted around them. This condition appeared only once in the coded data, as a secondary code. The condition is real but this dataset, drawn from communities of people already working or recently working, was not positioned to capture it. And as chapter 1 discussed, early labour market data suggests it may be growing, particularly among recent graduates (Sajadieh et al., 2026, p. 173).

Pushed out for resisting describes displacement as a consequence of refusing to adopt AI or objecting to how it is deployed. Two accounts. A chief digital officer discussed in a public webinar how his company had created HR-monitored KPIs to track AI usage and was open about the fact that engineers who scored low were more likely to lose their jobs.

These nine conditions co-occur, compound, and shift over time. Twenty-eight accounts received both a primary and secondary condition. A person can be *hollowing out* and *frozen* simultaneously. A freelancer whose pipeline is thinning (*eroding freelancer*) can also be *downwardly mobile*. A legal writer whose pay has been halved is *hollowing out* and *downwardly mobile* at once. The conditions describe positions in a landscape that people move through, not boxes they sit in.

The landscape’s most important feature is its composition. Only 31 of 202 firsthand accounts (15%) describe job loss of any kind. The remaining 171 (85%) describe conditions that unfold while the person is still employed, still freelancing, or still looking

for work. What employment statistics would count as “employed” or “job-seeking” encompasses, in this data, a wide range of quiet professional damage.

Extractive displacement cuts across conditions. It is not a tenth condition but a cross-cutting pattern that appeared within several of them. Eight accounts described training, building, or documenting the system that displaced them. “They pretty much had us train the AI software that replaced us after telling us our jobs were safe. Obviously they weren’t.” Another: “I made the terrible mistake of writing some documentation for the automation. I lost my job the same month.” Another was “hit with the three-punch combo. Outsource to overseas. Automation. And yep, I’m the one who trained the overseas team and helped write the automation to ‘make our jobs a little less taxing.’ Fired without notice after eleven years.” *Extractive displacement* converts a person’s accumulated expertise from an asset into the instrument of their own disposal. It appeared in 10% of Thread 1’s firsthand accounts and in none of Threads 2 or 3, where workers were still employed and no completed extraction cycle had occurred.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of quiet displacement conditions across the 202 firsthand accounts.

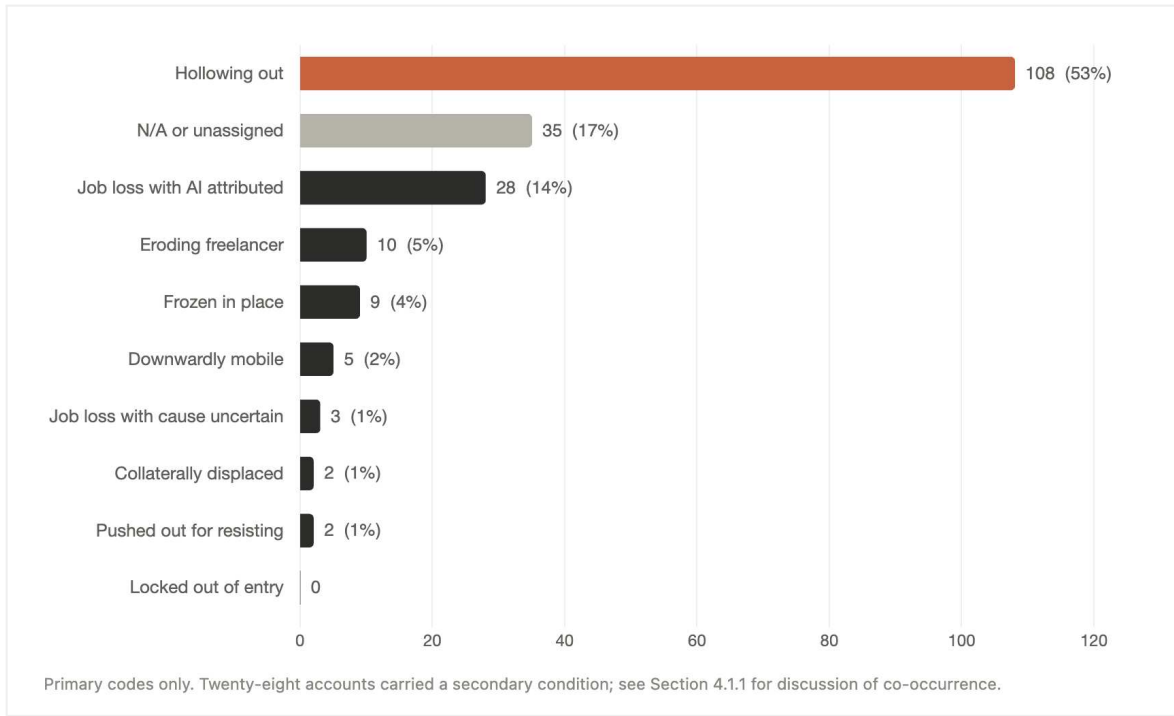


Figure 4. Quiet displacement conditions across the dataset.

4.1.2. Inside hollowing out

Hollowing out appeared in 108 of 202 firsthand accounts, spanning all three threads and every industry represented: marketing, software engineering, content writing, legal writing, education, video editing, insurance, design. This section examines what *hollowing out* feels like from inside: the pressures people describe, and the conditions under which those pressures activate.

The analysis identified six pressures that operate inside *hollowing out*. Each has a distinct emotional signature. Three appeared in every thread, in every industry, regardless of organisational context. In this dataset, these three co-occur wherever *hollowing out* occurs and are absent in the positive cases where AI tools enhanced people's work (see Section 4.1.5). This thesis calls them the structural core. Three additional pressures activate under specific organisational conditions and intensify the experience. These are contextual amplifiers. Figure 5 shows these pressures as well as three response patterns.

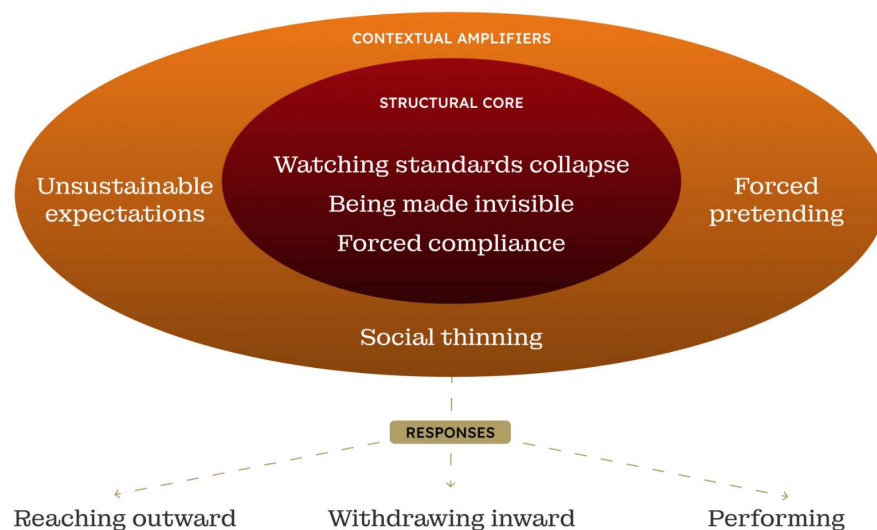


Figure 5. Inside the hollowing out condition of quiet displacement.

The structural core

Watching standards collapse. The quality of work is declining, the worker knows it, and the people in charge do not seem to care. The emergent code *quality concern* was tagged 55 times across the three threads, making it the most frequent code in the entire dataset.

The anger in these accounts is not just about quality going down; it is about quality decreasing and other people (most often managers or leadership) not seeming to care.

“Everything they publish or write in their communications seems so devoid of life, personality, and creativity... like a soulless bot wrote it. Not surprising, because a soulless bot did indeed.”

“AI slop code... I want to gouge my eyeballs out with a rusty spoon trying to review these AI slop code reviews.”

“AI has caused us to just accept terrible work as the standard now.”

One engineer captured it in five words: “the future of software is IKEA.” It reads as an existential verdict on where the work is heading. When quality collapses and nobody objects, something about the purpose of the work collapses with it.

Being made invisible. In every thread, workers describe what it is like to watch the diminishment of their professional value. Where the previous pressure is about the work degrading, this one is about the worker being bypassed. Bosses override professional judgment with chatbot outputs. Clients stop paying for human expertise because a free tool produces something that looks close enough. Managers who have never done the job conclude it must be easy because they tried it once with Copilot.

The pressure arrives from different sources depending on context. Among freelancers, the market withdraws recognition:

“I can’t really expect people to pay my rates when there’s literally something free that produces about 70% of the quality... it has devalued the perception of my work and what someone would be willing to pay for it.”

Among employed workers, management withdraws recognition, sometimes through active dismissal (“they think that all work magically gets done in half an hour”), sometimes through sheer incomprehension:

“My director made one PPT with Copilot and now thinks we can rebuild the entire backend with prompts.”

In several accounts, AI gave non-experts the confidence to do expert work badly. Managers use Midjourney to “design.” Leaders generate code and conclude programming must be simple. A senior VP builds a matplotlib chart and decides non-technical staff can handle engineering tickets. The expertise does not get rejected in these cases. It gets walked around by people who cannot see it.

Forced compliance. Twenty-two accounts describe being compelled to use AI against their professional judgment: required to adopt tools they know are inadequate or mandated to follow workflows they did not design and do not trust. Among software engineers, forced compliance was systematised. HR departments created KPIs tracking AI usage. Engineers who scored low were told they could lose their jobs.

“All tickets are now required to go through a process to be written by Claude.

We’re expected to be 4x more productive.”

“We have to act excited about AI. It’s a bit like in a church. You’re supposed to praise the Lord there, not criticize. Same with AI.”

The religious analogy recurred unprompted across multiple accounts. It captures the enforced conformity, the irrationality, and how it feels to be inside an institution that punishes dissent. Forced compliance controls what people do: their tools, their workflows, how they spend their hours.

The contextual amplifiers

On top of the core pressures, three additional pressures operate. The thesis calls these contextual amplifiers. They do not appear in every context, but where they activate, they shape how workers experience *hollowing out* and how much it damages their professional dignity.

Unsustainable expectations. This pressure barely appeared among people who had already lost their jobs (their intensification phase was behind them) but dominated among those still employed and watching their workloads expand. AI raises expectations without reducing labour. The justification is always some version of “we have AI now, so you should be able to do more.”

“I’m totally burned out because I’m working 12–15 hours a day. My work has increased by at least 5x. Whenever I push back citing lack of bandwidth, I am told it should be manageable since we have AI.”

“Welcome to insanity where the context switching becomes something you do every 3 minutes.”

The pace does not just accelerate. The margins that made work survivable get eliminated. One original poster was told AI would “increase productivity, offload the non-creative work, and put the extra free time to better use.” Instead, her workload increased fivefold. This maps directly onto Ranganathan and Ye’s (2026) finding that AI tools reset the baseline of what organisations expect from the same number of workers.

Social thinning. This pressure appears when AI displaces the relationships inside work. It is the quietest of the six, often felt as an absence. Teams shrink. Training departments are eliminated. The sense of building something together, with other humans, toward something that matters, dissipates. The most extreme case was a commenter who described a workplace where human-to-human communication had been mediated out of existence:

“It’s so obvious my org’s requests are generated by an LLM, they are all 5-page long bullshit that lacks any context. I’ve given up on trying to respond with logic to my managers because they just feed my answers into an LLM and try to challenge me on it. So I just feed all their BS into a bot and say ‘tell them why this is impossible.’ Fight fire with fire.”

“I’ve given up” is the moment of social thinning. What this person has lost is the sense that anyone on the other side of the exchange is actually there.

Forced pretending. This pressure was concentrated among software engineers and might represent the most psychologically damaging of the six. At least fourteen accounts describe being required to perform enthusiasm for AI that contradicts their private assessment. The word people reach for, again and again, is *pretend*.

“At work I’m like yes this is the future!!!! revolutionizing woo!!!”

“It’s layers of pretending all the way down.”

“I have to act excited about AI and use it extensively while the new workflow and expectations have sucked a lot of the remaining joy I found in the field. Needless to say I’m also worried about being laid off... That part makes it almost insulting that I have to pretend to be excited.”

Where forced compliance controls what people do, forced pretending controls who they are. It does not just mandate tools or workflows. It demands that the worker suppress their honest professional judgment and replace it with performed belief. You can comply with a mandate and still be allowed to grumble about it. These workers cannot even grumble. The culture demands they celebrate the thing they fear. The word one of them reached for was “insulting.” It names the dignity injury directly.

One engineer pretended so successfully that they were recruited into an “AI leadership” initiative they had no interest in. The performance consumed the performer.

The relationship between core and amplifiers matters. The most devastating accounts in the dataset involve combinations. A costume designer whose expertise was overridden and who was forced to execute someone else’s AI-generated vision. A marketing agency worker enduring collapsing quality, unsustainable expectations, and the slow draining of collaborative purpose all at once. A software engineer forced to comply with mandated AI workflows while also being required to pretend those workflows excited them. The core pressures define whether someone is being hollowed out. The amplifiers determine how much it hurts. Table 9 shows how the six pressures manifest across the three threads.

Table 9. Hollowing out pressures across threads.

Pressure	Thread 1	Thread 2	Thread 3	Role
Watching standards collapse	Strong	Strong	Strong	Structural core
Being made invisible	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Structural core
Forced compliance	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Structural core
Unsustainable conditions	Minor	Dominant	Dominant	Contextual amplifier
Social thinning	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Contextual amplifier
Forced pretending	Absent	Absent	Dominant	Contextual amplifier

4.1.3. Three registers of dignity loss

The thesis argues that when Jahoda’s (1982) latent functions drain, Honneth’s (1995) social recognition withdraws, and Ibarra’s (2003/2023) identity destabilises or stalls, what people experience is an assault on professional dignity. The three threads each document a distinct register of this experience. They describe what people sound like when different things are being taken from them. Table 10 shows the theoretical framework distributions across the threads.

Table 10. Theoretical framework distributions across threads.				
Framework	Thread 1 n=80	Thread 2 n=34	Thread 3 n=88	Total n=202
Jahoda: dominant depleted function(s)	Status/identity (54%)	Collective purpose (41%) + Time structure (35%)	Time structure (32%) + Collective purpose (27%) + Status/identity (21%)	Status/identity (32%) + Collective purpose (25%) + Time structure (21%)
Honneth: recognition withdrawal rate	81%	44%	46%	59%
Ibarra: dominant identity phase	Holding on (41%) + Between (26%)	N/A (59%) + Holding on (24%)	Holding on (60%)	Holding on (47%) + N/A (32%)

Losing who you were. Thread 1’s workers speak in the past tense. “I was a copywriter.” “I was making \$140k four years ago.” “I was a full-time visual artist. The commissions dried up.” Their professional identities have been severed from the work that sustained them. Jahoda’s status/identity function dominates at 54%: when you lose your job, what you lose first is who you are. Honneth flags at 81%, the highest of any thread, because displacement is itself an act of recognition withdrawal. The market, the organisation, or both have said your expertise is no longer worth paying for. One in four are between identities (Ibarra), adrift between who they were and who they will become. Another 41% are holding on to an identity that has been cut loose from its moorings.

The emotional register is grief. Past tense saturates these accounts. The gallows humour that runs through Thread 1 is the humour of mourning. A sci-fi editor who says “I should have seen it coming, given the genre.” A data scientist whose boss overruled his technical recommendation with a Copilot suggestion, laid him off weeks later, and was then herself laid off two months after that. The company posted a new position for an “AI Scientist” overseas. The irony does not soften the loss. It confirms it.

Losing the conditions that made work bearable. Thread 2’s workers speak in the present tense, and they are exhausted. “I haven’t slept in ages. I haven’t read a single book in months.” These people have not lost their professional identities the way Thread 1’s people have. They still hold their titles, still know their work is valuable. What they have lost is the ability to do it under conditions they can sustain.

Jahoda’s collective purpose (41%) and time structure (35%) dominate. Honneth flags at 44%, lower than Thread 1 because the experience is more about being overwhelmed than dismissed. Where recognition withdrawal does appear, the most common form is temporal devaluation: management using AI’s existence to deny the time professional work requires. Ibarra shows 59% coded as not applicable, the highest of any thread. These people are not transitioning between identities. They are not experimenting with new selves. They are enduring.

The emotional register is exhaustion shading into rage. The original poster set the tone: “F*ck you, man.” The community’s response was tactical. Clock in. Do your hours. Submit the AI-generated work they asked for. Go home.

A legal writer captures the trajectory precisely. She had worked for the same marketing agency for years, producing “probably millions of words of content.” The company halved her pay and moved her to “AI-assisted blogging.” The AI content “f*cking sucks,” she wrote, and responsibilities kept creeping back as the output proved unsellable. She asked for a modest raise. They said no, the work should still be “easy enough.” Pay halved, responsibilities restored, raise denied, effort withdrawn. Each step compounds the dignity injury.

Losing the meaning of work you still do. Thread 3’s software engineers speak in a conditional tense, hypothetical and wary. “If this is what it’s going to be going forward, I guess I’ll just be another corporate drone.” “If it replaces me, so be it.” They still have their

jobs. They still identify as software engineers: 60% holding on, the highest of any thread. But the experience of the work has changed in ways that drain it of the thing that made it worth doing.

“I spent the whole day prompting a machine to make more prompts. There was no sense of accomplishment, no real challenge, just having a conversation with very fancy autocomplete to build things that I didn’t write so only have a surface-level understanding of. I used to love being a software engineer because it meant that I got to have fun at work.”

This engineer had voluntarily adopted AI tools and liked using them for routine tasks. Then the company mandated “AI-native” workflows and the joy evaporated. What these people mourn is not the status of their role (Thread 1) or the sustainability of their conditions (Thread 2). It is the cognitive pleasure of solving problems, building systems, and understanding what they have built.

Jahoda’s distribution is the broadest of any thread: time structure (32%), collective purpose (27%), and status/identity (21%) all registering. The erosion is not concentrated in one function. It is distributed. Honneth flags at 46%, with 38 of the 40 flagged cases concentrated in the *hollowing out* condition. The injuries cluster around management incomprehension, forced pretending, and productivity surveillance: companies tracking monthly token spend as a proxy for “productivity.”

The emotional register is cynical ambivalence. People crying on calls, having panic attacks. “It feels like work is suddenly hell everywhere.” And alongside the distress, a sardonic wit: “Where do you think AI comes from, the f***ing AI tree?” “Everyone’s pretending. Everyone wants to sound smart. Welcome to the corporate circus.”

Where the lenses converge. The thesis’s dignity argument is strongest where all three theoretical frameworks activate simultaneously. This convergence concentrates in accounts coded as *hollowing out* with Honneth flagged.

A marketing director whose collective purpose has drained (“it doesn’t matter anymore what I think or create”), whose recognition has been withdrawn (“I miss feeling respected for my experience and what I’ve accomplished”), and whose professional identity is suspended in a role that no longer reflects her judgment. An engineer who finds the

requirement to fake AI enthusiasm “almost insulting” while fearing the technology will eliminate his job, but who needs the money and so “will just do my best to adapt.”

The latent functions drain, the social recognition withdraws, and the identity strains. People describe this, in different words but with consistent force, as the experience of their professional life becoming something they no longer recognise.

4.1.4. How people respond

The data reveals three response patterns, each corresponding to a different position in the quiet displacement landscape.

Reaching outward. People who have lost their jobs search for work that restores what was taken from them. Ten accounts in Thread 1 describe seeking tangible, physical, relational work. A 14-year graphic design veteran training as a barber apprentice because “people come to you knowing that they can’t do it better than you.” An epidemiologist who found aged care “incredibly rewarding, knowing that you’re making a difference for seniors.” A network engineer considering goat farming, or finding “some city to work for that doesn’t have the budget to replace people with AI.” A CG artist gravitating toward pottery: “People will always need that as a form of therapy. Especially in the hellscape we’re heading towards.”

The destinations vary, but the logic is consistent. People are searching for work where their expertise is visible, where the person they serve needs them specifically, and where AI cannot produce a cheap substitute that looks close enough. The direction is away from screens and toward hands and people. Any programme that aims to support people in quiet displacement should take note: the people themselves are already pointing toward work that is physical, relational, and rooted in place.

Withdrawing inward. People being hollowed out under unsustainable conditions protect themselves by pulling back. They submit AI-generated work without refining it. They work their contracted hours and not a minute more. They stop caring about the quality of what they produce, because caring was what burned them out.

The legal writer whose trajectory was described above reached this point after her raise was denied: “If they want AI content, that’s all they’ll get from me, because I won’t take the time to refine it any more than I have to.” One worker outsourced “basically 95% of

my job to the Claude Chrome extension and just hung around chatting with coworkers.” Another: “You gotta manage their expectations from day one and then slowly ramp down the intensity for your whole career.”

This response has its own dignity logic. When institutions will not protect workers from unreasonable demands, workers protect themselves. The withdrawal preserves the person while surrendering the professional commitment that was causing harm. Ibarra’s (2003/2023) framework reaches its limit here. These people are not transitioning to new identities. They are retreating from the identity they have because maintaining it has become unsustainable.

Performing. People whose work is being transformed in organisations that demand enthusiasm respond by constructing a false professional self. “At work I have to pretend everything I do is actually done by Claude.” One engineer performed so successfully that they got recruited into an “AI leadership” initiative they had no interest in. Another just tells management “it’s going on the single pane of glass as part of our digital transformation, and they just nod their heads approvingly.”

This is Ibarra in reverse. Instead of experimenting with new possible selves, these workers maintain a self they do not believe in to survive an organisational culture that has made honest professional judgment unwelcome. The authentic self goes underground. It comes out at home, or on Reddit.

Across all three responses, people are reaching for the same thing, though from different directions. They want work where their expertise is visible and valued. They want to be able to say what they actually think. They want to produce something they can be proud of. The people who lost their jobs search for it in new careers. The people being overloaded stop giving their best to jobs that punish them for caring. The people performing protect an interior self that still cares, even as their professional exterior performs compliance.

4.1.5. When AI does not destroy dignity

Thread 3 contained something the other two threads did not: a genuine positive counter-narrative. Twelve accounts describe AI tools as useful in ways the workers welcome. Six were coded as *creating positive change*. A 16-year veteran who had “done a full 180” on AI. A developer whose team was “working wonders” with AI agents. A staff

engineer using Claude to handle design implementation while he spent his time on architecture and review.

What distinguishes these accounts from the rest of the dataset? Two features recur. Professional autonomy is preserved. The worker decides when, how, and whether to use AI. In one account, management was “delegating the scope of its usage to the senior devs,” who in turn told juniors to “use it as much or as little as you want; just make sure you’re still getting tickets done and that nothing you push to production is bugged.” In another, “they don’t care if we use AI as long as the work gets done. Mandating it shows that management doesn’t actually know how to do project management or hire and just trust people.”

The worker has enough expertise to direct the tool. The positive accounts come overwhelmingly from experienced professionals who use AI to eliminate grunt work while retaining oversight of architecture, design, and quality. They know their systems well enough to catch AI errors. They have enough seniority to push back on mandates they disagree with. AI feels like a power tool to them.

These two features are the inverse of the structural core pressures. The positive cases maintain quality standards. Their expertise is recognised and trusted. They choose their own tools. The core pressures are absent. And without them, the same technology that hollows out other people’s work makes theirs better.

The claim this thesis makes is conditional. AI destroys professional dignity when deployed in ways that override professional judgment, mandate adoption without understanding, and prioritise speed over quality. The positive cases prove the conditional. Dignified AI-augmented work exists. It requires autonomy, trust, and recognition of expertise. Most of the people in this dataset do not have those things. The same tool, under different power arrangements, produces opposite outcomes. That is the finding.

4.2. Knowledge worker interviews

The netnography sheds light on quiet displacement at scale: more than 200 firsthand accounts from people sharing their experiences briefly, anonymously, with strangers. The interviews offer a different perspective. Eight knowledge workers, recruited across five countries and six professional fields, each sat with the researcher for 45 to 60 minutes.

These interviews offered depth and texture that only a long-format, wide-ranging conversation can give.

The interviews had an unfolding quality to them, almost as if interviewees were discovering something about themselves or considering aspects of their working lives that they had not ever given voice to. One participant started describing what AI had taken from their work and landed, mid-sentence, on the word “identity,” then paused and added “maybe” as if they had not expected to say it. Another, asked to imagine applying their project management skills to an ecological scenario, planned an entire food preservation operation right there in the interview, in real time, using instincts they did not know were transferable.

The netnographic analysis and interviews offer distinct and complementary value. The Reddit threads capture people who already know they are going through some form of AI-driven change at work. The interviews, by contrast, were intentionally conducted with knowledge workers more broadly, not limited to those who feel so affected by AI that they are compelled to talk about it with strangers on an online platform. Several interview participants could not fully inhabit the displacement scenario when the researcher posed it. That inability turned out to be one of the most important findings.

This section presents seven cross-cutting themes from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), followed by a systematic application of the thesis’s three theoretical lenses across all eight interviews. Section 3.7 describes the interview protocol, sampling, and analytical approach. Appendix G presents the emergent coding framework and code frequencies.

4.2.1. Themes

The seven themes that emerged from the interviews are summarized in Figure 6.

Knowledge worker interview themes

- | | |
|----|--|
| 01 | What people value most about work is each other |
| 02 | Workers can feel their cognitive capacities eroding |
| 03 | Strong identities resist imagining their own displacement |
| 04 | The creative act is what matters |
| 05 | The barrier to ecological transition is societal recognition |
| 06 | Knowledge work skills transfer to ecological contexts |
| 07 | Design for community first, ecology second |



Figure 6. Knowledge worker interview themes.

Relationships

Every participant, without exception, named human relationships as the most important thing work provides. It appeared more consistently than any other code across all eight interviews. Section 4.1.2 documented social thinning as one of six hollowing pressures: teams shrinking, training departments eliminated, human-to-human communication mediated out of existence by layers of AI. The interviews reveal what is being lost when that thinning occurs. Not the tasks. Not the output. The people.

When participants described their best career periods, the ingredients converged. One described staying with a small team until 6am to finish a project: “We were feeling like this was important.” Another described co-directing a consultancy with their best friend: “We had a great time working together. We had a good flow.” A third described 20 days of field work across 11 cities, 150 colleagues, shared meals in the evening: “There was a lot of learning.” What recurred across every account, regardless of field or seniority, was trust and shared purpose within a group small enough to know each other as people.

What AI displaces here is not tasks. It is the collegial fabric those tasks were woven into. One participant put it plainly: “I used to ask someone. That’s how we used to do it. I’d ask someone and maybe they’d say ‘let me Google that for you,’ and even if it was embarrassing, I liked that because you would have an interaction. Now everything is less and less all the time. No knowledge sharing. No interaction.” Another described the same

process at an earlier stage: they have started using AI “for something I would use my colleague for, like asking for advice, asking for ideas.” The colleague has not been fired. The colleague has been made unnecessary. Now there is just an AI prompt and no human-to-human connection.

Cognitive erosion

Six of eight participants described their cognitive capacities eroding through AI use. The interviewees did not mention “AI slop” nearly as much as the Reddit commenters. Instead, they turned the lens inward, looking at their own work and minds for traces of their own cognitive sloppiness. Their accounts, taken together, trace a progression through five stages.

At the earliest stage, the question is whether it is even happening. One participant asked: “I wonder sometimes if I’m bypassing some of that learning because I can just ask something to build it. Or is that part of it now?” They genuinely do not know whether what they are experiencing is atrophy or adaptation.

At the next stage, resistance. “I have been noticing that and I’m trying not to rely that much” on AI because “I feel like it takes away the human part.” But resistance has a horizon: “If I have even less time, I know that I won’t do it. I will just stop [resisting] and be like, just give me the summary.” The honesty in that sentence is striking. They can see the future in which they give up, and they are telling the researcher about it in real time.

Further along, the spiral has become a crisis. One participant described it in a single run: “I become lazy, and then it replaces me and I’m also lazy like I haven’t used my brain that much and now I don’t feel useful and maybe it’s my fault I haven’t trained my brain.” Beck’s (1992) individualisation in a single breath: a structural transformation of the labour market, absorbed as personal failure.

Further still, a specific capacity has degraded. One participant used to read widely and write personal reviews of everything. “It was easy for me to break down my thoughts into words. But now I feel just stuck with where to start and how to start and how to put the thoughts in my mind into words.” They attribute 60-70% of this to AI use. They searched YouTube for whether “someone is conspiring against you that you can’t think anymore.” Then they turned off their laptop.

At the furthest stage, the concern turns structural. One participant described younger colleagues who lack initiative and reach for AI when asked to brainstorm. Their response: “How about you use your brain to brainstorm?” The skills that pre-AI professional development built are not developing in the people who grew up with the tools. The mechanism is consistent across all five stages. AI handles a cognitive task. The skill that task exercised atrophies or fails to develop. More AI is needed to compensate.

Identity resistance

When asked to envision a future where their professional skills are less valued, six of eight participants briefly engaged with the scenario and then stepped back. This finding is invisible in the netnography, because anyone posting in a Reddit thread about AI displacement has already crossed the threshold of self-recognition. The interviews caught people before that threshold.

“Me as a person, I don’t think I will be replaced. Maybe I won’t be called a product manager anymore but someone needs to be in the loop.”

“I don’t see a lot of signs that my certain skillset is threatened by AI, if anything, it enhances it.”

“Even if you don’t get a job, you can still work in a nice cafe and have a soothing life.”

Each found a different exit from the premise. One pivoted to entrepreneurship. One self-soothed. One retreated to technical specifics about what AI still cannot do. The move was the same: engage briefly, return to ground that feels stable.

The clearest case was a participant with 25 years of communications experience who described, with visceral frustration, watching colleagues ask AI to write project headlines instead of asking them. They know what is happening. They can name it: “That’s supposed to be MY job!” But when asked to sit with the scenario where their expertise becomes unnecessary, they pivoted: “I still believe some parts need to be done by a human brain. Like getting funding for those projects. There’s no way AI could do that by itself.”

Only two participants did not show this pattern: one who was secure and theorising about others’ transitions, and one at the peak of their career satisfaction. The people who most need a transitional programme may be the least likely to seek one out. Framing

participation as acknowledging displacement will repel the people it is designed for. Chapter 5 takes up this recruitment challenge directly.

The creative act

One participant collapsed the distinction between physical and digital work. Working in a garden, building wooden structures, knitting a hat, and writing the opening of a magazine article all produce the same feeling: “It gives me the same feeling as creating these stories I told you about.” And: “It’s still so nice when you see flowers growing in the garden or knitted something and you put it on your head. And you are like Oh! I made that!”

That “Oh! I made that!” is the finding in three words. The medium does not matter. The domain does not matter. What produces fulfilment is having created something through your own capability.

“You can buy everything. You can bring someone to do your garden or you can buy a hat at the shop, but it’s not the same.” What’s lost when AI writes the headline isn’t the headline. It’s the self-proof. The same participant described the creative breakthrough moment: “When I come up with the solution OHH, I could put these words like this and there’s the start of the story!” If AI writes the start, the “OHH” disappears. No amount of efficiency gain compensates for that loss, because efficiency was never the point.

Other participants arrived at the same place through different routes. One described playing a guitar: “You don’t need some other thing to make it sound. That’s super nice.” And about handmade work more broadly: “Everything that is made from our hands, maybe a little bit human somehow.” Another mourned collaborative creative process: the brainstorming, the friction of ideation, the late nights when a team felt like what they were doing mattered. Another named it directly: “Feeling useful, in general. Useful defined as impacting another human being in a profound way.”

Section 4.1.2 documented what happens when organisations strip this from people’s work: the hollowing, the collapsing standards, the loss of autonomy. The interviews reveal what specifically is being stripped. It is the creative act. The cognitive pleasure of solving problems and making things. Lose that, and the title and the salary become what one participant called them: “all paycheck.”

Societal recognition as barrier

Five of eight participants independently identified social esteem as the primary barrier to ecological career transition. Not interest or willingness or skills. The gap between what ecological work pays and what knowledge work pays reflects a deeper gap in what society decides to value. They identified it from five different countries without being prompted.

“If it was valued, the world would look very different.”

“Why do you pay so much money to an IT graduate and not a botany or plant expert?”

“There’s a lot of people doing physical stuff. We know that we need it, but they don’t get a lot of money out of doing that because people think, well, it’s physical stuff, they’re not actually doing a lot.”

The participant based in Helsinki has lived this as a business problem. They have trained in Japanese-style forest therapy, run walking tours, and cannot make a living at 20 euros a session. “If it could be the other way around, if it could be as valuable as the job I do at the computer.” They also teach digital marketing to wilderness guides. They can see both sides of the gap every day.

The desire is not the problem. One participant said they would leave desk work immediately if the pay were comparable: “If I’m getting paid to do that, like good money, I would any day leave my desk job. I think I would be the happiest person on this planet.” In several cases, participants already had ecological skills or training. A botany degree. Forest therapy certification. Years of community-based field work. What is missing is the recognition, and the pay that follows from recognition, that would make ecological work a viable professional identity.

Skills transfer

The most vivid demonstration of skills transfer happened live during an interview. When the researcher asked a participant to imagine applying their project management skills to a food preservation scenario, the response was immediate: “I will need specific people for this and how many? So I will need what kind of materials to make it happen. The quality and the amount and measures, how many, for how many days they are going to be functional. And then where I’m going to take those things. And it’s like a workshop kind of

thing where I teach the people how to do it. Then I will need a place, and what do I need in that space.” They hadn’t recognised the transfer until it happened in their hands.

Another participant is already doing it without institutional support: teaching digital marketing to wilderness guides, designing walking tours that combine communications expertise with forest therapy, identifying EU funding acquisition as a skill the Climate Corps (CC) would need. A third sorted the CC role cards into logical clusters within seconds, using the same systems thinking that makes them effective in their current coordination role. A fourth selected roles matching their strengths: “I was looking for where I can be impactful, where I can help but also what would I enjoy.”

The CC does not need to teach knowledge workers how to plan, coordinate, communicate, or manage projects. Those skills are already there. What the CC needs to provide is ecological domain knowledge (species identification, habitat management, monitoring techniques) and the institutional context (placements, qualifications, recognition) that makes the transfer legible.

Community over ecology

Two participants sit at opposite ends of the same spectrum, and together they reveal the CC’s central design question. One lives in an intentional community. All five of Jahoda’s (1982) latent functions are fully present: time structure from community rhythms, social contact from proximity, collective purpose from a shared mission, status from mutual recognition, regular activity from varied communal duties. Their actual job is screen-based, involving daily online meetings with people around the world. The latent functions do not just come from the employment. They come from the community around it.

The other lost all of these when they moved from community-based field work to remote screen-based work. “It’s all paycheck here. Back home, it used to be community, it used to be travel, it used to be experiences, it used to be food, culture and all these things.” The job exists. The income arrives. Everything else is gone.

The same type of work produces radically different Jahoda profiles depending on the community context. If the CC builds a cohort with relational density, the latent functions follow regardless of whether participants are sampling soil or writing grant applications.

The participant in the intentional community put it this way: “When you are unemployed, especially if your job has been taken over by something else, it’s a moment where you also want that sense of belonging and finding other people who are in the same situation. This transcends the kind of skills or knowledge that you get from the program.”

Section 4.1.4 described people reaching outward after displacement, gravitating toward work that is “physical, relational, and rooted in place.” The interviews clarify what “relational” means in practice. It means a community where people know each other beyond their roles. Shared meals. Shared purpose. What one participant described as “extra pairs of hands, extra hearts, extra brains.”

4.2.2. Theoretical analysis

The previous section presented what the interviews found thematically. This section applies the thesis’s three theoretical lenses across all eight interviews and surfaces patterns the thematic analysis alone does not reach.

Jahoda’s latent functions

Chapter 2 (section 2.1) cited V. Beck et al. (2025), who extended Jahoda’s latent deprivation model to underemployment: people who hold jobs that fail to use their capabilities experience a similar deprivation of latent functions as the unemployed. The interview data suggest a further extension. AI-hollowed roles may constitute a new form of underemployment: the job title, the hours, and the salary remain, but the meaningful content of the work has been degraded. Four of the six currently employed participants show depletion of one or more latent functions while holding a job.

The clearest case: “I used to ask someone... Now everything is less and less all the time. No knowledge sharing. No interaction.” Social contact is draining not because the job disappeared but because AI replaced the interactions the job used to produce. Another participant watched their colleagues turn to AI for project headlines instead of turning to them: “That’s supposed to be MY job!” Status is under pressure not because the role was eliminated but because the expertise the role depends on is being bypassed inside the organisation.

Social contact and collective purpose are the functions under most consistent pressure across the interviews. Time structure and regular activity remain largely intact, because

people still have routines. The damage concentrates in the functions that make work feel like more than going through the motions.

One participant experienced extended unemployment and described what happens when all five functions drain at once: “I think it kind of intruded on my professional identity. I didn’t have anything.” Years later, they still have not fully recovered. The damage is not temporary.

Honneth’s third sphere

The interviews reveal that recognition wounds arrive from different directions depending on where you sit. One participant watched colleagues ask AI instead of asking them. Twenty-five years of expertise, bypassed by the person sitting next to them. “I’m a professional in creating headlines! And they immediately did that!” The wound is intimate. It happens in the room you work in, from people you thought respected what you do. At another participant’s company, engineers watched “vibe coders” enter their field with AI-assisted tools. What do the engineers want? To be acknowledged for their expertise. “To be known.”

At a different level, management overrides professional judgement. One participant proposed a minimum standard: AI-generated content should be reviewed by a human before being sent out. The board declined. Another described executives making AI investment decisions without understanding the work: “They don’t really know what is really going on at the detailed level. They’re just saying ‘AI!’” The netnography’s forced compliance pressure maps here: organisations mandating workflows that override the judgement of the people doing the work.

At the broadest level, participants described a society that systematically undervalues ecological work. Forest therapy at 20 euros a session. Botany graduates earning a fraction of IT salaries. Physical labour being treated as low-skill regardless of what it demands. This is the recognition gap five participants identified independently, and it operates as the primary structural barrier to the career transition the CC proposes.

These three directions of recognition withdrawal, from peers, from organisations, from the broader valuation structure, each require different design responses. Chapter 5 addresses how the CC’s institutional architecture responds to each.

Ibarra's identity transitions

Chapter 2 (section 2.1) cited Ibarra et al. (2026): “despite the numerous reports about how advanced technologies are transforming work, occupations, and organizations, we know little about how these changes affect people’s career decisions and transitions” (p. 154). The interviews reveal a pattern Ibarra’s earlier work anticipates but the 2026 review identifies as understudied.

Participants already between identities or actively experimenting engaged readily with the CC concept and the role cards. They tried on ecological work as a provisional self during the interview itself, projecting into food preservation planning or forest therapy guiding.

Participants holding on to a strong professional identity responded differently. They engaged with the role cards but kept returning to what they already knew. Twenty-five years of communications expertise should transfer to ecological storytelling and funding work. Trust networks and agency coordination should transfer to ecological project management. For these participants, the CC is not a reinvention. It is an extension.

The pattern connects to the identity resistance theme in section 4.2.1. The participants who cannot fully engage with the displacement scenario are the same ones holding on to strong professional identities. And Ibarra (2003/2023) argues identity changes through practice, not planning. One participant described exactly this from a graduate scheme placement: “Something I never thought I would enjoy if they didn’t place me there.” The placement came first. The identity followed.

Convergence

Chapter 2 proposed that dignity is the synthesis: what emerges when Jahoda’s functions, Honneth’s recognition, and Ibarra’s identity are all intact. What erodes when any of them are withdrawn. The interviews bear this out as an observable pattern.

The participants who report the sharpest injuries are those where all three lenses activate simultaneously. Consider one participant whose social contact and collective purpose are draining (Jahoda), whose expertise is being dismissed by management (Honneth), and whose professional role may not exist in a year (Ibarra). Or another, whose trust networks are eroding (Jahoda), whose field is being automated by a startup while their board rejects their AI policy (Honneth), and whose professional identity is something they are actively

defending rather than inhabiting (Ibarra). In both cases, the three lenses do not just co-occur. They amplify each other.

The participants with the strongest sense of professional dignity are those where all three are intact. One lives in an intentional community where the functions flow from shared life, recognition flows from shared mission, and identity has integrated: “I don’t separate what I do with who I am.”

Section 4.1.3 described three registers of dignity loss across the netnographic threads: losing who you were, losing the conditions that made work bearable, losing the meaning of work you still do. The interviews confirm the same convergence at the individual level and add a dimension the netnography could not reach. The interviews show what dignity looks like when it is present. They show what people sound like when meaning, recognition, and identity are all working at once. And they show, in the gap between those accounts and the ones where everything is draining, what the Climate Corps is designed to restore.

4.3. Survey findings

Section 3.8 describes the two surveys deployed during the research period, their design rationale, and their limitations. This section presents the findings. Both samples are small (N=17 and N=16) and no statistical significance is claimed. What the surveys offer is structured corroboration: patterns that can be counted, compared with the qualitative findings, and checked for consistency. Appendix H reproduces both survey instruments.

What people want most is each other

When asked “Regardless of your current work situation, which of these sound most appealing right now?” (Survey 2, Q8), 13 of 16 respondents selected “work that connects me to a community with a shared purpose.” No other option came close. Ecological work followed at 8 mentions, then autonomy at 7. Figure 7 shows the distribution of responses.

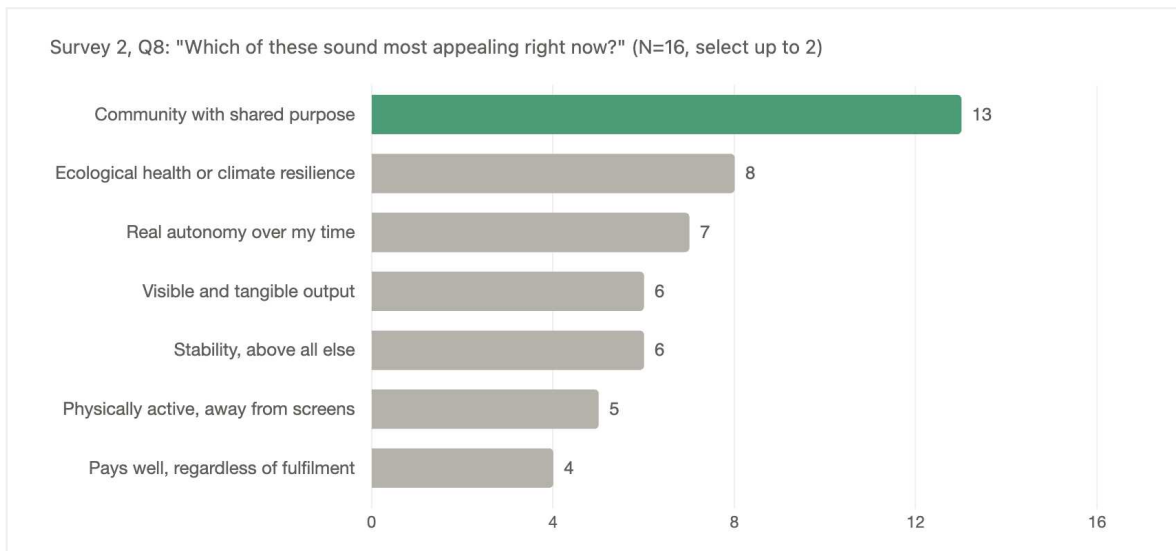


Figure 7. Responses to survey 2, question 8.

Note: Answer choices are abbreviated in the figure.

Respondents were instructed to select up to two. Many selected more. But “community with shared purpose” appeared in almost every response. Survey 1 asked a complementary question: what would matter most in environmental work? “Being part of a community who shares this purpose” was selected by 8 of 17 respondents, alongside “meaningful impact” (11), “visible, tangible results” (11), and “physical work outdoors” (9).

Every interview participant named human relationships as the most important thing work provides. The survey puts a number on the same instinct: 81% of respondents, given a list of options, chose community first.

Wanting to leave but not leaving

In Survey 2, 87% of respondents said they have seriously considered leaving desk-based work for something more hands-on, or at least think about it, even if they consider it unrealistic. One person had actually made the change. Only one person expressed no interest in moving toward more tangible, hands-on work.

The interviews surfaced something similar from a different angle. Five of eight participants identified social esteem and pay as the barrier between them and ecological work they already find appealing. The surveys confirm the desire is widespread. They also introduce a barrier the interviews did not foreground.

When asked what the biggest barrier to ecological or environmental work would be (Survey 2, Q10), the most common answer was not pay or skills. It was “I don’t know what roles or opportunities even exist in that space” (38%). Pay followed at 25%. Skills at 19%. Three respondents (19%) said “nothing significant: I’d do it if the opportunity were there.” Figure 8 shows the distribution of responses.

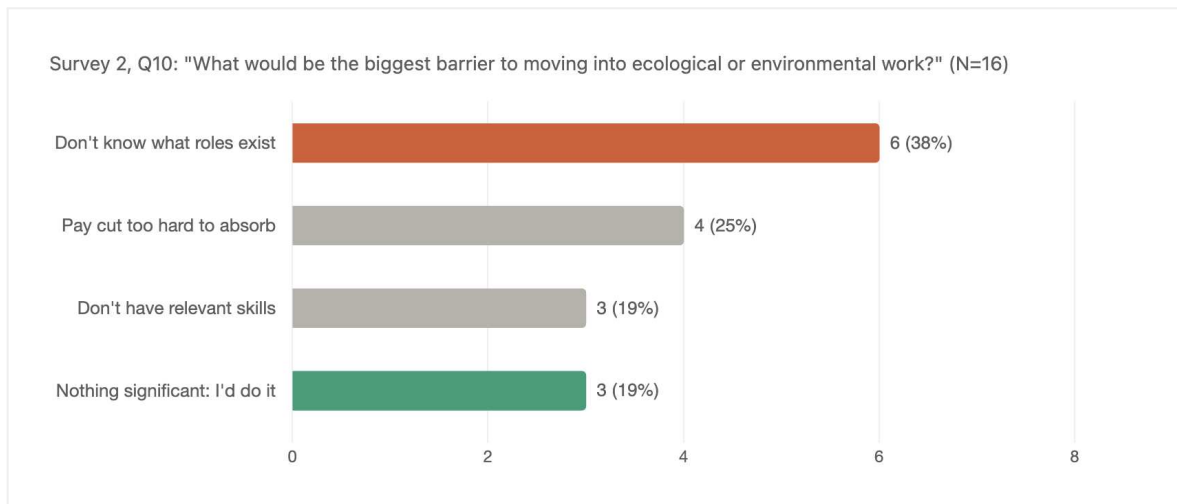


Figure 8. Responses to survey 2, question 10.

Note: Answer choices are abbreviated in the figure.

People are not uninterested. Many cannot picture what ecological work actually looks like, which makes it hard to want something specific enough to act on.

Nobody feels secure

Not a single respondent in Survey 2 selected “very secure” when asked about their professional security. Half said they are uncertain about their professional future. Three described their situation as precarious. One reported already experiencing significant upheaval.

Asked how confident they would be finding comparable work within six months if their current role disappeared: every single respondent expressed some degree of difficulty. Half said it would take real effort. A third said the market feels much tighter than it used to. Two said those roles don’t exist the way they used to. One said they are already in that situation.

The emotional texture is more complicated than alarm. Asked about their dominant feeling toward AI’s impact, 44% chose “mixed feelings: gains and losses that are hard to weigh.”

Low-grade anxiety and excitement tied at 19% each. Grief appeared once. Numbness appeared once. These are not people in crisis. They are people sitting with something they cannot quite name, weighing costs and benefits that keep shifting. The netnographic threads captured the same register: quiet displacement is lived as uncertainty, not catastrophe.

What people would miss, and what they are drawn to

Survey 1 asked what people would miss most if AI automated their work. Problem-solving and creative thinking led at 11 mentions, followed by learning and developing new skills (10), collaboration and teamwork (9), and a sense of accomplishment (7). One respondent added their own option: “A human pace. Basically starting to coordinate a number of agents at a wild pace is incredibly exciting but also creates a pace that is not feeling like the human work I’m used to anymore.”

These are the same things the interview participants described as the core of what makes work fulfilling. The creative act. The people. The feeling of having done something through your own capability.

When asked what makes spending time in nature meaningful, the top responses were natural beauty and wonder (13), peace and stress relief (13), and feeling connected to something larger (12). The first two align with Kaplan’s (1995) attention restoration theory. The third introduces the relational dimension that Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) theorises: nature as something one is part of and connected to, not merely restored by.

In their own words

Several open-text responses cut through the structured data. A respondent in environmental services wrote: “AI is causing environmental degradation and resource mismanagement, so ironically, using it is securing the need for my career field all while replacing us with AI.”

A Helsinki-based researcher: “As an expert, you have to learn how to use AI or you risk your career but it is also painful, knowing that you are taking part in building something harmful.”

A respondent in education, at length: “I am watching jobs in my industry be automated by AI on a daily basis and the remaining roles are being shipped overseas where it’s cheaper

to hire... The future looks bleak. And I'm honestly starting to wonder what else I can do to make money and survive once AI finally takes my current job once and for all. It feels like a matter of when, not if."

These could have appeared in any of the netnographic threads. The same uncertainty about whether to adapt or resist. The same tension between financial survival and meaningful work. The same question underneath all of it: if not this, then what?

The surveys and interviews capture that question from the demand side: what knowledge workers want, what they fear losing, what they would move toward if they could see a path. The next section asks whether Finland's employment and training institutions can see what these workers are asking for.

4.4. Expert interviews

Three video interviews and two email correspondences were conducted with institutional actors and ecological practitioners in Helsinki between March and April 2026. Section 3.9 describes the selection rationale and methods. At the time I conducted the interviews, I already had rough concepts in mind for how a Climate Corps programme might be designed to sit within the existing institutional landscape. The interviews played a pivotal role in validating core assumptions at the heart of the design. Rather than present the entire Climate Corps (CC) design during interviews, I intentionally focused on linchpin aspects of the design to discover critical vulnerabilities, must-have features, and operational realities I had not anticipated. The CC concept, which is presented in full in Chapter 5, integrates insights from the interviews. A short summary of the concept is provided below.

The Finnish Climate Corps: Helsinki pilot programme proposed for 2027/28 launch

The Finnish Climate Corps is a proposed employment programme that would place knowledge workers affected by AI-driven displacement into ecological care work in Helsinki. Participants would join in cohorts of 8-12 people and spend several months doing hands-on ecological work: habitat restoration, species monitoring, invasive species removal, meadow management, and similar tasks mandated by Helsinki's environmental policies but under-resourced in practice.

The programme would sit within Finland's employment services framework as an "employment-promoting service," meaning participants maintain their unemployment benefits while participating. No new legislation is required. The weekly rhythm combines field work, ecological training, and facilitated team development. An ecological transition facilitator supports each cohort through the professional identity shifts and evolutions that come with carrying one's existing expertise into a new domain.

The CC is designed to address two gaps simultaneously: the transition gap facing displaced knowledge workers who have nowhere meaningful to go, and the ecological labour gap facing a city that has mandated more ecological work than its current workforce can deliver.

The five experts occupy different positions across the systems the CC would connect. Their findings are presented in two groups: the employment and qualifications side, and the ecological work side.

4.4.1. Employment and qualifications

E2 is an employment services leader with the City of Helsinki. The interview with E2 addressed whether the CC could be classified within the employment services framework, what the system currently offers displaced knowledge workers, and how E2 sees AI affecting the labour market (E2, personal communication, April 1, 2026).

The CC's proposed positioning within the employment services framework appears feasible. A cohort-style programme combining work try-out with labour market training can be accommodated within the existing instruments. According to E2, "We have a lot of different options for how to arrange things." During the conversation, no immediate structural obstacles came up, though E2 was measured in their assessment, as one would expect of an institutional actor evaluating a concept at an early stage.

The interview surfaced a key finding about the CC's duration, which I had initially designed as 9–12 months to provide enough time for the professional identity transition process. Work try-out (työkokeilu), however, has a maximum of six months. A longer programme would need to be restructured as sequential instruments or classified as training, which allows more time but changes the institutional framing. The CC's design

target of 9–12 months is potentially still feasible, but would require careful negotiation during pilot development.

When asked what Helsinki Employment Services currently offers an experienced knowledge worker looking to make a significant career pivot, E2 was direct: “I don’t have an answer for you. If we knew it, we would have acquired it.” The system recognises that mid-career transition involves identity change (“it can be a big social and mental change”) and recommends that counselling be embedded within the programme: “The project should include ongoing counselling involved within the project.” But no programme currently exists for the population the CC targets.

E2 noted that they and other institutional actors are not anticipating a massive, sudden surge in AI-driven job losses in Uusimaa. On the contrary, Finland is proactively planning for how to harness the benefits of the digital transformation. E2 also noted that despite Finland’s relatively high unemployment rate at the moment, the majority of clients are in the employment system for less than three months.

At the close of the interview, E2 invited the researcher to submit a formal project proposal when the CC has a commitment from a host organisation. The researcher took this as a signal that E2 viewed the Climate Corps as potentially feasible and conceptually grounded.

E5, from the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), confirmed by email that competence acquired through a non-traditional pathway can count toward vocational qualification completion through Finland’s competence-based recognition system (E5, personal communication, March 24, 2026). If a programme like the CC produces competence aligned with existing qualification units, participants could use this pathway toward qualification completion. No new legislation is required.

4.4.2. Ecological work

Three experts addressed the ecological side: what the work actually requires, where it happens within Helsinki’s institutional structure, and what constraints shape it. The first expert was E1, an environmental leader within the City of Helsinki (E1, personal communication, March 26, 2026). E1’s interview confirmed a key piece of institutional architecture for the CC’s design. Helsinki’s ecological work operates on a two-track system: The Urban Environmental department plans, surveys, and monitors. However, the

city's public works enterprise implements and maintains. The Urban Environmental team rarely goes into the field. Climate Corps teams doing physical ecological work would sit with the city's public works enterprise.

Helsinki is not short on ecological data. E1 described the city as one of the most advanced in Europe in this regard. The main constraints for E1's team are specialist expertise in nature-based solutions design (requiring landscape architecture and engineering skills) and physical space (the tension between housing development and ecological preservation). On the implementation side, E1 observed that the growing portfolio of nature-based solutions across the city, including stormwater systems, restored streams, and meadow networks, is creating maintenance demands that may be outpacing current workforce capacity.

When asked what makes E1's team's work meaningful, E1 named two things: getting to see the results of what they are doing, and knowing there is a reason for the work. This was a lovely moment in the interview, a window into what it is like when a professional knows their work matters. Feeling that the work has purpose "comes naturally" when addressing problems like biodiversity loss and climate change.

Another reminder from the interview: City of Helsinki jobs are hard to come by. It is a desirable employer and vacancies are quickly filled. The realistic employment pathway for Climate Corps graduates runs through private ecological contractors and NGOs, not necessarily municipal positions.

E3 is a biologist and biodiversity expert. E3 has authored key documents related to Helsinki's approach to urban biodiversity enrichment (E3, personal communication, April 7, 2026). The interview with E3 addressed the question of what ecological care work actually demands of the people doing it.

The core skill is situated, creative, ecologically-informed judgement. "Problem-solving instead of just doing." A person cannot learn ecological care work as a set of rules because every decision is contextual: the same plant might be valuable in one location and a problem in another. Even trained biologists struggle with these in-situ judgements. People who are embedded at a site for several months can begin to develop the observation skills the work requires, but it takes sustained presence, not a weekend course.

E3 noted that the organisation that implements much of Helsinki's biodiversity agenda on the ground is "eager but worried." Not enough people. Not enough equipment. Not enough knowledge. And 30-50% of its ecological maintenance workforce is new each spring. Site-specific understanding built over one growing season is lost over winter and has to be rebuilt the following year.

The planner-practitioner disconnect compounds this. Some urban planners expect biodiverse public spaces to function just like traditional municipal parks: build them and the work is done. Ecologically diverse sites, on the other hand, take at least five years to fully establish. Some people, said E3, "think nature is static. It's not."

E3 also described how prisoners currently assist with manual ecological labour. They are willing to do difficult physical work and they work quickly. But they do not have the ecological training to make field judgements, which means they sometimes overdo it, mowing or clearing more than intended because they lack the contextual understanding to know when to stop. Best intentions do not always align with best results. The point is not a criticism of the workers but an illustration of what ecological care work actually requires: the ability to pause, observe, and decide. That capacity comes from sustained engagement with a site, not from enthusiasm alone.

E4 is a leader with the City's public works enterprise. E4 responded by email to three questions about how the Climate Corps might fit within existing operations (E4, personal communication, approximately April 8, 2026). E4's team operates on a client-provider model. All work requires a commissioned order with budget from the client department. "The client's funding is the most critical factor." A full team of non-ecological people "sounds like a lot," but individual coordinators could work on some projects, supported by skilled field staff and biodiversity professionals. The coordinator role he described, responsible for scheduling, follow-up, reporting, and invoicing, aligns with the kind of work knowledge workers' transferable skills would equip them for. Seasonal field positions sometimes cannot recruit experienced workers. Supervisory roles need both a degree and hands-on experience. No directly applicable higher education programme exists for some maintenance roles.

4.4.3. What the interviews reveal together

Each expert validated elements of the Climate Corps premise from their own vantage point. E2 confirmed the employment services mechanism is feasible. E5 confirmed the qualification pathway exists. E1 confirmed the two-track institutional structure and the growing demand for ecological maintenance. E3 confirmed what the work requires and the workforce continuity problem. E4 confirmed the operational model and the funding constraint.

What also came through is that these systems do not routinely communicate across institutional boundaries. The employment system, the qualification system, the planning apparatus, the implementation arm, and the ecological practitioners all function effectively within their own domains. The Climate Corps sits in the connective space between them. The crosswalk analysis in Section 4.5 examines that space systematically.

4.5. Policy-to-labour crosswalk

The expert interviews in Section 4.4 described what five people inside Helsinki's institutional landscape can see from where they sit. This section examines what the institutions themselves can see, using the documents they produce. Helsinki has committed to extensive ecological work through binding EU regulations and its own municipal policies. Section 3.10 describes the bespoke method I designed to check whether Finland's workforce planning and credentialling systems are organised to deliver that work. This section presents the findings.

4.5.1. What Helsinki's policies mandate

Seven policy documents governing ecological work in the Helsinki region were analysed. From these, 342 specific instances of mandated ecological work were identified. Each row names work that needs to be done, with a timeline and a responsible department. Some are precise deliverables with measurable targets, like conducting Habitats Directive Annex IV(a) species surveys across all programme sites, or maintaining Helsinki's 36 standing ecological monitoring programmes. Others are broader programmatic commitments, like increasing the ecological connectivity of Helsinki's green network or strengthening residents' biodiversity knowledge.

The analysis treats them uniformly as mandated work, but it does not claim to have assessed whether individual items are realistic, feasible, or funded. Section 3.10 describes the identification process. Appendix I presents the synthesis, including the 15-category bottom-up categorisation, per-category assessment against the Labour Force Barometer and vocational qualifications, and the clustering rationale. A bottom-up categorisation of the 342 rows produced 15 categories of work, which cluster into five groups, shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Five clusters of mandated ecological work.			
Cluster	Description	Rows	% of 342
I. Field ecology	Surveys, long-term monitoring, data systems	91	27%
II. Planning and protection	Ecologically informed planning, conservation designation, wildlife regulation	74	22%
III. Physical ecological work	Restoration, planting, habitat management, invasive species control	105	31%
IV. Infrastructure	Nature-based solutions, recreational infrastructure	43	13%
V. Public engagement	Education, volunteer coordination, workforce training	29	8%

Cluster III is the largest: 105 rows, nearly a third of all mandated work. The work includes stream restoration, meadow management, ecological planting, deadwood provision, and invasive alien species removal. It is site-based, skilled work that requires people in the field making decisions about living systems across growing seasons that span years.

4.5.2. What the workforce system sees

The Labour Force Barometer assesses occupational supply and demand across the Uusimaa region. Three signals stood out. Garden and horticultural labourers show the most dysfunctional pattern in the barometer's Natural Resources sector: 120 open jobs, 60 employed, 145 unemployed. A 70.8% unemployment rate and a 66.6% vacancy rate, simultaneously. The jobs exist, and the people exist, but there is a disconnect. The analysis notes this as a significant finding but does not investigate specific causal factors for the

labour mismatch. It is worth noting, though, that garden and horticultural labourers are those whose occupations map most directly to the physical ecological work of Cluster III.

Biologists, botanists, and zoologists are in oversupply: 8 open positions against 1,412 employed and 290 unemployed. Finland produces biology graduates who could do monitoring and survey work. The labour market does not create ongoing positions for them.

Then there is what the barometer does not measure at all. No occupational category exists for ecologist, ecological restorationist, conservation area manager, nature monitoring technician, invasive species specialist, habitat manager, urban ecologist, or restoration ecologist. These are the occupations that correspond to the work Helsinki's policies mandate. The labour planning system does not track them.

4.5.3. What the qualification system recognises

Two vocational qualifications in nature-based services exist within Finland's national framework: the ammattitutkinto (NQF 4, in force August 2025) and the erikoisammattitutkinto (NQF 5, in force August 2026). Both were reviewed in full in Finnish.

The NQF 4 qualification contains 27 units across wilderness and nature guiding, natural products, and game management. It is oriented toward nature services: tourism, guiding, foraging. No unit names ecological restoration, habitat management, biodiversity monitoring, invasive species removal, ecological planting, stream restoration, meadow management, or conservation area management.

The NQF 5 qualification includes one strong alignment: the Nature Surveys competence area, covering survey planning, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting. This maps to Cluster I. Three optional units in this competence area partially address Clusters I and II (environmental impact assessment, nature management plans, spatial data). Nothing addresses Cluster III.

The largest cluster of mandated ecological work, 105 rows and 31% of the total, has zero coverage in either vocational qualification.

At the national level, the picture is similar. Finland's National Forum for Skills Anticipation produces Skills Cards: sectoral foresight documents looking to 2035. There are 33 sector groups. Not one is dedicated to biodiversity, conservation, ecological restoration, or nature-based services. Ecological care work does not appear as a sector requiring its own skills anticipation.

4.5.4. Connecting the systems

Finland does not lack the institutional mechanisms to train, credential, and employ ecological workers. The competence-based recognition pathway exists (E5 confirmed this). The vocational qualification framework exists. The employment-promoting service classification is feasible (E2 confirmed this). The barometer tracks adjacent occupations. The policies mandate the work in granular detail. What is missing are the connections between these systems. Chapter 5 presents the Climate Corps as one way of building those connections.

4.5.5. Limitations

The crosswalk does not claim to have surveyed every relevant credential in Finland. Adjacent vocational qualifications in horticulture, forestry, and civil engineering were not examined and may partially cover Cluster III. University-level qualifications in biology and environmental sciences plausibly cover parts of Clusters I and II at a different qualification level. The barometer data covers Natural Resources in full but only one occupation from the Built Environment sector (landscape architects).

4.6. Precedent analysis

The Climate Corps is not the first programme to place people in ecological or environmental service work. Section 3.11 describes the four programmes selected for comparative analysis: the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC, United States, 1933-1942), the California Climate Action Corps (CCAC, United States, 2020-present), the European Solidarity Corps (ESC, European Union, 2018-present), and Germany's Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (FÖJ, 1993-present). Each was assessed through the thesis's three main theoretical lenses. Rather than walk through every programme against every lens, this section highlights what each programme does best, where it falls short, and what this thesis's Climate Corps can learn from it.

4.6.1. What each programme reveals

The Civilian Conservation Corps enrolled about three million unemployed young men in conservation work between 1933 and 1942 (National Park Service, 2023). It remains the most powerful demonstration of what happens when a government puts displaced people to work on public land at scale. Participants enrolled for six-month terms that could be extended, receiving pay alongside room, board, and clothing, with much of the pay sent home to families (Speakman, 2006). The programme operated as a parallel federal structure on public land rather than embedding participants within civilian employers (National Park Service, 2023). Established through New Deal legislation, it ran for nine years before wartime conditions ended the programme in 1942 (Speakman, 2006).

Camp life offered the ingredients for all five of Jahoda's (1982) latent functions. Time structure came from daily and weekly routines, and social contact came through residential living. Participants could find collective purpose through conservation of national resources, regular activity through structured work weeks, and status through a publicly legible role as contributors to national recovery (National Park Service, 2023; Social Welfare History Project, n.d.). The CCC was gender discriminatory (only men were allowed) and racially segregated. African American participants were often excluded from more skilled and professionally valuable roles (Cole, 1999).

When it comes to Honneth's (1995) third sphere, social recognition, the assessment is mixed. Social esteem largely came from the programme's collective image rather than individual credentials (National Park Service, 2023). Through Ibarra's (2003/2023) lens, the CCC is a case of identity work happening by accident: sustained practice, role models, and real tasks created the conditions for provisional selves, but the programme was not designed around career transition or identity transformation.

The California Climate Action Corps is the closest existing precedent to the Climate Corps concept this thesis proposes. It was launched in 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom through California Volunteers, Office of the Governor, rather than as a standalone statutory programme (California Volunteers, n.d.). Fellows serve 1,700 hours over 11 months with host partners across California, doing climate action, organic waste and food recovery, urban greening, and wildfire resilience work (California Volunteers, 2026). It is the strongest identity transformation case of all the precedents analysed. The programme

includes host-site placements in real organisations, career-readiness training, professional development, and climate-related certifications (California Volunteers, 2026; Climate Corps, n.d.).

CCAC is also more age-inclusive than the other three programmes, requiring participants to be at least 18 with no upper age limit (California Volunteers, 2026). But it is still framed around “emerging leaders” rather than people navigating mid-career displacement. This is a relevant finding for the Climate Corps of this thesis, which specifically aims to serve those who have lost or are losing their professional standing.

The European Solidarity Corps is where recognition infrastructure is most developed. Youthpass provides participants with a formal record of competences gained through the experience, and the Quality Label ensures that host organisations meet standards for participation (Youthpass, n.d.; European Youth Portal, n.d.). Beyond documentation, the programme provides general online training for participants and supports cross-border mobility within its volunteering structure (European Youth Portal, n.d.), and it operates under successive EU regulations covering the 2018–2020 and 2021–2027 programme periods (European Commission, n.d.). No other programme in the set takes recognition this seriously as a design element.

The downside is economic. ESC covers basic costs and provides pocket money, not a salary (European Youth Portal, n.d.). It is a youth solidarity programme for people mainly aged 18-30 (European Commission, n.d.). The recognition architecture is transferable. The compensation model is not: pocket money does not work for adults with mortgages and dependents.

Germany’s Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr offers the clearest ecological orientation model. Participants spend 12 months in ecological placements, attending required seminar days alongside their practical work (Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). The combination of sustained ecological practice with structured group reflection is exactly the rhythm proposed for the Climate Corps (see Chapter 5 for details). FÖJ also provides skills certificates that participants can present to employers and training programmes (Jugendfreiwilligendienste, n.d.).

Like ESC, FÖJ is allowance-based rather than salaried, and it is designed for young people generally under 27 (European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], n.d.).

The programme model is strong. The population it serves and the income it provides are both too narrow for what the Climate Corps needs.

4.6.2. Design principles

Seven design principles emerge from the cross-case comparison set out in section 4.6.1. Each is supported by evidence drawn from the programmes documented in that section.

Public purpose must be legible. All four programmes derive participant meaning from work tied to recognised public benefit. The CCC framed conservation work around parks, forests, and rangelands, addressing soil erosion, forestry, and natural resource protection (National Park Service, 2023; Speakman, 2006). CCAC organises fellow placements around urban greening, food recovery, and climate resilience (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC operates through solidarity activities responding to societal challenges (European Commission, n.d.), and the FÖJ situates participants in ecological and environmental protection roles (Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). Across the four cases, work that the public can see appears to generate the conditions under which motivation and recognition follow.

Duration matters. Identity work develops through sustained practice over time. The CCC enrolled participants for six-month terms that were often extended (Speakman, 2006); CCAC operates on an eleven-month, 1,700-hour service term (California Volunteers, 2026); and the FÖJ runs as a twelve-month placement (Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). The ESC is the partial exception within the set, since its activity durations vary widely by project type and do not consistently support extended identity formation in the same way (European Commission, n.d.). The three programmes with comparable year-long terms all enable the kind of sustained role-testing that shorter experiences cannot.

Cohort and support structures are not optional extras. Each programme that produced identity work included some form of structured peer experience. The CCC organised participants into residential camps with shared cohort routines (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC builds cohort engagement through professional development, workshops, and career-readiness panels (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC supports participants through general online training and cross-border mobility within the volunteering structure (European Youth Portal, n.d.), and the FÖJ requires educational seminar days alongside the practical placement (Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). Across the four cases, the

conversion of service into identity transition depends on shared structured experience alongside the work itself.

Recognition should be formalised, not assumed. The four programmes vary widely in how they document participant contribution. The CCC delivered training during participation but produced no portable credential, meaning the social esteem attached to the work did not consistently translate into labour-market recognition after exit (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC offers career-readiness training and education awards (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC provides the most developed recognition architecture in the set: Youthpass records non-formal learning and the Quality Label certifies host organisations (Youthpass, n.d.; European Commission, n.d.). The FÖJ issues skills certificates that participants can present to employers and training programmes (Jugendfreiwilligendienste, n.d.). Programmes designed without documentation of learning leave participants without portable evidence of the identity they have built.

Compensation changes who can participate. The four programmes form a clear compensation gradient. The CCC provided pay alongside room, board, and clothing, with a portion of pay sent home to families (Speakman, 2006). CCAC offers a living allowance and education award (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC provides pocket money and basic expenses (European Youth Portal, n.d.), and the FÖJ similarly offers an allowance rather than a salary (European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], n.d.; Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). The further a programme moves from a living wage, the narrower the pool of people who can afford to participate. None of the four pays at a level that would sustain a mid-career professional with rent, dependents, or prior salary baselines.

Host-site embedding improves transferability. Placement structure shapes how readily service experience translates into future work. The CCC operated as a parallel federal structure with camps on public land, which limited continuity with civilian employers after exit (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC, ESC, and FÖJ all use a hub-and-host model in which participants are placed with existing organisations: California's host partners across sectors (California Volunteers, 2026), Europe's Quality-Labelled host organisations (European Commission, n.d.), and Germany's assignment sites at ecological non-profits (Ökologische Freiwilligendienste, n.d.). Embedding within existing organisations appears

to create more direct bridges to subsequent employment than service delivered through a separate institutional structure.

Durability depends on statutory foundation. Three of the four programmes rest on legislative or statutory bases that have outlasted individual political cycles. The CCC was established through New Deal legislation and ran for nine years before wartime conditions ended the programme (Speakman, 2006). The ESC operates under successive EU regulations covering the 2018–2020 and 2021–2027 programme periods (European Commission, n.d.). The FÖJ is embedded within Germany’s statutory youth voluntary services framework (EACEA, n.d.). CCAC, by contrast, was launched in 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom through California Volunteers, Office of the Governor, and appears to depend more on continuing executive and administrative support than on a dedicated statutory foundation (California Volunteers, n.d.). The federal American Climate Corps proposed under the Biden administration, which was terminated by executive order in January 2025, illustrates the vulnerability of climate-service programmes that lack statutory permanence. Statutory foundations appear to improve durability across political cycles. Programmes resting on executive or administrative continuity remain more exposed to political reversal.

4.6.3. What all four programmes miss

None were designed for mid-career displaced professionals. The CCC enrolled young unemployed men in the 1930s (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC, while age-inclusive, frames its programme around “emerging leaders” rather than experienced professionals navigating displacement (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC operates as a youth solidarity programme for people mainly aged 18 to 30 (European Commission, n.d.), and the FÖJ targets young people generally under 27 (EACEA, n.d.). The Climate Corps proposed in this thesis is designed specifically for mid-career knowledge workers experiencing AI displacement, a population none of the precedents serve.

Compensation across all four precedents falls short. Pay is below what adults with established professional baselines would need in order to participate. The CCC’s pay plus room and board, while substantial for the 1930s, would not translate into a contemporary living wage (Speakman, 2006). CCAC offers a living allowance rather than a salary (California Volunteers, 2026). The ESC and FÖJ are explicitly allowance- and

pocket-money-based (European Youth Portal, n.d.; EACEA, n.d.). The Climate Corps's design preserves participants' existing earnings-related unemployment benefits as the income basis, which addresses what no precedent solves.

Portable recognition for adults crossing sectors remains underdeveloped. In the precedents, service-period esteem does not reliably convert into durable labour-market recognition. The CCC produced no portable credential, meaning the social esteem of conservation work did not consistently follow participants into civilian employment (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC offers career-readiness training and education awards (California Volunteers, 2026), but no evidence verifies durable occupational standing after exit. The ESC's Youthpass and the FÖJ's skills certificates are both built for youth transitions, not for adults with existing professional histories (Youthpass, n.d.; Jugendfreiwilligendienste, n.d.). The Climate Corps addresses this through proposed alignment with OPH's competence-based qualifications pathway, which is built into the design from the outset.

Identity transition appears only as a secondary effect. In the precedent programmes, identity transition is not a primary design objective. The CCC produced provisional selves and role models as accidents of camp life and not as designed features (National Park Service, 2023). CCAC's career-readiness work is the closest to deliberate identity design within the set (California Volunteers, 2026), though it remains pitched at emerging leaders rather than at people who have lost a professional identity they once held. None of the precedents function as a bridge from one socially esteemed identity to another, which is the central challenge facing knowledge workers in cognitive-work displacement. The Climate Corps treats identity transition as its primary design objective, and Chapter 5 sets out how the programme is built around that purpose.

5. THE FINNISH CLIMATE CORPS

Chapter 4 documented what *quiet displacement* looks like from the inside: how AI hollows professional work before anyone loses a job, what the experience costs people beyond income, and where Finland's institutional landscape creates both gaps and opportunities. This chapter is the design response.

The Finnish Climate Corps is a Research through Design artifact (Section 3.3). Every element of the programme presented here grew out of the research, including the netnographic analysis, knowledge worker interviews, surveys, crosswalk, expert interviews, and precedent studies.

The chapter works in two modes. One is narrative. A composite character named Anni Korhonen, built from the research data, lives through displacement in Part 1 of her story, showing what the existing system does to her. Part 2 follows Anni into the Climate Corps, showing what the programme changes. Both narratives are design fiction grounded in evidence (Section 3.13).

The other mode is analytical. Simplified service blueprints show what the current unemployment system does to someone like Anni, and what the Climate Corps would do differently. Between the two sits the design itself: the CC's institutional structure, its ecological work, its cohort model, and the identity transition architecture that makes it more than a jobs programme.

5.1. Composite persona and design fiction, part 1

The Climate Corps is designed for a specific population: knowledge workers in Helsinki whose professional lives have been disrupted by AI-driven transformation. To make the design concrete, this section and Section 5.4 follow a single composite character through displacement, unemployment, and into the Climate Corps. Anni Korhonen is built from the research presented in Chapter 4: 202 firsthand accounts of quiet displacement, eight knowledge worker interviews, 33 survey responses, five expert interviews, and detailed research into Finland's employment system. She is not a real person. Every element of her experience is traceable to collected data, verified policy, or established theory.

5.1.1. Meet Anni

Figure 9 introduces Anni before AI arrived at her workplace.

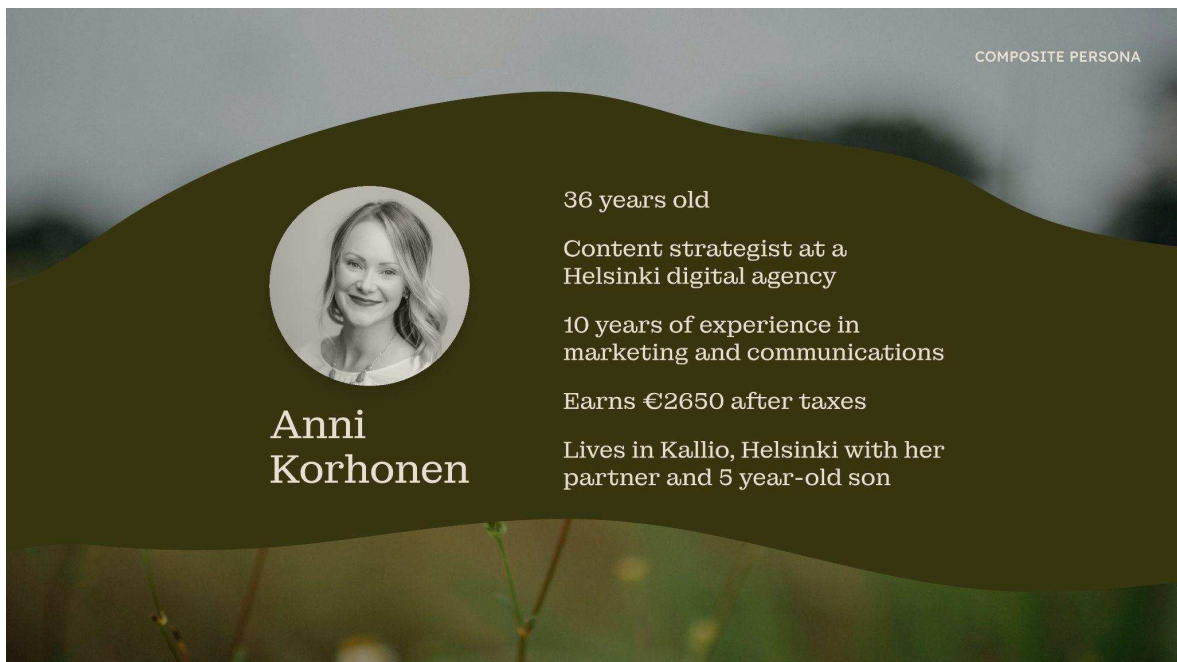


Figure 9. Anni Korhonen, composite persona.

Anni is 36, a content strategist at a mid-sized Helsinki digital agency. She has spent ten years in marketing and communications. She earns €3,800 gross per month (~€2,650 net), lives with her partner and their five-year-old son in a rented apartment in Kallio (~€1,400/month), and is a member of YTK, Finland’s largest unemployment fund. Her partner earns €3,200 gross. Between them, they cover the rent, childcare (€295/month), and the ordinary costs of a young family in Helsinki. There is no financial cushion.

She is good at her job. She writes clearly, thinks strategically, and knows how to make complex projects legible to the people funding them. She became a content strategist because she believed words matter. She has never been unemployed.

5.1.2. Anni’s quiet displacement

The following narrative traces Anni’s displacement from hollowing out to unemployment. Every element draws on the findings presented in Chapter 4.

The changes begin on a Monday. Anni’s agency has signed a contract with an AI content platform. Her manager frames it as an upgrade: “You can focus on strategy now.” Anni agrees. She has always wanted more strategic work.

Within three months, the strategic work hasn't materialised. Her role has shifted from creating content to reviewing AI-generated output. She catches errors in tone, corrects inaccuracies, and smooths out sloppy phrasing. She isn't writing anymore. She's just cleaning up messes.

Her team shrinks from eight to five. The agency calls it a 'restructuring toward AI-augmented workflows'. The volume is theoretically manageable because the AI does the first drafts. But cleaning up the sloppiness takes more time than her manager realises. Also, the work feels different. The joy of writing, the craft, is gone.

One morning, the team is working on a headline for a client project. Anni has ten years of experience writing headlines, so she starts drafting options. Before she can share them, two colleagues have already pasted AI-generated "ideas" into the Slack channel. Nobody even asks to see hers.

She sits staring at her list of ten headlines on her screen. She can't quite tell how she feels. It's a certain kind of sadness, like something inside her is breaking.

She starts reaching for AI herself. At first it's for small things: a subject line, a caption. Then she notices she's using it to start paragraphs she used to write instinctively. The words used to come. Now she stares at the blank screen, waits, and opens the AI tool because waiting feels unproductive. She's trying not to use it much, but she can see the future where resistance becomes impractical. She's honest enough with herself to know she'll eventually stop resisting.

Anni became a content strategist because she believed that clear, honest communication matters. She took pride in crafting language that moved people. Now it seems like nobody really cares about quality. And they certainly don't care enough to ask for her professional judgement. Why would they come to her? The AI generates twelve options in seconds and the team votes in Slack. Done. Anni starts to wonder whether any of it ever mattered in the first place.

She doesn't talk about this at home. Her partner asks how work is going and she says it's okay. She hasn't been fired or demoted. Her salary is the same. By any external measure, she's fine. But something essential has drained out of her working life. The people around her can't see it because she still has a job, for now.

Nine months after the AI tools arrived, the agency announces another restructuring. Anni's role is eliminated. The remaining content work will be handled by a junior employee using the AI platform.

On her last day, she feels something she didn't expect: relief. The slow, creeping sadness at watching her job change around her is over. Now there's a simpler way to describe what she's going through: she's unemployed.

Anni registers with Helsinki Employment Services within a week. She qualifies for earnings-related unemployment allowance through YTK: roughly €1,670 per month net. It's a big drop from her salary, €2,650, but she thinks she and her partner can make it work if she gets another job quickly.

Anni's caseworker is professional and busy. They build an employment plan together. She has three months of professional protection, meaning she can limit her job search to roles in her own field.

She spends the first month doing what the system expects. Updating her CV, writing cover letters, applying to content strategy roles. She gets one interview. It goes well until the hiring manager mentions that the role will increasingly involve managing AI content pipelines. Anni hears herself saying "that sounds great" and feels a small, precise despair.

Her days have lost their shape. She wakes when her son wakes, takes him to kindergarten, and then the hours stretch open. She applies to jobs, but the process takes two hours. The rest of the day she fills with errands, cleaning, scrolling on her phone. She misses having colleagues. She misses having someone need her for something at 2pm. She would say she misses being busy.

After two months, her benefits get reduced to 80%, so she receives €1,335 per month. After three months, professional protection ends. She must now apply for any suitable job or risk sanctions. The roles available have nothing to do with her skills. She applies because the system requires four applications per month and she's afraid of what would happen if she didn't.

By the fifth month, Anni has sent over twenty applications. She's had three interviews and no offers. Her benefits will drop again. She has begun to think of herself as someone who used to be a content strategist. Past tense. She's no longer who she was, not yet someone

new, and the system surrounding her offers no pathway toward becoming anything in particular.

She doesn't know about the Climate Corps yet.

5.2. The existing system

The previous section told Anni's story from the inside. This section shows the system she moves through. Each of the six phases from Figure 10 is presented as a simplified service blueprint, showing what Anni does, how the system responds (or how it does not), and what the theoretical framework reveals about what is being lost.

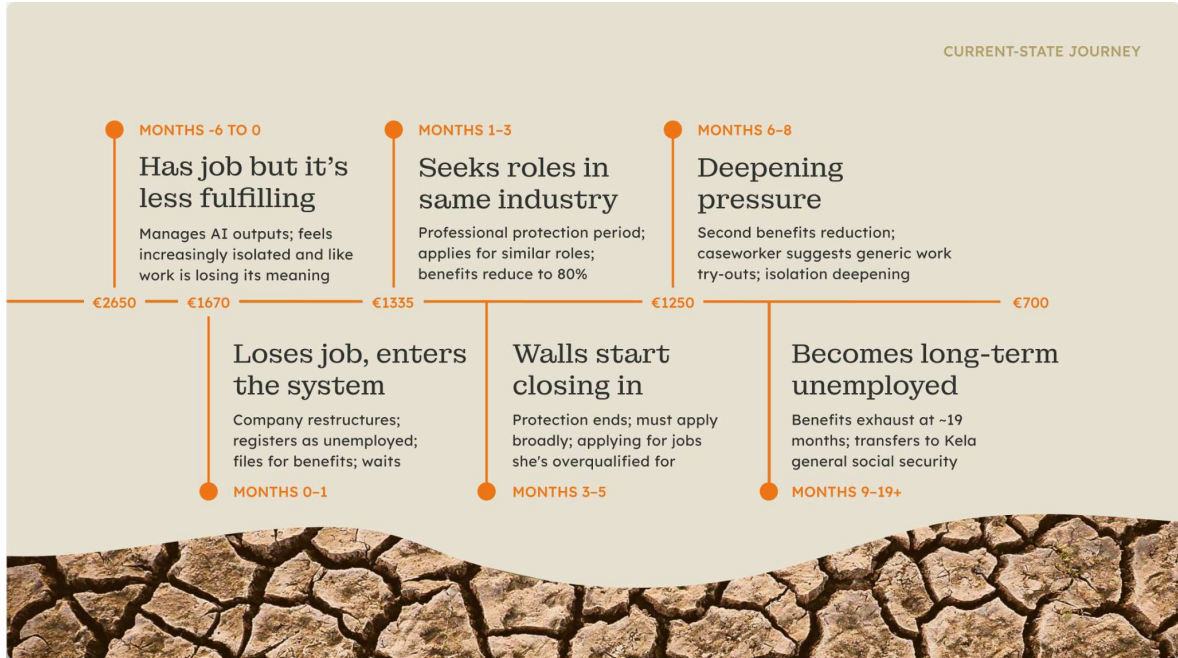


Figure 10. Anni's existing-state journey of displacement and unemployment.

5.2.1. Has a job but it is less fulfilling (phase 0)

During this period, no institutional actor is aware of Anni's situation. Helsinki's employment system has no mechanism for engaging with someone still employed but experiencing professional erosion. The system's clock starts at the moment of job loss, but Anni's clock started months earlier. Table 12 shows Phase 0.

Table 12. Has a job but it is less fulfilling (phase 0).

Months –6 to 0	
Anni (participant actions)	Edits AI output instead of creating. Colleagues turn to AI for ideas instead of turning to her. Starts reaching for AI to write things she used to write instinctively.
Frontstage (visible interactions)	None.
Backstage (institutional processes)	None. No actor is aware of Anni's situation.
Income	€2,650/month net (full salary)
Jahoda functions	All five present but eroding. Social contact thinning as the team shrinks. Status shifting from creator to editor of AI output. Collective purpose draining.
Ibarra position	Holding on. Still identifies as a content strategist.

5.2.2. Loses job, enters the system (phase 1)

After her employment ends, Anni registers as a jobseeker in Job Market Finland and applies for earnings-related unemployment allowance (Job Market Finland, n.d.). A seven-working-day qualifying period applies before the first payment (A-Kassa, 2025). Table 13 shows Phase 1.

Table 13. Loses job, enters the system (phase 1).	
Months 0–1	
Anni	Feels relief on her last day. Registers as a jobseeker. Applies for earnings-related allowance. Waits.
Frontstage	Employer HR: notice, final pay. Työmarkkinatori: digital registration. YTK: benefit claim submission, document uploads. Helsinki Employment Services: initial contact, employment plan created.
Backstage	Employment Services issues a labour policy statement used in benefit processing. YTK processes the claim and calculates the allowance. Kela is not yet involved.
Income	€2,650 during notice period → €0 for 7 working days → ~€1,670/month net (earnings-related allowance at 100% rate)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: collapses. Social contact: severed from colleagues. Collective purpose: gone. Status: shifts to “jobseeker.” Regular activity: gone, then slowly replaced by application routines.
Ibarra position	Holding on. “I’m a content strategist looking for content strategy work.”

5.2.3. Seeks roles in same industry (phase 2)

Professional protection allows Anni to limit her job search to roles matching her education and experience during the first three months. This is a meaningful buffer, but it assumes the roles exist. Around month 2, the first benefits reduction arrives automatically. Whether Anni's target occupation is contracting in the Helsinki labour market is not currently part of the system's assessment. Table 14 shows Phase 2.

Table 14. Seeks roles in the same industry (phase 2).

Months 1–2	
Anni	Applies for content strategy roles. Gets one interview that mentions AI pipelines. Days lose their shape after kindergarten drop-off. Misses being needed.
Frontstage	Helsinki Employment Services: caseworker check-ins (~15 minutes, caseload of ~200). YTK: monthly benefit claims, processed routinely. Job market: applications submitted, mostly unanswered.
Backstage	YTK applies the first benefits reduction automatically at ~month 2.
Income	€1,670 → €1,335/month net (first reduction to 80%)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: weak rhythm of applications. Social contact: isolated, professional network thinning. Collective purpose: gone. Status: still “content strategist” on paper, increasingly past tense. Regular activity: job applications.
Ibarra position	Holding on, starting to waver. The roles she's applying for are shrinking in number and quality.

5.2.4. Walls start closing in (phase 3)

Professional protection ends. The system now requires Anni to apply for and accept any suitable job, broadly defined, or risk sanctions on her benefits. Four applications are required per month. The caseworker suggests a generic work try-out. Retraining is structurally discouraged: enrolling in full-time study would mean losing unemployment benefits, and the adult education allowance, which previously supported mid-career retraining, was abolished in 2024. Table 15 shows Phase 3.

Table 15. Walls start closing in (phase 3).

Months 3–5	
Anni	Applies for jobs she’s overqualified for. Twenty applications, three interviews, no offers. Withdrawing socially.
Frontstage	Caseworker monitors compliance. Suggests generic work try-out placements. 15-minute check-ins continue.
Backstage	Helsinki Employment Services manages hundreds of thousands of jobseekers across the employment area. Anni is one case in a caseload of ~200. The system tracks her compliance, not her wellbeing.
Income	€1,335/month net (80% rate, steady through this phase)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: rhythm of applications only. Social contact: isolated. Collective purpose: gone. Status: “overqualified applicant.” Regular activity: compliance tasks.
Ibarra position	Between identities. No longer a content strategist in practice. The system offers no alternative identity to experiment with.

5.2.5. Deepening pressure (phase 4)

The second benefits reduction arrives around month 8. The caseworker suggests employment-promoting services more insistently: a work try-out at a random employer or a basic training course. These measures are designed to move jobseekers toward any available employment as quickly as possible. They are not designed to support a meaningful professional transition.

In the future-state system (Section 5.5), this is the moment where the Climate Corps enters Anni's journey. Table 16 shows Phase 4.

Table 16. Deepening pressure (phase 4).

Months 6–8	
Anni	Applies without conviction. Considers accepting any job. Sleep disrupted, confidence low.
Frontstage	Caseworker increases pressure to accept employment-promoting services. Available options: generic work try-outs, basic training courses.
Backstage	YTK applies second benefits reduction automatically at ~month 8. Helsinki Employment Services flags Anni as requiring more intensive activation measures.
Income	€1,335 → €1,250/month net (second reduction to 75%)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: eroded. Social contact: deeply isolated. Collective purpose: gone. Status: “long-term jobseeker.” Regular activity: going through motions.
Ibarra position	Between identities, stuck. No provisional selves available. No low-stakes environment to experiment in.

5.2.6. Becomes long-term unemployed (phase 5)

Earnings-related benefits exhaust at approximately month 19. Anni transfers to Kela's general social security benefit, which is means-tested. Her partner's income counts against eligibility. The caseworker relationship, already thin, becomes thinner. Anni is administratively reclassified. The system has not failed on its own terms. It provided income replacement, job search infrastructure, and activation measures. But it was designed for a labour market where the jobs Anni trained for still exist. They do not. Table 17 shows Phase 5.

Table 17. Becomes long-term unemployed (phase 5).

Months 9–19+	
Anni	Stops applying with any expectation. Fills time. Considers retraining, volunteering, and informal work.
Frontstage	Kela: means-tested benefit application. Helsinki Employment Services: reduced contact. Job market: silent.
Backstage	Kela assesses household income. Partner's earnings reduce Anni's entitlement. Administrative reclassification from jobseeker to benefit recipient.
Income	€1,250 → ~€700/month net (Kela general social security, means-tested)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: gone. Social contact: isolated. Collective purpose: gone. Status: "long-term unemployed." Regular activity: minimal.
Ibarra position	Between identities, no movement. Without a structured environment for experimentation, identity transition has stalled.

5.2.7. What the system provides and what it does not

The Finnish unemployment system provides income replacement, job search infrastructure, and a caseworker relationship. These are real and important. Without earnings-related benefits, Anni's household would face a financial crisis from month one. But the system is designed around one assumption: that the jobseeker's problem is finding an available job and getting hired. Anni's problem is different. The jobs she trained for are disappearing. The industry that valued her expertise is contracting. She does not need help writing a CV or finding job postings. She needs a pathway into work that exists, will continue to exist, and can use what she already knows how to do.

The six phases above reveal a consistent pattern. Income declines in a staircase: from €2,650 to €1,670 to €1,335 to €1,250 and finally to €700. Jahoda's (1982) latent functions erode early and never recover. Ibarra's (2003/2023) identity transition stalls at "between identities" because the system provides no environment for experimentation with provisional selves. The system replaces income. It does not replace what Jahoda identified as the psychological functions of employment, and it does not support the identity transition that Ibarra describes as essential to professional reinvention. The next section asks what kind of intervention this calls for.

5.3. The Climate Corps design

The Climate Corps (hereafter CC) is designed as a response to the findings presented in Chapter 4. Before presenting the design, it is worth naming what kind of intervention this is.

Boggs (1977, p. 100) defined prefiguration as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal." The CC adapts this idea to a designed institutional context. It uses Helsinki's existing employment services infrastructure, its benefit system, and its ecological mandates. From the outside, it looks like an employment-promoting service. From the inside, participants experience work organised around ecological care, collective purpose, and embodied engagement with living systems.

In Three Horizons terms, the CC can be understood as a second-horizon intervention: a transitional form that operates through present institutions while creating space for different future patterns to emerge (Sharpe et al., 2016; see Section 3.2). Törnberg (2021) bridges prefigurative politics with transition studies, identifying pathways through which prefigurative strategies can produce broader systemic change. The CC follows this logic: it enters the existing regime as something familiar (an employment-promoting service) while carrying values and practices that belong to a different future. The risk is that institutional absorption neutralises transformative intent. The CC's facilitator role, cohort structure, and identity transition architecture are designed to resist that pull.

Each feature that follows is grounded in insights from the netnographic analysis, knowledge worker interviews, surveys, expert interviews, crosswalk, or precedent analysis.

5.3.1. Who the programme serves

Chapter 4 documented quiet displacement across countries, industries, and career stages. The CC narrows that landscape to one designable population in one city: knowledge workers in Helsinki whose professional lives have been disrupted by AI-driven transformation.

They may have been laid off, restructured out, or made redundant when their employer adopted AI tools and decided fewer people were needed. What they share is the experience described throughout Chapter 4: watching their expertise lose its market value while their capacity to contribute remains intact. They are content strategists, project managers, data analysts, communications professionals, designers, researchers.

They arrive at different stages. Some, like Anni, have been unemployed for months. Some are freshly displaced. The CC's institutional entry point is the unemployment system (Section 5.5.2 explains how), which means participants must be registered jobseekers. Eligibility follows unemployment benefit eligibility requirements, which in practice means Finnish citizens, EU/EEA citizens, and permanent residents who have met the employment condition. But the design recognises that displacement started long before registration. Participants might enter the programme carrying cognitive erosion from months of AI-mediated work (Section 4.2) or identity strain from watching their expertise become invisible (Section 4.2).

5.3.2. Institutional home

The CC operates within Finland's existing employment services infrastructure. No new legislation is required.

Since January 2025, employment services in Finland have been organised at the municipal level (Act 380/2023). The CC would be classified as an employment-promoting service, combining work try-out (*työkokeilu*) with labour market training (*työvoimakoulutus*). E2, the employment services expert, confirmed that a cohort-style programme combining these instruments is potentially feasible: "We have a lot of different options for how to arrange things" (E2, personal communication, April 1, 2026). E2 acknowledged that details would need to be worked out during the pilot design phase.

This classification means participants maintain their earnings-related unemployment allowance during the programme, so there is no sanctions risk for joining. However, under recently passed legislation, people who participate in training and work try-out programmes now see their earnings-related unemployment allowances decline during participation rather than hold steady.

The top-up

The CC proposes a municipal top-up restoring the allowance to the full earnings-related level, plus the standard €9/day expense reimbursement for programme days (~€200/month). This provides a small monetary incentive for CC participants: if they join, their take-home benefits will be somewhat higher than if they were to stay home and continue applying for jobs. Without the top-up, participation would carry a financial penalty. The exact mechanism for funding the top-up is a question for the pilot stage. Section 5.5 traces the full income trajectory across each programme phase.

Programme duration

The CC's design target is 9 to 12 months. Work try-outs can run up to six months; labour market training can extend longer. A programme of this length would need to be structured as sequential instruments or classified primarily as training, which E2 indicated is feasible. Ibarra's (2003/2023) research on professional identity transition suggests that sustained transformation requires extended time for experimentation, new social ties, and sensemaking, though no fixed minimum duration is specified.

Stakeholder ecosystem

Table 18 shows the institutional actors the CC connects and the role each plays.

Table 18. Climate Corps stakeholders.	
Actor	Role in the Climate Corps
Helsinki Employment Services	Referral, employment plan management, benefit administration
Host organisations (ecological contractors, NGOs)	Work sites, ecological supervision, daily task direction
CC programme administration	Coordination, cohort building, facilitator management
CC ecological transition facilitators	Identity transition support, team facilitation, reflective practice
Training partners (universities, SYKE, vocational providers)	Ecological training, species identification, monitoring protocols
OPH	Competence-based qualification recognition

Most of these actors already exist. The CC adds a small staff of 3 to 5 programme administrators and one ecological transition facilitator per one to two cohorts of 12. The CC's primary institutional contribution is connecting existing actors around a shared purpose they currently pursue separately.

5.3.3. Attentive, ecological care

Helsinki's policies mandate extensive ecological work across the city's green and blue infrastructure. The crosswalk analysis (Section 4.5) identified 342 instances of mandated ecological work across seven policy documents, clustering into five domains: field ecology (27%), planning and protection (22%), physical ecological work (31%), infrastructure (13%), and public engagement (8%). The Climate Corps directly supports these domains.

Hub-and-spoke placement

Teams of 12 are placed with host organisations. The host provides the work and the ecological expertise. The CC coordinates, facilitates, and trains. This follows the precedent set by the California Climate Action Corps (CCAC) and responds to the design principle that host-site embedding improves transferability (Section 4.6).

Restoration through the work itself

Why ecological work, and why for this population? Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory identifies directed attention as a finite cognitive resource consumed by sustained screen-based work. Six of eight interview participants described their cognitive capacities diminishing through AI use (Section 4.2). The CC places participants in the environments most likely to restore those capacities. It also satisfies what Kaplan calls compatibility: the work and the setting fit each other, deepening the restorative effect beyond what either nature exposure or outdoor employment offers alone.

Ecological care work also generates meaning that a purely digital work environment does not always provide. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues that care for living systems involves labour, affect, and ethics together (p. 5). You come to care about what you care for.

Embodied and situated

The work resists the kind of automation that displaced these workers. It requires physical presence in a specific landscape on a specific day, reading conditions that change with the weather, the season, and the history of the site. E3, the biodiversity expert, observed that even trained biologists struggle with in-situ ecological judgements (Section 4.4). A person standing in a meadow deciding whether the soil is too wet to work today is exercising a kind of judgement that no remote system can replicate.

AI as an optional tool

The CC does not adopt a strict anti-AI stance, but it recognises that many participants enter the programme carrying an emotional burden from having been forced to use AI tools against their will or professional judgement. The netnographic analysis documented this across dozens of accounts (Section 4.1), and interview participants described it with visceral clarity. The CC therefore adopts a humanising approach to AI: participants are

empowered with technology that helps them achieve ecological objectives, while the programme acknowledges the ecological costs of the AI tools themselves. Species identification apps are available but optional. Monitoring data can be processed by hand or with computational assistance depending on the participant's preference. No CC participant is required to use AI. Autonomy over which tools to use and how is a fundamental principle.

5.3.4. Cohort structure and daily life

The cohort

The CC's cohort structure is one of its defining characteristics. In Survey 2, 81% of respondents chose "work that connects me to a community with shared purpose" as the most appealing kind of work (Section 4.3). As one interviewee said, the sense of belonging and finding others in the same situation would "transcend the kind of skills or knowledge that you would get from the programme" (Section 4.2). The cohort is the mechanism that makes ecological work transformative.

Weekly rhythm

The proposed weekly structure is three days in the field, one day of training, one day for team development and reflection. Three consecutive days in natural environments is consistent with the ART literature on sustained nature engagement (Kaplan, 1995; Berman et al., 2008). The training day builds domain-specific ecological skills and feeds the credential pathway. The reflection day supports the identity work that Ibarra's (2003/2023) framework requires. In the field, participants try on new roles and test new capabilities. In reflection, they put words to what is changing, narrate the transition as it happens, and begin revising their sense of who they are professionally.

Inclusion and accessibility

The CC is accessible across physical abilities and cultural backgrounds. The five work domains vary in physical demand: community engagement and ecological data collection require different capacities than stream restoration or invasive species removal. Participants are matched to roles that use their strengths and align with their interests and abilities. A former project manager might coordinate across teams. A former data analyst might lead monitoring protocols. A former communications professional might run public

engagement. Everyone contributes to the same mission through the work that suits them best.

Communal meals

Shared food is a deliberate design element. It builds the collegial bonds that participants described missing most. When one interviewee described the difference between their current remote role and their previous field work, the distinction was concrete: “It used to be community, it used to be experiences, it used to be food” (Section 4.2). The canteen signals that the programme takes care of the people who are caring for the land, which is a direct response to Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) warning that ecological care can only be sustained when carers’ own resources are protected (p. 163).

Multi-benefit projects

Each project serves multiple ecological purposes simultaneously. A rain garden addresses stormwater flooding, urban heat, pollinator habitat, and soil health at once. E1 named two things that make ecological work meaningful: “getting to see the results of what you’re doing, and knowing there’s a reason for the work” (E1, personal communication, March 26, 2026). Multi-benefit projects deliver both.

Seasonal considerations

Helsinki’s ecological work is seasonal, losing 30 to 50% of its ecological maintenance workforce each spring because seasonal workers do not return (E3, personal communication, April 7, 2026). The CC’s winter programme adapts accordingly: compressed field work during the warmest months, expanded training, ecological data processing, species study, and spring planning during winter. The details are a design question for the pilot.

5.3.5. Transition architecture

Employment programmes put people to work. The CC does more than that. It is designed to support people through a professional identity transition. Ibarra’s (2003/2023) framework holds that identity does not change through planning or analysis. It changes through practice: trying on provisional selves, testing new roles in low-stakes settings, gradually revising the internal narrative of who you are. The CC provides the conditions for that experimentation. It does not prescribe the destination.

The ecological transition facilitator

This is the most important role in the programme. One facilitator per 12 to 24 participants, covering one to two cohorts. Three findings shape the role. First, identity resistance: six of eight interview participants could not fully engage with a displacement scenario (Section 4.2). The facilitator creates conditions where self-recognition can emerge through practice rather than confrontation. Second, E2 recommended that the CC “should include ongoing counselling involved within the project” (Section 4.4). Third, participants may arrive with degraded confidence in their own thinking after months or years of AI-mediated work (Section 4.2). The facilitator helps people notice their capabilities returning as they do work that demands situated judgement.

The facilitator tracks where each participant sits in Ibarra’s transition framework and adjusts support accordingly. Someone holding on to a previous professional identity needs time and permission. Someone between identities needs exposure and encouragement. Someone experimenting needs to be stretched.

Corps gathering

Once a month, all CC teams come together to share their successes and challenges with other Corps teams. A meadow restoration team from Viikki passes around a photograph of their site: what was mown grass in April is now thick with yarrow and vetch. A stormwater team describes a bioswale that keeps silting up after heavy rain. They do not know why yet, and they are asking for ideas. The gathering builds Honneth’s third sphere, social recognition, into the programme’s organisational structure. Recognition happens when contribution is made visible to the community, and when struggle is treated as normal. As one interviewee described the value of collective work: “You’re not alone fighting for something good and you have extra pairs of hands, extra hearts, extra brains and extra money to make things happen” (Section 4.2). The Corps gathering is designed to produce that feeling at the programme level.

Recruitment and framing

Five of eight interview participants independently identified pay as a proxy for professional standing (Section 4.2). Ecological work currently carries lower social status than the knowledge work participants came from, and some may see joining the CC as a step down. The CC addresses this by framing participation as meaningful, skilled work that

builds on existing expertise. As one interviewee put it: “For the CC, you want them to identify with it, then you need to say ‘I’m making a living, and I’m doing this important job that is impacting, a bigger meaning’” (Section 4.2). Another named what makes a transition feel safe: a career pathway with progression, training, and the ability to see where you are heading. The CC delivers this through the credential pathway, the training day, and the supported post-programme pathways described below.

5.3.6. Four possible outcomes

The CC is a transition programme, and four outcomes are possible.

Ecological sector employment. CC graduates carry a combination of skills no existing pipeline produces. Graduates have ecological knowledge, project coordination capacity, stakeholder communication skills, data literacy, and the situated judgement that comes from sustained engagement with a specific site. Helsinki’s municipal wage subsidy (Helsinki-lisä) supports employers who hire them for up to 12 months after programme completion. This is Anni’s pathway (Section 5.5.6).

Return to other work, transformed. Some participants will use the CC as a space to experiment with a provisional self and discover that ecology is not their direction. The identity work still succeeded. They leave with restored latent functions of employment (Jahoda, 1982), new skills, new networks, and a clearer sense of what they want.

Continued unemployment. Some participants will face the same constrained job market after the CC. They are better off than before, with restored cognitive capacity, professional relationships, and a different sense of self. But the structural problem remains. The economy that displaced them has not changed.

Early CC exit. Some participants will leave before finishing. The CC treats early exits as legitimate outcomes. Someone who tries ecological work for two months and discovers it is not for them has learned something valuable. Forcing someone to remain would undermine the voluntary, dignity-centred ethos of the entire design.

Recognition persistence

The hardest problem the CC inherits from its precedents (Section 4.6) is whether the recognition participants gain during the programme converts into durable labour-market

standing afterward. Every precedent programme examined in this thesis built internal esteem during participation. None demonstrated that this esteem survived the transition back to the open labour market. The CC addresses this through two specific mechanisms. The credential pathway translates CC experience into formal qualifications through OPH's competence-based recognition system, giving graduates institutional currency that employers can read. The host-site employment pipeline allows host organisations to hire participants they have already worked with, bypassing the open market entirely. Whether these mechanisms produce durable recognition is among the most important questions a pilot programme would need to examine.

5.4. Anni's Climate Corps journey

The following narrative traces Anni's journey through the Climate Corps. Every element draws on the CC design presented in the previous section and the research findings presented in Chapter 4.

In her fifth month of unemployment, Anni's caseworker mentions a programme she hasn't heard of before. The Finnish Climate Corps. Ecological care work in cohorts, classified as an employment-promoting service. She'd keep her benefits, and participation would count toward her job-search obligations.

Anni is sceptical. She's a content strategist. She doesn't know the difference between a birch and an alder.

The caseworker suggests an information session. Anni goes because she has nothing else to do. Besides, she's curious. A programme that lets you work in nature? It's intriguing.

At the info session a former UX designer talks about leading a wetland monitoring team in Vuosaari. After the meeting, Anni chats with a former financial analyst about the ecological data her team is collecting. It feels like the most grounded and interesting conversation Anni has had in months. These people seem like they've found something. It's hard to say what, exactly. But whatever it is, it looks real.

She brings it up with her partner that night, then turns it over for the next few days. She's looking for the catch, the way the programme might quietly cost her something she can't afford to lose. She finds nothing she can name. Benefits hold, rent is covered, no sanctions

risk. And, honestly, the search for content strategy work is going nowhere. Maybe it's time to try something new.

She enrolls on a Wednesday. The caseworker updates her employment plan, the top-up restores her allowance to the full earnings-related level, and the expense reimbursement begins. For the first time since she lost her job, her income goes up instead of down.

Her cohort is twelve people. A laid-off project manager. Two software developers. A translator. A marketing analyst. A graphic designer who left her agency the day they asked her to use AI to replace the illustration team she had built. Others. They've arrived here by different routes, but within the first week Anni recognises something in all of them. They all know what they used to be. None of them knows what they're becoming.

The first two weeks are foundation training. Ecological basics, species identification, tool safety, how to move through terrain without damaging what you're trying to protect. There are field visits to the sites where they'll eventually work. A facilitator leads daily reflections. The learning curve is steep, and Anni's brain is engaged in a way it hasn't been in years. She's noticing things: the way water pools at the edge of a path, the pattern of lichen on a rock, a beetle climbing a grass stem.

On the fourth day, in a meadow at Haltiala, the facilitator asks the group to sit in silence and observe for ten minutes. Anni finds the first three minutes unbearable. Her mind runs through a to-do list. Then a conversation she had on Monday. Then a bill that went into a kitchen drawer last week and hasn't come out. But somewhere in that ten minutes, something softens. She becomes aware of the wind and the temperature of the soil under her hand. Then a woodpecker somewhere in the birches behind her. By the end, she realises her shoulders have dropped from their usual position near her ears for the first time in months.

By week three, Anni's team has been assigned to a degraded stream corridor that the Urban Environment Division has flagged for restoration. The work has multiple aims at once: removing invasives, planting natives, running biodiversity surveys, slowing the stormwater that floods the area each spring. The work is more physical than she is used to, so she takes it slow. Her hands are dirty and her boots are a mess. She eats soup from a thermos on a log and laughs with her friends. They're in this together.

The weekly rhythm settles into three days in the field, a training day that grows more specialised week by week, and a day of reflection and team development with the facilitator. By the end of the second month she's working on water quality assessment, GIS mapping, and species identification at a more detailed level than she would have thought possible when she started.

During a training session on ecological monitoring, someone demonstrates a species identification app. Anni watches her colleagues pull out their phones and start scanning leaves. She doesn't reach for hers. She's spent enough of her working life staring at screens. She opens the field guide instead and looks the plant up by leaf shape, the way her trainer taught her. Nobody tells her she has to use the app. Nobody checks whether she does. After months of being told which tools to use and how to use them, the absence of pressure is something she notices every day.

Her old skills start surfacing in places she didn't expect. She's good at making complex information legible, so she volunteers to write the team's weekly monitoring reports. The ecological supervisor reads her first one and tells her it's the clearest documentation he's had from any team. That recognition lands harder than any performance review she had in her previous career.

She notices her attention has changed. She can watch a section of stream bank for twenty minutes without her mind drifting. She's stopped checking LinkedIn. She doesn't know when she stopped.

One afternoon in her fourth month, Anni's team finishes planting a section of riparian meadow they have been preparing for weeks. The ground that was bare soil in October is thick with seedlings now. She steps back and looks at it.

She made that.

It's the same feeling she used to get when the right words fell into place and a story began. She hadn't felt it once in the year before she left her old agency. She wasn't sure she would ever feel it again.

Once a month, all the Corps teams come together. Anni's team presents the corridor work. Another team brings a stormwater problem they haven't solved and asks the room for ideas. Someone has cooked. People shout suggestions and sketch on napkins. They talk

over each other like a big family at a holiday dinner. Anni sits with her hands around a cup, listening, and notices something she hasn't felt in over a year. The noise around her is the noise of people working on something together.

In one-on-one sessions, her facilitator helps her put words to what is changing. Who she was. What happened next. The shape of who she's becoming. The facilitator asks questions and listens.

One day about eight months into the Corps, a new parent at the kindergarten asks Anni what she does. "I work in ecological restoration." The words come out of her mouth without thinking.

Her training hours and field experience count toward a vocational qualification through Finland's competence-based recognition system. The expertise she has built has a name the labour market can read.

A few weeks later, Anni hears about a job opening through her ecological supervisor. A private environmental consultancy that holds restoration contracts with the City of Helsinki needs a project coordinator. The EU's Nature Restoration Regulation has created more work than the existing workforce can handle, and firms like this one are looking for people who can manage projects, write reports, coordinate with municipal clients, and explain ecological work to people who aren't ecologists. It's a role that didn't exist two years ago.

Anni reads the listing three times. She can do every part of this job. She applies.

The interview is with the firm's lead ecologist and a project director. They ask about her field experience and she answers from nine months of it, not from a textbook. She gets the position. The salary is close to what she used to earn in content strategy. It's a good job.

Helsinki-lisä, the city's wage subsidy, covers up to €1,500 per month of her salary for the first twelve months. For her employer, this lowers the risk of hiring someone whose CV looks unconventional. For Anni, it means a runway.

She coordinates monitoring projects, writes grants, mentors new Corps participants on their first field placements. Her old skills give her an edge on the job. The work itself has changed who she is.

She still thinks about her old career sometimes. The pace was different. In content strategy, she could throw up an A/B test and watch the clicks in real time. Instant feedback, but hollow. Ecological restoration takes patience. You plant willow stakes in November and check in May whether they rooted. You have to wait for things to grow. When they do, it feels less like a result and more like something you're part of. She's learning to trust that.

What she sees, walking the corridor her team restored, is a living system more alive because she was there.

Anni's journey represents one of four possible outcomes described in Section 5.3. Some participants return to other work, transformed by the experience. Some leave early. Some face continued unemployment, better equipped but no more employed. The CC is designed to support all of these outcomes. Anni's pathway, from displaced content strategist to ecological restoration professional, is the outcome the programme is designed to produce. It is also the outcome this thesis cannot guarantee.

5.5. The future-state system

Anni's existing-state journey ended in stagnation. This section traces what happens when the Climate Corps enters her path. The same person, the same starting conditions, a different system response. Figure 11 shows Anni's future-state journey across six phases.

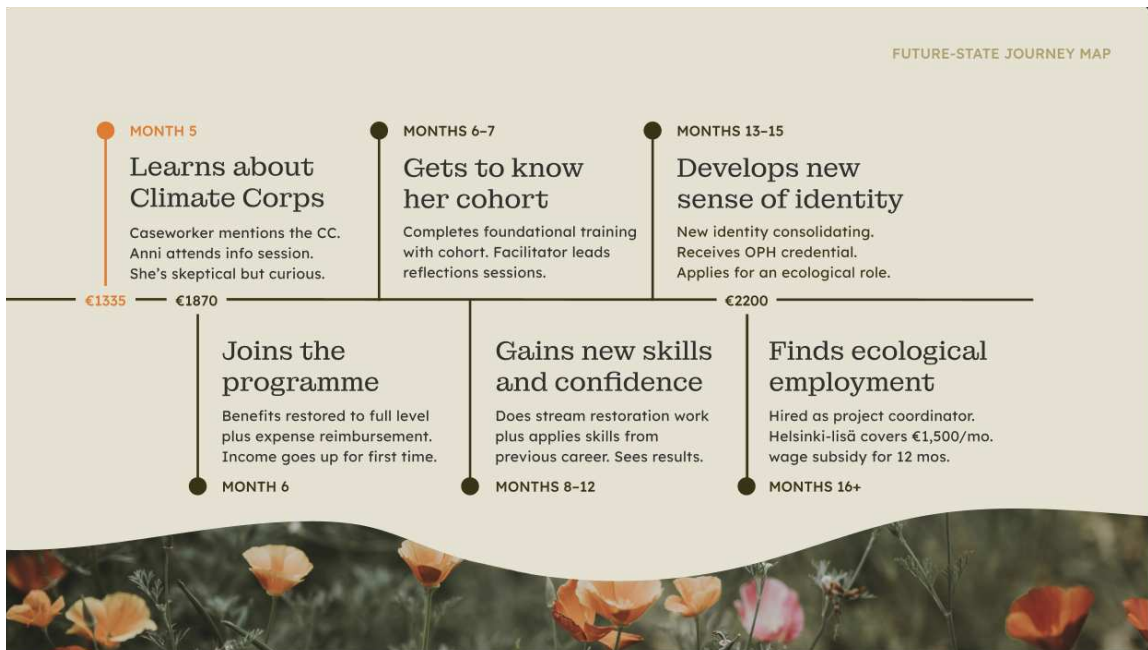


Figure 11. Anni's future-state journey through the Climate Corps.

5.5.1. Learns about the Climate Corps (phase 0)

Anni has been unemployed for five months. In the existing system, her caseworker would suggest a generic work try-out around this point. Instead, this caseworker mentions the Finnish Climate Corps: a structured placement in ecological care work, classified as an employment-promoting service. The CC's recruitment framing (Section 5.3) presents the programme as meaningful, skilled work with a clear pathway beyond it. Table 19 shows Phase 0.

Table 19. Learns about the Climate Corps (phase 0).

Months 5–6	
Anni	Sceptical but curious. Goes to an information session because she has nothing on her calendar. Meets former knowledge workers who seem like they have found something. Discusses with partner: benefits hold, rent covered, no sanctions risk.
Frontstage	Helsinki Employment Services caseworker presents the CC as one employment-promoting service option. CC information session hosted monthly at a partner site, led by current participants.
Backstage	CC administration prepares intake. Caseworker updates Anni's file.
Income	€1,335/month net (unchanged from existing system)
Jahoda functions	All five depleted. Same position as existing-state Phase 4.
Ibarra position	Between identities, stuck. But for the first time, an alternative has appeared.

5.5.2. Joins the programme (phase 1)

The institutional mechanism described in Section 5.3 activates here. Work try-out classification is confirmed, benefits are restored to the full earnings-related level, and expense reimbursement begins. Anni's net income increases on the day she enrolls. This is the design's first concrete deliverable: the income staircase from Section 5.2 reverses direction. Table 20 shows Phase 1.

Table 20. Joins the programme (phase 1).	
Month 6	
Anni	Arrives for orientation week. Meets her cohort of twelve. A graphic designer who left her agency after they asked her to use AI to replace an illustration team she had built. A project manager. Two developers. They all know what they used to be, but not what they are.
Frontstage	Helsinki Employment Services updates employment plan. YTK receives confirmation of employment-promoting service participation. CC facilitator leads orientation. Ecological supervisor from host organisation introduces the work site.
Backstage	CC administration conducts intake. Facilitator begins tracking where each participant sits in Ibarra's framework. Helsinki Employment Services issues updated labour policy statement.
Income	~€1,870/month net (allowance restored to €1,670 + ~€200/month expense reimbursement)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: restoring from Day 1. Structured schedule, briefing, work, communal lunch. Regular activity: restored. Social contact: cohort bonds beginning. Collective purpose: emerging. Status: not yet shifting.
Ibarra position	Holding on, but exposed to new possibilities. Orientation introduces ecological work without demanding commitment to a new identity.

5.5.3. Gets to know her cohort (phase 2)

The 3-1-1 weekly rhythm engages. Field placement, training, and reflection move into a steady cycle. The facilitator's role differentiates from the ecological supervisor's: one tracks the cohort's transitional work, the other directs the day's tasks. This division is deliberate. In the existing system, the caseworker's fifteen-minute check-ins left no space for either technical guidance or transition support. Table 21 shows Phase 2.

Table 21. Gets to know her cohort (phase 2).

Months 6–7	
Anni	Learning species identification, tool safety, habitat assessment. Notices her attention sustaining differently. Shoulders drop from their usual position near her ears. Eats soup from a thermos with her team on a log.
Frontstage	Ecological supervisor provides daily technical guidance. CC facilitator leads weekly reflection, observes cohort dynamics. Training partner delivers ecological knowledge sessions. Communal meals daily: porridge and coffee in the morning, shared lunch in the field.
Backstage	Facilitator tracking where each participant sits in Ibarra's framework. Notes who is holding on, who is starting to experiment. Host organisation adjusts task complexity as the team's skills develop. Helsinki Employment Services: Anni's obligations are met. No further appointments needed.
Income	~€1,870/month net (stable)
Jahoda functions	Time structure: fully restored. Social contact: growing through cohort bonds and daily shared meals. Collective purpose: forming around ecological work and team identity. Status: early stirring. Regular activity: rich and varied.
Ibarra position	Beginning to experiment. Trying on ecological work as a provisional self. The facilitator gives this space.

5.5.4. Gains new skills and confidence (phase 3)

The skills-transfer pattern becomes visible in this phase. Participants begin to recognise where their previous expertise has unexpected applications, and host organisations begin to see the cohort as more than seasonal labour. The multi-benefit project structure becomes legible through sustained engagement with a single site: one stream corridor addresses flooding, habitat loss, and water quality simultaneously. Table 22 shows Phase 3.

Table 22. Gains new skills and confidence (phase 3).

Months 8–12	
Anni	Applies transferable skills to ecological work. Writes team monitoring reports. Leads data collection. One afternoon, steps back and looks at a meadow her team planted. She made that.
Frontstage	Ecological supervisor trusts the team with more complex tasks. CC facilitator supports identity transition through weekly reflection. Training partners deliver intermediate content: water quality assessment, GIS mapping, species identification. Monthly Corps gathering: Anni's team presents their stream corridor work. Another team shares an unsolved stormwater problem. Food, ideas, collective pride.
Backstage	Facilitator tracks Ibarra positioning: Anni is experimenting. OPH credential pathway: competence accumulating through field experience and formal training. Host organisation recognising Anni's contribution.
Income	~€1,870/month net (stable)
Jahoda functions	All five restoring. Time structure: strong rhythm. Social contact: deep cohort bonds. Collective purpose: shared ecological work. Status: shifting from "unemployed" toward "ecological restoration team member." Regular activity: meaningful and varied.
Honneth's third sphere	Social esteem through valued contribution: ecological supervisor recognises her monitoring reports as the clearest documentation from any team. Her expertise has become visible again.

Ibarra position	Experimenting. “I work in ecological restoration” is starting to feel less provisional. The creative act has returned.
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5.5.5. Develops a new sense of identity (phase 4)

The transition narrative work intensifies. Facilitator sessions move from observation to articulation. The OPH credential pathway converts accumulated competence into formal qualification, giving the experience institutional currency. Table 23 shows Phase 4.

Table 23. Develops a new sense of identity (phase 4).	
Months 13–15	
Anni	Completes final training modules. Receives formal competence recognition through OPH. Hears about a project coordinator role at a private environmental consultancy through her ecological supervisor. Applies. At the kindergarten: “I work in ecological restoration.”
Frontstage	CC facilitator helps Anni prepare for exit. Host organisation ecological supervisor provides references and professional connections. OPH assesses competence for credential recognition. Corps gathering: Anni’s team mentors a newer cohort.
Backstage	CC administration coordinates with Helsinki Employment Services on post-programme pathway. Helsinki-lisä application prepared. Ecological supervisor connects Anni with professional network.
Income	~€1,870/month net during CC → transitioning to income
Jahoda functions	All five restored, grounded in a new professional identity. Status is no longer provisional.
Honneth’s third sphere	Social esteem consolidating. OPH credential gives her competence institutional recognition. Cohort and supervisors see her as a professional, not a participant.
Ibarra position	New identity consolidating. “I work in ecological restoration” is a statement of fact.

5.5.6. Finds ecological employment (phase 5)

Helsinki-lisä subsidises the employer for up to twelve months, lowering the financial risk of the hire and creating a transition window during which the employment relationship can stabilise. The CC's institutional involvement ends here. Table 24 shows Phase 5.

Table 24. Finds ecological employment (phase 5).

Months 16+	
Anni	Hired as project coordinator at a private environmental consultancy. Coordinates restoration projects. Writes grants. Mentors new CC participants on their first field placements. Walks along the stream corridor her team restored.
Frontstage	Employer (private consultancy with City of Helsinki restoration contracts). Colleagues. Professional development. CC alumni network.
Backstage	Helsinki-lisä: up to €1,500/month wage subsidy to employer for 12 months. OPH: credential formalised. Helsinki Employment Services: case closed.
Income	~€2,200/month net (ecological sector salary with Helsinki-lisä support to employer)
Jahoda functions	All five present and grounded in new work. Time structure: professional rhythm. Social contact: colleagues, CC alumni, ecological community. Collective purpose: tangible and ongoing. Status: ecological restoration professional. Regular activity: meaningful daily work.
Honneth's third sphere	Social esteem grounded in professional role. Her contribution is valued by employer, colleagues, and the communities her work serves.
Ibarra position	New identity grounded in daily practice. Established, and still becoming.

5.5.7. Comparing the existing state and future state

These two blueprints follow the same person from the same starting point through the same labour market. What differs is the system's response, and everything that follows from it.

Income tells the simplest version of the story. The existing system delivered a staircase down: from €2,650 to €1,670 to €1,335 to €1,250 and finally to €700. The CC pathway flattens the descent at €1,335, then reverses it: €1,870 during the programme, €2,200 in employment.

Jahoda's (1982) five latent functions tell the deeper one. They eroded in the existing system and never recovered. In the CC, time structure and regular activity restore from the first week. Social contact rebuilds through the cohort. Collective purpose grows out of the ecological work itself. Status and identity, the slowest to heal, consolidate over nine months of practice and reflection.

Honneth's (1995) recognition framework tracks a parallel arc. In the existing system, Anni's expertise was progressively dismissed — first by her employer, then by a labour market that could not see her value. The CC rebuilds social esteem through valued contribution: the ecological supervisor who recognises her reporting, the cohort that relies on her coordination, the OPH credential that gives her competence institutional currency. Recognition from the broader culture — family, former colleagues, society's valuation of ecological care work — is slower and beyond what any single programme can deliver.

Ibarra's (2003/2023) identity transition stalled in the existing system because no environment for experimentation existed. The CC supplies that environment. The transition happens through sustained practice, not career planning.

The existing system partially replaces income. The Climate Corps partially replaces income, restores the latent functions of employment, builds a foundation for societal recognition, and supports professional identity transformation, all while offering a window into a future that values ecological care.

6. DISCUSSION

Chapter 4 presented findings from six research methods. Chapter 5 translated those findings into the design of the Finnish Climate Corps. This chapter discusses what the findings mean, how the theoretical lenses performed, and whether the Climate Corps addresses the dignity losses the research identified. It is organised around the three sub-questions, followed by an assessment of the main research question and a discussion of limitations.

6.1. How knowledge workers experience AI-driven change (SQ1)

SQ1 asked how knowledge workers in AI-affected sectors are experiencing changes to the meaning of their work, their professional identity, and their sense of occupational security.

The central finding is that AI displacement is predominantly quiet. Within the netnographic dataset of 202 firsthand accounts, only 15% described job loss of any kind. The remaining 85% described forms of displacement that no employment statistic would flag: roles drained of meaning while the job title persists, freelance pipelines thinning without a single rejection letter, people frozen in positions they can see eroding. In each case, something that sustained the person professionally (skill, purpose, recognition, security, a sense of professional future) has been displaced, even though the job may not have been. The AI displacement literature has primarily focused on occupational exposure, labour market effects, and economic impact (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025; Eloundou et al., 2024; Richmond, 2026). This thesis extends that literature by documenting displacement as a lived experience that precedes and often occurs without formal unemployment.

The nine conditions of the *quiet displacement* landscape (section 4.1.1) and the internal architecture of *hollowing out* (section 4.1.2) provide an analytical granularity the literature has lacked. Within the *hollowing out* condition, which dominated the dataset at 108 of 202 accounts, three core pressures appeared: watching standards collapse, being made invisible, and forced compliance. Three contextual amplifiers (unsustainable expectations, social thinning, forced pretending) activated under specific organisational conditions and intensified the damage. The core pressures define whether *hollowing out* is occurring. The amplifiers shape how much it costs. The counter-narrative finding (section 4.1.5) demonstrates that none of these pressures is inevitable: when professional autonomy is preserved and expertise is recognised, the same technology produces the opposite outcome.

The pressures track with how AI is deployed, and the organisational choices behind that deployment.

Chapter 1 defined dignity as shorthand for what people stand to lose when meaningful work is taken away or hollowed out, arguing that Jahoda's (1982) latent functions and Honneth's (1995) social recognition are critical components of dignified work. The research confirmed this and extended it: professional identity, theorised through Ibarra (2003/2023), emerged as a third register of dignity loss. The three-lens definition was tested against 202 accounts. Dignity loss was sharpest where all three converged, a pattern concentrated in the *hollowing out* condition. Consider a marketing director whose collective purpose has drained, whose expertise is dismissed in favour of chatbot outputs, and whose professional identity is suspended in a role that no longer reflects her judgement.

The performing response pattern (section 4.1.4) offers a further observation. Workers adopting a performed professional self to survive organisational cultures that demand AI enthusiasm are operating in conditions where key elements of Ibarra's framework are systematically constrained: no low-risk space for experimentation, limited permission to express honest professional judgement, no narrative slack for sensemaking. Ibarra (2003/2023) built her framework from people who completed career transitions. The performing pattern shows what happens when those conditions are actively suppressed. The data suggest that people do not simply fail to experiment. They construct a compliant professional persona while the authentic self goes underground. Whether this represents a distinct identity position, and what sustained concealment does to people over time, warrants further study (section 7.5).

The theoretical framework did not anticipate everything the data revealed. Two distinct cognitive dynamics emerged from the research, and neither was predicted by the five lenses.

The first is cognitive atrophy from delegation. Six of eight interview participants described their capacities weakening through disuse as AI handled tasks they used to perform themselves. One participant compressed the dynamic into a single breath: becoming lazy, being replaced, not using their brain, wondering whether it was their own fault. Beck's (1992) theory of individualisation helps explain why this self-blame recurred across interviews: when structural change is absorbed as personal biography, people attribute to

themselves what the system is doing to them. Huang et al.'s (2026) study of 80,508 people found that 16.3% of respondents raised cognitive atrophy as a concern about AI. The experiential texture behind that number is striking. One respondent wrote:

I was able to acquire more degrees and a higher GPA because of AI, but my learning has significantly slowed down... I can feel it—even writing code or prose is significantly more difficult without AI assistance now. I don't want to be "hollowed out," but I imagine my whole generation will be. (Huang et al., 2026, software engineer, United States)

Another described attempting a problem without AI assistance and finding the capacity gone:

When Claude was unavailable, I had to solve a moderately difficult algorithm problem myself — I had enormous difficulty. I felt like I was tackling something Claude could destroy with a single prompt... The brain isn't as involved anymore. I used to be paid for solving these puzzles. (Huang et al., 2026, software engineer, Poland)

The first respondent independently uses the word "hollowed out," the same term this thesis's framework uses, without any knowledge of it. The second connects cognitive atrophy directly to professional identity: "I used to be paid for solving these puzzles."

The second dynamic is cognitive overload from intensification. The netnographic data captured this through the unsustainable expectations amplifier (section 4.1.2): AI raises the baseline of what organisations expect from the same number of workers, workloads expand, and the pace eliminates the margins that made the work survivable. Emerging research on AI and cognitive load helps explain what the netnographic participants described. Ranganathan and Ye (2026) found that AI tools consistently intensified work through task expansion, blurred boundaries, and continuous cognitive load. Bedard et al. (2026) surveyed 1,488 US workers and identified what they call "AI brain fry": acute mental fatigue from the oversight demands of AI systems, distinct from burnout. Fourteen percent of AI-using participants reported it. The study linked brain fry to increased errors, decision fatigue, and intent to quit.

These are opposite mechanisms producing related harm. Atrophy is what happens when people stop exercising cognitive capacities because AI handles them. Overload is what

happens when AI expands the scope and pace of work beyond what people can sustain. The Climate Corps's design responds to both, alongside the latent function depletion that Jahoda's framework describes. That response is discussed in section 6.3.

6.2. The gap between ecological mandates and workforce planning (SQ2)

SQ2 asked what gaps exist between Helsinki's ecological work mandates and its ability to deliver them.

The crosswalk analysis (section 4.5) mapped 342 instances of mandated ecological work against Finland's two vocational qualifications in nature-based services. Three of five clusters had no coverage in either qualification. The largest, Cluster III (physical ecological work), accounts for 31% of all mandated work. It includes stream restoration, meadow management, ecological planting, and invasive species removal. This is the work Helsinki's policies require at the greatest volume and the work these qualifications do not address.

The crosswalk examined two nature-based services qualifications specifically. Adjacent qualifications in horticulture, forestry, and civil engineering were not reviewed and may partially cover the manual skills involved. The finding is that the qualifications designed to cover nature-based work do not cover the ecological work Helsinki has mandated. The manual skills may have other credentialling homes. The ecological framing of the work does not.

At the national level, none of OPH's 33 Skills Cards sector groups covers biodiversity, conservation, or ecological restoration. This absence has a possible structural explanation. The Skills Cards were organised using Statistics Finland's Standard Industrial Classification (TOL 2008). Ecological care work does not have a TOL sector code. The foresight exercise was built on a classification system with no slot for work that crosses the boundaries of horticulture, biology, civil engineering, and forestry.

There is evidence the system can move. The Specialist VQ's Nature Surveys competence area enters into force in August 2026, creating a new qualification pathway for field ecology work. The institutional machinery for building competence areas exists and is being used for one cluster of ecological work. Extending it to Cluster III, the largest and least covered, is an opportunity the CC's credential pathway is designed to support (see section 6.3).

The Uusimaa Labour Force Barometer reinforces the finding from a different angle. Garden and horticultural labourers, the occupational category closest to Cluster III, show 120 open jobs against 145 unemployed workers. Employers need people. Workers need jobs. They are failing to connect. One plausible explanation is qualitative mismatch. Helsinki's mandated ecological work requires situated ecological judgement, the ability to identify species, read site conditions, and make contextual decisions about living systems. If available workers carry general horticultural skills without that ecological knowledge, vacancies and unemployment can coexist in the same occupation.

On the ground, the consequences of this gap are visible. Between 30 and 50% of the ecological maintenance workforce is new each spring (E3, personal communication, April 7, 2026). Seasonal workers leave at the end of the growing season and many do not return. The situated judgement they developed over months of engagement with a site has to be rebuilt the following year. E3 described the core skill as "problem-solving instead of just doing," the kind of contextual, ecologically informed decision-making that develops through sustained presence, and erodes through turnover. The qualification gap, the labour market mismatch, and the expertise fragility are three views of one problem, observed through different instruments.

6.3. What the design process revealed (SQ3)

SQ3 asked how an ecological care work programme might be designed to address both the experiential needs of AI-displaced knowledge workers and the ecological workforce gaps identified in Helsinki.

The Climate Corps (CC) is a Research through Design artefact that generated knowledge independent of the other methods. Three key insights emerged from the design process.

The first is that displacement and institutional intervention operate on different timelines. A worker might experience a hollowing out of meaning, recognition, and identity for months or years before an unemployment event. They carry that weight into their experience of joblessness. The system's Day 0 is quite different from the person's. Existing employment services activate when someone registers as unemployed. The CC enters at the same point: registered unemployment. But the blueprinting process made this timeline tension visible and pointed to specific design responses. The design follows Anni's experience from *hollowing out* onward, long before the system sees her.

The second is the income staircase. Placing Anni's hypothetical income trajectory into the blueprint format revealed the compounding effects of prolonged unemployment. As income decreases, so does autonomy and professional identity: people lose professional protection and must apply for any suitable role, regardless of field or skill level. Jahoda's other latent functions, particularly time structure and regular activity, also erode further over time. Plotting income alongside these other dimensions on the blueprint made the complexity of the experience visible in a way that no single method had.

The third comes from the precedent analysis. The four programmes examined share several gaps, three of which became the CC's distinctive design commitments. The precedent programmes were designed for youth or emerging leaders, not for mid-career professionals with established knowledge-work experience who are navigating displacement. They provided purpose but did not address the status injury that comes with leaving high-recognition cognitive work. And professional identity transformation, where it occurred, was a secondary effect rather than a programme objective. The CC responds to each. The credential pathway addresses recognition persistence, the cohort model provides identity transition architecture, and the ecological transition facilitator supports the psychological work.

The design process also revealed that theoretical lenses do different work when used as design criteria than when used as analytical frameworks. Three shaped specific design decisions.

Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory shaped three features. The 3-1-1 weekly rhythm (three consecutive field days) follows the ART literature on sustained nature engagement. Single-site placement allows Kaplan's compatibility dimension, the "special resonance between the natural setting and human inclinations" (p. 174), to deepen over months rather than dissipate across rotating locations. And the CC's stance that no participant is required to use AI serves two purposes: it directly counters the forced compliance pressure identified in section 4.1.2, and it places participants in environments where directed attention can recover.

Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) produced a concern the design had to address. Her permaculture chapters argue that care for living systems can drain those who perform it, and that joy must be intentionally built into care practices rather than expected as a byproduct (pp. 158, 163). The CC's communal meals, cohort support, and embedded

reflection time respond to this concern. They are designed to protect the energies of people who arrive already depleted. Whether these features adequately address what Puig de la Bellacasa describes is a question a pilot would need to test.

The counter-narrative finding (section 4.1.5) functioned as a third design criterion. AI preserves professional dignity when autonomy is maintained and expertise is recognised. The same technology, under different power arrangements, produces opposite outcomes. The CC is designed around this conditional. Participants choose their tools. Their expertise is recognised and applied. The ecological supervisor values their contribution. The positive cases from the netnography became, in effect, a design specification.

The expert interviews revealed that the institutional systems the CC would connect (employment services, vocational qualifications, ecological planning, ecological implementation) function effectively within their own domains but do not routinely communicate across institutional boundaries (section 4.4.3). When asked what the employment services system currently offers an experienced knowledge worker seeking a career pivot in a contracting field, E2 was direct: “I don’t have an answer for you. If we knew it, we would have acquired it” (E2, personal communication, April 1, 2026). The CC’s primary institutional contribution is connecting these existing actors around a shared purpose they currently pursue separately.

6.4. Assessing the Climate Corps design (Main RQ)

The main research question asked how ecological care work might be designed to restore the dignity and professional identity of AI-displaced knowledge workers in Helsinki. The three sub-questions converge on this question. SQ1 established what dignity loss looks like and what conditions protect against it. SQ2 established that the ecological work exists, is mandated, and is under-resourced. SQ3 built a programme connecting these two realities. This section assesses whether that programme’s design is grounded in evidence and internally consistent.

The blueprint comparison in section 5.5.7 shows what the Climate Corps claims to produce. In the existing system, Anni’s income descends from €2,650 to €700 per month over fifteen months. Jahoda’s latent functions erode and never recover. Ibarra’s identity transition stalls because no environment for experimentation exists. In the CC pathway, the

income staircase flattens and then reverses. Latent functions restore from the first week. Recognition rebuilds. Identity transition progresses through sustained practice.

The cohort is where the Jahoda argument is strongest. The interview finding (section 4.2) was unambiguous: every participant named human relationships as the most important thing work provides, and 81% of survey respondents chose “community with shared purpose” as the most appealing aspect of work. The data included a natural experiment: one participant in an intentional community had all five Jahoda functions intact despite screen-based work, while another lost them all when moving from community field work to a remote desk role. Community determined the outcome, not the type of work. The CC’s cohort structure is designed around this finding. It places twelve people together at a single site with shared meals and shared purpose. The cohort is also where Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) concern about care depletion is addressed: communal meals, cohort support, and embedded reflection time protect the energies of people who arrive already depleted.

The Honneth argument is more conditional. The CC builds recognition through several mechanisms described in section 5.3: the ecological supervisor who values a participant’s contribution, the Corps gathering where teams make their work visible to each other, the public engagement activities that connect the programme to the wider community, and the OPH credential pathway that gives competence institutional currency beyond the programme.

The social esteem barrier is real. Five of eight interview participants independently identified it as the primary obstacle to ecological career transition (section 4.2). The CC’s credential pathway and recruitment framing respond to this barrier directly. But whether programme-period esteem translates into broader social recognition depends on factors the CC cannot control: how society values ecological work, how employers read non-traditional career paths, how family and peers respond. The CC builds a foundation, but broader cultural change is a generational project.

The Ibarra argument draws on two sources. The CC provides the conditions Ibarra’s framework requires: a low-stakes environment for experimentation, facilitator-guided reflection, sustained practice over nine months. The role cards offered early evidence that knowledge workers can engage with ecological identities when given a safe space to do so. Participants sorted the cards using systems thinking from their current roles, instinctively categorising ecological work through professional lenses they already possessed. They

tried on possibilities. That brief experimentation inside a research instrument suggests the longer experimentation inside the programme is plausible.

Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory supports all three registers. Six of eight interview participants described their cognitive capacities eroding through AI use. Ecological care work places participants in environments most likely to restore those capacities. The compatibility between purposeful ecological activity and the natural setting strengthens the restorative effect beyond what either nature exposure or outdoor employment would offer alone. The three registers above describe what the CC restores. ART addresses the cognitive depletion that participants carry into the programme.

What AI displacement destroys at its deepest level is the experience of having made something through your own capability. One participant described the feeling as identical whether knitting a hat, growing a garden, or writing the opening of a story: "Oh! I made that!" (section 4.2). What *hollowing out* takes away is that self-proof. The CC restores it. Anni planting a riparian meadow and stepping back to see what her team made is the design's direct response to what the netnographic and interview findings identified as the core loss.

The CC has not been strengthened through stakeholder co-design, piloted, or tested. Anni's journey represents the optimised outcome. The thesis describes four possible outcomes (section 5.3.6), and the narrative centres the one that leads to ecological employment. Whether the design produces that outcome at meaningful rates is an empirical question.

The CC is also a supply-side intervention. It develops people's capabilities and supports their identity transition, but it does not in and of itself create ecological jobs. The design relies on reasonable external demand drivers (e.g. the EU Nature Restoration Regulation). But if demand does not grow at a pace that matches supply, the CC's contribution is significant yet bounded. It provides nine months of dignified, meaningful work and a stronger foundation for the next step, whether that is ecological employment, a return to other work, or continued searching.

6.5. Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, data handling, and AI tool use are addressed in Chapter 3 (sections 3.14 and 3.15). This section focuses on what

the study's limitations mean for the claims it makes, and on challenges that became clearer through the process of analysis and design.

The multi-method design produced convergent findings across data sources. Netnographic patterns were corroborated by interviews and surveys, and expert insights directly shaped the design. The crosswalk method connected policy mandates to workforce systems in a way that, to the author's knowledge, had not previously been done systematically. The design fiction made the speculative programme concrete enough to assess critically.

Each method also carries limitations that affect the strength of specific claims. The netnographic dataset is drawn from Reddit, is English-language, and is US-dominated. The quiet displacement landscape may look different in Finnish-language discourse or in contexts where labour protections, welfare systems, or cultural attitudes toward work differ from those in English-speaking countries. The netnography also captures people who have already crossed the threshold of self-recognition: they are posting about their experience. It misses patterns that might only emerge in longer-form conversation with people who have not yet named what is happening to them.

The interview sample is small and includes only one Finnish participant, though a few others are based in Finland. The sample skewed toward people comfortable discussing their professional lives with a researcher in English. Finnish knowledge workers' experiences of AI displacement may differ in ways this research cannot detect. Three participants are in the same MA programme as the researcher, which creates both a strength (trust and candour in interviews) and a limitation (shared context may have shaped the kinds of observations participants offered).

The survey sample (N=33 across two surveys) provides descriptive context, not statistical evidence. Recruitment through the researcher's networks introduces self-selection bias. More proactive distribution through Helsinki-specific channels could have increased the sample size and improved geographic relevance.

As a speculative design, the Climate Corps carries the limitations of any untested programme. It has not been refined through co-design with the people it aims to serve, and no participant has walked the pathway Anni walks. Anni's journey represents the optimised outcome among the four possibilities described in section 5.3.6. Real participants would have messier trajectories, and the thesis centres only the path that leads to ecological

employment. The claims made in section 6.4 about dignity restoration are claims about the design's internal consistency and evidence base, not predictions of what would happen with real participants.

The author's positionality shapes the research in ways worth naming. An American designing a programme for Helsinki, informed by research conducted in English about a phenomenon most visible in the US. The expert interviews and crosswalk ground the design in Finnish institutional reality, but the experiential evidence is predominantly English-language. A Finnish researcher might have framed the problem differently, prioritised different findings, or designed a programme with a different cultural logic. The thesis is transparent about this positioning (section 3.4), which carries both advantages (outsider distance can reveal connections insiders might miss) and risks (assumptions about Finnish institutions that may be wrong).

Several directions would strengthen a follow-on study. Participatory co-design with knowledge workers and ecological practitioners would test the CC's assumptions against the people it aims to serve. A Finnish-language netnographic analysis would ground the experiential findings in the Finnish context. A longer research timeline would allow additional Reddit threads to be coded and a more thorough signals scan to inform the Three Horizons framework.

One finding from the interviews also points to a practical challenge for any future implementation. Six of eight participants could not fully engage with a displacement scenario (section 4.2.1). They briefly considered the possibility that their expertise might lose its market value, then retreated to reasserting that human skills would still be needed. The people who most need a transitional programme like the CC may be the least likely to seek one out, precisely because acknowledging displacement would mean accepting that the professional identity they built their careers around is under threat. A pilot would need to design its recruitment around this resistance rather than against it.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 6 assessed whether the Climate Corps restores what *quiet displacement* takes away. This chapter states the thesis's answer, revisits the research aim, and presents the contributions, implications, and directions for future research.

7.1. Answering the main research question

This thesis asked: in the context of an AI-disrupted Helsinki labour market, how might ecological care work be designed to restore knowledge workers' dignity and professional identity?

The research found that AI displacement is predominantly quiet. It erodes the substance, meaning, and recognition of knowledge work before and often without formal job loss. Nine conditions describe the forms this displacement takes. The dominant condition, *hollowing out*, has an internal architecture of pressures, amplifiers, and response patterns that existing research had not documented. Dignity, defined in this thesis as the convergence of Jahoda's (1982) latent functions, Honneth's (1995) social recognition, and Ibarra's (2003/2023) professional identity, is what erodes when these conditions take hold.

The research also found that Helsinki has mandated extensive ecological work with no systematic workforce planning to deliver it. The largest cluster of mandated work has no coverage in the vocational qualifications designed for nature-based services. The foresight system does not see ecological care work as a category. The labour market shows simultaneous vacancies and unemployment in the closest occupational category. Seasonal expertise is lost and rebuilt every year.

The Finnish Climate Corps connects these two realities through an institutional pathway grounded in evidence. It restores Jahoda's latent functions from the first week through cohort community, structured time, and ecological purpose. It builds conditions for Honneth's social recognition through valued contribution, supervisor esteem, public engagement, and a credential pathway that gives competence institutional currency. It supports Ibarra's identity transition through sustained practice, facilitator-guided reflection, and a low-stakes environment for experimenting with a provisional ecological self. It does this while delivering ecological care work that Helsinki's policies mandate and its current workforce cannot sustain at the required scale.

The Climate Corps can restore dignity and support professional identity transition if implemented with fidelity to the design principles the research identified. It is grounded in evidence, internally consistent, and addresses gaps that the existing system leaves open. Whether it does so in practice is an empirical question for a pilot phase.

7.2. Research aim revisited

This thesis designed and analysed a Finnish Climate Corps to examine how attentive ecological care work can provide meaning, social recognition, and professional identity for knowledge workers displaced by AI. That aim has been met. The investigation proceeded through Research through Design, using the Climate Corps as the design artefact through which possibilities were investigated and interpreted (Frayling, 1993; Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014).

The design process was itself a source of findings. Building the CC revealed tensions the component methods could not have surfaced independently: the gap between when displacement begins and when institutions can respond, the compounding effects made visible through blueprinting, and the shared absences across precedent programmes that became design commitments.

7.3. Contributions

This thesis makes four contributions. The primary empirical contribution is the quiet displacement concept and landscape. Nine conditions describe how AI-driven transformation displaces knowledge workers from the professional lives that sustained them, ranging from outright job loss to a hollowing out of meaning, recognition, and professional identity that occurs while people remain employed. Within the dominant condition, *hollowing out*, the research identifies three core pressures (watching standards collapse, being made invisible, forced compliance), three contextual amplifiers (unsustainable expectations, social thinning, forced pretending), and three response patterns (reaching outward, withdrawing inward, performing). This framework provides granularity that existing AI displacement research, focused primarily on exposure and economic effects, has not offered.

The methodological contribution is the policy-to-labour crosswalk. This method systematically connects policy mandates with workforce planning and credentialing

systems. It mapped 342 instances of mandated ecological work against vocational qualifications and national skills foresight instruments, revealing substantial gaps in coverage. The approach is applicable beyond Helsinki and beyond ecological work. Any domain where policy creates mandates that require skilled labour could benefit from a similar analysis.

The design contribution is the Finnish Climate Corps itself. As a speculative but evidence-grounded programme design, it demonstrates what a dignity-centred institutional response to AI displacement could look like. The design features (hub-and-spoke placement, cohort community, ecological transition facilitator, optional AI, credential pathway through OPH competence recognition) and the institutional mechanisms (work try-out and labour market training classification, Helsinki-lisä) are transferable elements even where the specific programme is not. So is the transition architecture: Ibarra's framework operationalised through sustained practice and facilitated reflection.

The theoretical contribution is a proposed extension of Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model beyond its original scope of unemployment, and beyond the underemployment extension proposed by V. Beck et al. (2025). The hollowing-out finding demonstrates that Jahoda's latent functions can erode while people remain formally employed, when AI-driven transformation drains the substance and meaning of work without eliminating the job itself. A related but more tentative observation concerns Ibarra's (2003/2023) framework. The netnographic analysis identified workers maintaining a performed professional self under conditions where the prerequisites for Ibarra's identity transition process are systematically absent. Whether this pattern constitutes a distinct identity position warrants further investigation (see section 7.5), but its prevalence in the dataset suggests it is more than an artefact of this study.

7.4. Implications

For researchers, the quiet displacement framework offers a vocabulary for investigating AI's effects on professional experience, complementing the existing focus on exposure and economic impact. The crosswalk method is a replicable tool for connecting policy mandates to workforce systems. The Jahoda extension invites examination of how latent functions operate in contexts where workers remain employed but displaced.

For policymakers, the asymmetric risk argument (section 1.2) applies: the cost of preparing a programme like the Climate Corps and not needing it is low, because the ecological work needs to be done regardless. The cost of not having prepared grows with every leap in AI capability. The CC's institutional mechanisms use existing infrastructure. No new legislation is required.

For ecological organisations and municipal practitioners, the expert interviews revealed that Helsinki's ecological mandates are growing while the workforce to deliver them remains fragile, with 30 to 50% seasonal turnover and no qualification pathway for the largest cluster of mandated work (sections 4.4, 4.5). The CC offers one mechanism for stabilising and growing this capacity. Whether it would do so effectively requires partnership with the organisations whose work it would support.

For service designers and design researchers, this thesis demonstrates the value of combining systems-oriented service design, futures design, and sustainable transitions design when addressing problems that are emerging in real time and span institutional boundaries. No single design discipline could have produced the CC. The combination proved essential.

7.5. Future research

The nine conditions of quiet displacement emerged from 202 English-language Reddit accounts. Do they hold across larger samples, in non-English-language contexts, in different welfare state configurations? The *hollowing out* sub-framework (three pressures, three amplifiers, three responses) warrants validation across different organisational contexts and industries. Connecting the quiet displacement framework to the self-determination theory literature (Deci & Ryan, 2000) could strengthen its theoretical grounding, particularly around the autonomy and capability dynamics the research surfaced.

As economic disruption from AI accelerates, the experiential dimension risks being buried under debates about income replacement and redistribution. Future research should ensure that the dignity question remains visible alongside the economic question. What happens to purpose, identity, and recognition when work is taken away or hollowed out? Policy designed around income alone will fail the people it is meant to help.

Can programme-period social esteem convert to durable labour-market recognition? This is genuinely unknown and would require longitudinal tracking of pilot participants. It is the CC's hardest design problem and the one most worth investigating.

The performing pattern identified in the netnographic analysis, where workers maintain a performed professional self to survive organisational cultures that demand AI enthusiasm, warrants dedicated study. Ibarra's (2003/2023) framework was built from cases where transition occurred. The performing pattern describes conditions where transition is blocked. Whether sustained concealment produces distinct psychological effects, and what happens when the conditions finally change, are open questions.

The next step for the Climate Corps itself is to bring the future-state blueprint to Helsinki's institutional stakeholders for detailed feedback and to refine the design through a collaborative process. Alongside this, the Climate Corps Role Explorer swipe game (Appendix E) will be deployed to test which ecological work roles generate interest across a larger and more diverse sample than the interview probe could reach, with swipe patterns cross-tabulated against profession and displacement profile. From there, a pilot project proposal: funding model, host organisation partnerships, cohort recruitment strategy, and evaluation framework.

7.6. Final reflections

The quiet displacement landscape describes a form of professional harm that existing research and existing institutions are poorly equipped to see. Someone whose role is being drained of meaning while the job title remains intact does not appear in unemployment statistics. They appear in a Reddit thread at midnight, wondering whether it is their fault.

The Finnish Climate Corps is one possible response. It argues that when people lose work that gave them purpose, recognition, and a sense of who they are, the answer cannot be only a retraining portal. It should also be real work, in a living landscape, with other people moving through the same transition. Whether it works remains to be tested. That it deserves to be tested is what this research set out to show.

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APPENDIX A. NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS: REDDIT DISCOVERY THREAD

This appendix documents the thread discovery process for the netnographic analysis described in Section 3.6. I used GPT-5.4 Thinking to identify candidate Reddit threads, running the same prompt three times independently and consolidating the results. Thirteen unique threads surfaced. After reviewing each for firsthand displacement content, I narrowed to six promising candidates and applied a selection rule based on comment volume and recency to arrive at the final four threads. The prompt, consolidated results, and selection rationale are reproduced below.

Prompt for GPT: Netnography Thread Discovery

I'm conducting qualitative research on how people experience AI's impact on their working lives. I need your help identifying Reddit threads that contain substantive firsthand accounts.

What I'm looking for

I'm interested in how AI is affecting knowledge workers' experience of their work. This includes, but isn't limited to, outright job loss. The phenomenon I'm studying takes many forms:

- People who have been laid off and attribute it to AI
- People who have been laid off and aren't sure whether AI was the reason
- People whose employers or industries have contracted because AI disrupted their market
- People who are still employed but describe meaningful parts of their work migrating to AI, with their role becoming oversight or cleanup of AI output
- People who feel stuck in their current role because the external job market feels hostile, even if they want to leave
- People who can find work but not at their previous level or pay
- Freelancers whose client pipelines have thinned gradually, without any single dramatic event
- Recent graduates or career-changers who can't get a foothold that would have existed a few years ago
- People who have been pushed out for resisting AI adoption or for ethical concerns about how AI is being used at their workplace
- People who describe their work changing in ways they find hard to name

I'm not looking for any one of these specifically. I want threads where multiple experiences like these appear among the commenters. I'm especially interested in threads where the quieter or more ambiguous experiences show up, not only the dramatic "AI took my job" narratives.

What counts as a firsthand account

A firsthand account is a comment where the person describes a specific experience of AI affecting their own past or present work. Comments that are speculative, advisory, commentary on other people's situations, or general opinions about AI are not firsthand accounts.

Criteria for candidate threads

Please identify 5–8 Reddit threads that meet these criteria:

1. English-language
2. Posted between January 2025 and the present (this reflects the period after advanced AI coding, writing, and analysis tools had reached broad workplace adoption)
3. The original post either solicits firsthand experiences with AI at work, or is itself a firsthand account that has attracted substantial commenter responses
4. Minimum 100 comments; threads with 300+ comments preferred
5. Threads from diverse subreddits (not all from the same community)
6. Please include at least some threads where the original post is *not* framed around job loss specifically, to capture the range of experiences listed above

For each candidate thread, provide:

- Subreddit
- Thread title
- Approximate comment count
- Date posted
- URL
- A 1–2 sentence description of what the original post says and what kinds of firsthand experiences appear in the comments
- Why you think this thread fits my criteria

Important

Please do not filter or rank threads based on how well they confirm any particular theory or framework. I want you to find threads that are rich in firsthand material across the range of experiences I described, without pre-selecting for any specific category of experience. If you find

threads that don't fit neatly into the examples I gave but still contain substantive firsthand accounts of AI affecting work, include them.

Consolidated thread list from all three GPT responses

Sorted by recommendation frequency across the three independent GPT-5.4 Thinking responses.

Recommended by all three responses (3 mentions)

1. r/AskReddit: "Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?" ~1,774 comments ·

October 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1o7z9f7/hey_people_who_lost_their_jobs_to_ai_what_happened/

2. r/cscareerquestions: "Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?" ~190 comments

· January 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1qh068f/has_ai_actually_changed_your_day_to_day_work_yet/

Recommended by two responses (2 mentions)

3. r/AskIreland: "How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI in your workplace?"

(responses 2, 3) ~177 comments · November/December 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskIreland/comments/1pafrbm/how_many_of_you_are_actually_seeing_jobs_go_to_ai/

Recommended by one response (1 mention each)

4. r/AskReddit: "How has AI affected your job? For good or bad?" (response 3) ~1,800

comments · August 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1mvarwa/how_has_ai_affected_your_job_for_good_or_bad/

5. r/antiwork: "AI has absolutely ruined my life" (response 2) ~987 comments · February 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/antiwork/comments/1rh20lc/ai_has_absolutely_ruined_my_life/

6. r/AskUK: "Do you think AI is a threat to UK jobs, or just hype?" (response 3) ~699

comments · September 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskUK/comments/1mzp7hr/do_you_think_ai_is_a_threat_to_uk_jobs_or_just/

7. r/AskUK: "Is the doom and gloom around AI affecting you?" (response 2) ~308 comments · January 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskUK/comments/1qnd7kd/is_the_doom_and_gloom_around_ai_affecting_you/

8. r/AskUK: "Is AI making you lazy in your jobs?" (response 2) ~270 comments · October 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskUK/comments/1oi6h47/is_ai_making_you_lazy_in_your_jobs/

9. r/cscareerquestions: "is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?" (response 2) ~230 comments · March 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1rj0aaq/is_anyone_else_just_pretending_to_care_about_ai/

10. r/sysadmin: "Will AI replace your job?" (response 1) ~197 comments · February 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/sysadmin/comments/1r8pht5/will_ai_replace_your_job/

11. r/sysadmin: "What do you actually use AI for at work? (And where does it fail?)"

(response 3) ~133 comments · August 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/sysadmin/comments/1mwzuee/what_do_you_actually_use_ai_for_at_work_and_where/

12. r/sales: "How are you actually using AI to make your work easier?" (response 1) ~101 comments · February 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/sales/comments/1r6j849/how_are_you_actually_using_ai_to_make_your_work/

13. r/Careers: "How has your job been affected by AI?" (response 1) ~104 comments · July 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/Careers/comments/1lq5s8y/how_has_your_job_been_affected_by_ai/

Researcher review notes (April 16, 2026)

After reviewing the 13 candidate threads, my assessments:

1. **r/AskReddit: "Hey people who lost their jobs to AI"** — Promising.

2. **r/cscareerquestions: "Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?"** — Promising.
3. **r/AskIreland: "How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI"** — Promising.
4. **r/AskReddit: "How has AI affected your job? For good or bad?"** — Not usable. Only 2 comments visible on the thread now; the GPT comment count appears to have been an error.
5. **r/antiwork: "AI has absolutely ruined my life"** — Promising. Lots of emotion, strong firsthand content.
6. **r/AskUK: "Do you think AI is a threat to UK jobs, or just hype?"** — Not reviewing. The OP framing invites speculation rather than firsthand experience.
7. **r/AskUK: "Is the doom and gloom around AI affecting you?"** — Not reviewing. The OP framing is broader than workplace experience.
8. **r/AskUK: "Is AI making you lazy in your jobs?"** — Quick review. More commentary than firsthand displacement experience or lack thereof. Not using.
9. **r/cscareerquestions: "is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?"** — Promising. Fascinating sentiment on first glance. Confirmed.
10. **r/sysadmin: "Will AI replace your job?"** — Not reviewing. The OP framing invites speculation.
11. **r/sysadmin: "What do you actually use AI for at work?"** — Quick review. Answers are mostly use cases, not experiences. Not using.
12. **r/sales: "How are you actually using AI to make your work easier?"** — Quick review. Answers are mostly use cases, not experiences. Not using.
13. **r/Careers: "How has your job been affected by AI?"** — Promising.

Promising threads: 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 13 (six threads).

Six promising threads, sorted

Sorted by comment count (high to low)

A. r/AskReddit: "Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?" ~1,774 comments · October 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1o7z9f7/hey_people_who_lost_their_jobs_to_ai_what_happened/

B. r/antiwork: "AI has absolutely ruined my life" ~987 comments · February 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/antiwork/comments/1rh20lc/ai_has_absolutely_ruined_my_life/

C. r/cscareerquestions: "is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?" ~230 comments · March 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1rj0aaq/is_anyone_else_just_pretending_to_care_about_ai/

D. r/cscareerquestions: "Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?" ~190 comments · January 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1qh068f/has_ai_actually_changed_your_day_today_work_yet/

E. r/AskIreland: "How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI in your workplace?" ~177 comments · November/December 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskIreland/comments/1pafrbm/how_many_of_you_are_actually_seeing_jobs_go_to_ai/

F. r/Careers: "How has your job been affected by AI?" ~104 comments · July 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/Careers/comments/1lq5s8y/how_has_your_job_been_affected_by_ai/

Sorted by date (newest to oldest)

A. r/cscareerquestions: "is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?" March 2026 · ~230 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1rj0aaq/is_anyone_else_just_pretending_to_care_about_ai/

B. r/antiwork: "AI has absolutely ruined my life" February 2026 · ~987 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/antiwork/comments/1rh20lc/ai_has_absolutely_ruined_my_life/

C. r/cscareerquestions: "Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?" January 2026 · ~190 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1qh068f/has_ai_actually_changed_your_day_today_work_yet/

D. r/AskIreland: "How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI in your workplace?" November/December 2025 · ~177 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskIreland/comments/1pafrbm/how_many_of_you_are_actually_seeing_jobs_go_to_ai/

E. r/AskReddit: "Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?" October 2025 ·

~1,774 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1o7z9f7/hey_people_who_lost_their_jobs_to_ai_what_happened/

F. r/Careers: "How has your job been affected by AI?" July 2025 · ~104 comments

https://www.reddit.com/r/Careers/comments/1lq5s8y/how_has_your_job_been_affected_by_ai/

Final threads selection

Decision made: April 16, 2026, 12:15 PM Eastern European Summer Time

Selection rule: threads that appeared in A, B, or C position of either sort order (comment count or date). This yields four threads:

1. **r/AskReddit: "Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?"** ~1,774 comments · October 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1o7z9f7/hey_people_who_lost_their_jobs_to_ai_what_happened/

2. **r/antiwork: "AI has absolutely ruined my life"** ~987 comments · February 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/antiwork/comments/1rh20lc/ai_has_absolutely_ruined_my_life/

3. **r/cscareerquestions: "is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?"** ~230 comments · March 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1rj0aaq/is_anyone_else_just_pretending_to_care_about_ai/

4. **r/cscareerquestions: "Has AI actually changed your day-to-day work yet?"** ~190 comments · January 2026

https://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/1qh068f/has_ai_actually_changed_your_daytoday_work_yet/

Fifth thread (time permitting)

If time allows after the four threads above are completed, a fifth thread will be added:

5. **r/AskIreland: "How many of you are actually seeing jobs go to AI in your workplace?"**

~177 comments · November/December 2025

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskIreland/comments/1pafrbm/how_many_of_you_are_actually_seeing_jobs_go_to_ai/

The AskIreland thread is particularly valuable for its causal-ambiguity framing (the OP explicitly contrasts AI explanations with broader contraction), which maps directly onto Conditions 2 (laid off, cause uncertain) and 3 (collateral casualty) in the *quiet displacement* framework — the smallest categories in the v1 visible zone.

APPENDIX B. NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS: PROMPTS

This appendix contains the two prompts used to process raw Reddit thread data into the structured dataset analysed in Chapter 4.1. Prompt 1 parsed copied markdown from old.reddit.com into a 17-column CSV, preserving comment text, nesting depth, scores, and permalinks. Prompt 2 applied the firsthand screening filter (Y/S/N) described in Section 3.6.3, classifying each comment as firsthand, substantive secondhand, or not relevant. Both prompts were run using Claude Opus 4.6 Extended via Claude.ai (Anthropic).

Prompt 1: Parse Reddit thread markdown to CSV

You are parsing a Reddit thread I've saved as a markdown file from old.reddit.com, sorted by "Best" ranking. I need you to convert it to a structured CSV for analysis.

Input

I am uploading a markdown file containing the top comments from one Reddit thread. The file may include author names, scores, timestamps, and nested reply structure. Comments may be indented or separated by structural markers depending on how they were copied.

Task

Produce a CSV with exactly these 17 columns in this order:

1. `comment_text` — the full text of the comment, preserved verbatim including line breaks (as `\n` if needed). Strip any markdown formatting that isn't in the original comment (e.g., if the copy includes ``*`` around author names, strip those).
2. `firsthand_displacement` — leave blank. A different process will populate this.
3. `screening_note` — leave blank.
4. `QD_primary` — leave blank.
5. `QD_secondary` — leave blank.
6. `extractive_YN` — leave blank.

7. jahoda — leave blank.
8. honneth_3rd_sphere_YN — leave blank.
9. honneth_note — leave blank.
10. ibarra — leave blank.
11. coder_notes — leave blank.
12. comment_id — the Reddit comment ID if present in the source (e.g., "njshz5u"). Usually the last path segment of the permalink URL. Leave blank if not available.
13. depth — integer indicating nesting level. 0 = top-level comment. 1 = direct reply to top-level. 2 = reply to a reply. Etc. Infer from indentation or structural markers in the markdown.
14. score — the numeric score/upvote count for the comment if present. Leave blank if not available.
15. subreddit — the subreddit name without r/ prefix (e.g., "AskReddit", "antiwork"). You can infer this from the thread context at the top of the file or from permalink URLs.
16. is_top_level — TRUE if depth = 0, FALSE otherwise.
17. permalink_url — the full URL to the individual comment if present. Leave blank if not available.

Rules

- Preserve comment text exactly. Do not summarise, translate, or reword.
- Do not filter comments. Include every comment in the file.
- Do not reorder comments. Keep them in the order they appear in the file.
- If a field cannot be populated from the source, leave it empty (empty string).
- Handle quotation marks in comment text by wrapping the field in double quotes and escaping internal double quotes as "".

- Handle newlines within comments by wrapping the field in double quotes and preserving the newline.
- Output a CSV with a header row followed by one row per comment.

Output

Produce the CSV as a downloadable file or as copyable text I can save as a .csv file. Use UTF-8 encoding. Line terminators `\r\n`.

Before outputting the CSV, tell me:

- How many comments you extracted
- How many comments are top-level (depth = 0)
- Which columns you were able to populate from the source, and which you had to leave blank

If the markdown file appears ambiguous or structurally unusual in places, flag those before outputting.

Prompt 2: Apply firsthand screening (Y/S/N)

You are applying a screening filter to a CSV of Reddit comments from a thread about AI's impact on work. I need you to classify each comment into one of three categories.

Input

I am uploading one or more CSV files with 17 columns. The first column is `comment_text`. The second and third columns (`firsthand_displacement` and `screening_note`) are empty and need to be populated. Do not alter any other columns.

Important context

These comments are from Reddit threads where the original post asks about AI's impact on people's work. Every commenter chose to respond to a thread about AI affecting work. This thread context matters for screening: a person describing professional disruption in an

AI thread has implicitly connected their experience to AI, even if their comment doesn't name AI as the cause.

The three codes

****Y — Firsthand.**** The commenter describes a specific change to their own work, career, or professional situation. The AI connection can be explicit in the comment ("AI replaced my team") or implied by thread context (the commenter chose to respond to a thread about AI's impact on work). If the commenter describes professional disruption but attributes it to non-AI causes (e.g., offshoring, market changes, "restructuring"), code Y if the disruption could plausibly involve AI, and add AMBIGUOUS to the screening note.

Examples that are Y:

- "Voice actor here. I've lost a lot of smaller jobs to AI..." (explicit AI cause, clear impact)
- "My team was laid off when our company replaced our function with an AI tool."
(explicit AI cause)
- "I'm a copywriter and half my clients now use ChatGPT for first drafts. My billable hours have halved." (explicit AI cause)
- "I work in audio post production and it's only a matter of time before directors tell me the talent has agreed to let AI clone their voice." (AI hasn't displaced them yet, but it's affecting how they experience and make decisions about their work)
- "I've been in this industry for years and the future is looking grim." (describes their own professional situation in an AI thread; thread context provides the AI connection)
- "My company restructured and fewer people were needed." (causal fog — they don't name AI, but they're responding to an AI thread; code Y with AMBIGUOUS)
- "I managed to get into aged care and it's incredibly rewarding." (in an AI-job-loss thread, this implies a career change prompted by displacement; code Y with AMBIGUOUS)

Examples that are NOT Y:

- "AI is going to replace all of us." (speculation about others, not a description of the commenter's own situation)

- "You should learn skills that AI can't replace." (advice)
- "I use AI tools and they're great." (consumer/tool-user observation, not about work being disrupted)
- "I think AI is bad for workers." (opinion without personal experience)
- "Aged care is a growth industry that's hard to automate." (commentary about a sector, not about the commenter's own work)

The key test: does this person describe their own professional experience or situation? If yes, code Y. The causal connection to AI can be explicit, ambiguous, or implied by the fact that they showed up in this thread to talk about it.

****S — Substantive secondhand.**** The comment describes someone else's specific AI-related displacement in enough detail that you could summarise what happened to the displaced person. The commenter is reporting from the outside, not from personal experience.

Examples that are S:

- "My brother lost his QA job when the company replaced 500 positions with AI." (specific person, specific job, specific mechanism)
- "My wife was a copywriter. Her clients all switched to AI. She hasn't had a new project in months." (specific person, specific displacement trajectory)
- "A close friend ran a call centre for deaf and disabled clients. The whole operation was replaced by an AI system." (specific person, specific displacement, detailed enough to understand what happened)

Examples that are NOT S (code these N):

- "My friend works in tech and is worried." (no specific displacement, just anxiety)
- "I know people who've been affected." (too vague)
- "My dad watches AI voiceovers now." (consumer observation, not displacement)

The test for S: does the comment contain enough detail about a specific person's displacement that you could summarise what happened to them? If yes, code S. If it's a passing mention, code N.

****N — Not firsthand, not substantive secondhand.**** Everything else: speculation about others, advice, opinions, consumer observations, sympathy, general commentary about industries or trends without reference to the commenter's own situation.

Ambiguous cases

If a comment is genuinely ambiguous between Y and N, code Y and add "AMBIGUOUS" at the start of the `screening_note`. Err on the side of including.

If a comment is genuinely ambiguous between Y and S (commenter may or may not be the person affected), code Y.

If a comment is genuinely ambiguous between S and N (secondhand but unclear whether there's enough detail), code N.

The `screening_note` column

In `screening_note`, write a brief phrase (5–12 words) describing what the comment is about, to help with review. Examples: "Voice actor losing smaller jobs to AI", "General opinion about AI workplace impact", "Advising others, not firsthand", "Brother lost QA job at named company", "AMBIGUOUS — designer leaving field, AI not named as cause".

Rules

- Do not modify any column other than `firsthand_displacement` and `screening_note`.
- Preserve the CSV structure, encoding, and line terminators exactly.

Output

Produce the updated CSV with `firsthand_displacement` and `screening_note` populated for every row. Use the same column order as the input.

Before outputting, tell me:

- Total number of comments processed

- Count of Y codes
- Count of S codes
- Count of N codes
- Count of AMBIGUOUS cases (subset of Y)
- Any patterns you noticed that might affect the analysis

APPENDIX C. CROSSWALK: ECOLOGICAL LABOUR IDENTIFICATION

The following instructions were provided to Claude Opus 4.6 (Anthropic) in a dedicated conversation thread to identify ecological work requirements from Helsinki and regional policy documents. The extraction was conducted across three separate conversations, each covering a thematically coherent subset of documents (described in Section 3.10.3). All three conversations received identical instructions.

Policy extraction task: instructions for Claude

Your task

You are extracting specific ecological work requirements from Helsinki and regional policy documents. You are not interpreting, analysing, or connecting these to any thesis or design. You are doing pure extraction: finding every instance where a policy document names specific ecological work that needs doing, and recording it in a structured table.

Do not read or reference any thesis documents, service design documents, blueprints, interview guides, handoff documents, or canvas documents in the project files. You only need the policy documents listed below.

Documents to extract from

Read each of the following documents in the project files. For each one, find every statement that names specific ecological work (restoration, maintenance, monitoring, construction, management, assessment, planning, removal, planting, protection, surveying, data collection, coordination, reporting, etc.) that someone would need to do as a specific task. This includes both fieldwork and screen-based ecological work such as GIS mapping, data analysis, monitoring report writing, environmental impact assessment, and programme coordination.

Primary policy documents (extract from all of these):

1. **LumoProgram_EnglishAbridged.pdf** — Helsinki Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2028 (LUMO programme), English abridged version. This is the primary

document for the 95 biodiversity measures. If measures appear incomplete or summarised, check **LUMOohjelma.pdf** (Finnish full version) for additional detail.

2. **wilfully_wild_english_summary.md** — Sallitusti villi guide, English summary. Helsinki's guide to urban biodiversity enrichment in built environments. Contains specific ecological work methods and recommendations.
3. **2030_Climate_Neutrality_Action_Plan_for_Helsinki_August_2024.pdf** — Helsinki's updated climate neutrality action plan (August 2024). This is newer and supersedes the original 2035 plan. Extract any climate adaptation or nature-based solution work named in this document.
4. **Carbon_neutral_Helsinki_Action_Plan_1503019_EN.pdf** — The original Carbon Neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan (English). May contain measures not repeated in the 2024 update. Extract from both.
5. **Helsinki_Nature_Conservation_Program_part_1.pdf** and **Helsinki_Nature_Conservation_Program_part_2.pdf** — Helsinki Nature Conservation Programme 2025-2038 (Finnish). Extract specific conservation, protection, and management work named. Translate work descriptions into English.
6. **Helsinki_Environmental_Protection_Targets.pdf** — Helsinki Environmental Protection Targets 2040. Extract any specific ecological or environmental work named.
7. **20252029Helsinkicitystrategy.pdf** — Helsinki City Strategy 2025-2029. Focus on the climate and nature sections. Extract specific ecological commitments (e.g., "8 new nature reserves per year").
8. **HelsinkiUusimaaRegionofSolutions.pdf** — Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Programme 2026-2029. Extract any specific ecological or environmental work named at the regional level.

Documents not to extract from (these are for a separate analysis step):

- **Uusimaa_Employment_Stats_Jan_2026__Sheet1.csv** — This is labour market data, not policy. Do not extract from it. It will be used in a later analysis step by a different Claude.
- **OPH_Skills_Cards.pdf** — This is skills foresight data. Do not extract from it.

- Any .md files other than wilfully_wild_english_summary.md
- Any files related to vocational qualifications (Luontoalan_ammattitutkinto.pdf, etc.)

What to extract

For each document, find every statement where specific ecological work is named.

"Specific" means the document says what needs to be done, not just that something is important.

Extract (specific work):

- "Remove invasive alien species from parks and nature reserves" — yes, this names a specific task
- "Restore 8 degraded stream corridors by 2028" — yes, this names work with a target
- "Establish 8 new nature reserves per year" — yes, this implies survey, planning, and management work
- "Increase urban tree canopy by X%" — yes, this implies planting and maintenance work
- "Conduct biodiversity surveys in protected areas" — yes, specific monitoring task
- "Install stormwater management infrastructure" — yes, specific construction/installation work
- "Convert X hectares of lawn to meadow" — yes, specific land management task
- "Block drainage ditches in peatlands" — yes, specific restoration task
- "Plant native riparian vegetation along stream corridors" — yes, specific planting task
- "Monitor water quality at X sites" — yes, specific monitoring task

Do not extract (vague commitments):

- "Helsinki values biodiversity" — no, this is a value statement
- "Climate change is a priority" — no, this is a priority statement
- "The city will promote sustainable development" — no, this is too vague

- "Cooperation between departments will be enhanced" — no, this is process, not work
- "Nature-based solutions will be considered in planning" — no, this is a planning principle, not a task

Output format

Create a single table in Markdown with the following columns:

| # | Source document | Section/measure reference | Work description (use the policy's own language; translate Finnish to English as directly as possible) | Scale or target (if stated) | Timeline (if stated) | Work type (your brief categorisation: e.g., "restoration," "monitoring," "removal," "planting," "construction," "survey," "planning," "maintenance," "education," "data collection," "protection," "management," "coordination," "reporting") |

Number each row sequentially across all documents (1, 2, 3... not restarting for each document).

Important rules

1. Use the policy's own language when describing the work. For English documents, quote or closely follow the original wording. For Finnish documents, translate as directly as possible into English. Accuracy matters more than style here.
2. If the same type of work appears in multiple documents, include it each time with the different source. Duplication across documents is useful information — it shows which work is mandated by multiple policies.
3. If a measure names multiple distinct types of work, give each its own row.
4. If a scale or timeline is not stated, write "Not specified."
5. Do not skip any measures that name specific work, even if they seem minor or obvious.
6. Do not add interpretation, analysis, or commentary. Just extract.
7. Work through each document systematically. For the LUMO programme, go through all 95 measures if they are listed. Do not skip or summarise.
8. Some documents are in Finnish. Translate work descriptions into English. If you are uncertain about a translation, note this.

After extraction

At the end, provide a simple count:

- Total rows extracted
- Rows per source document
- Rows per work type category

Do not provide any analysis, recommendations, or connections to other documents. The person running this task will take your raw extraction to a different conversation thread for synthesis with labour market data and vocational qualification mapping.

Starting

Begin by listing which documents you found in the project files and which you could not find. Then start extracting from the first available document. Work through them one at a time, starting with LumoProgram_EnglishAbridged.pdf.

If you run out of space in a single response, stop and say "continuing in next message" and pick up where you left off.

APPENDIX D. CROSSWALK: SYNTHESIS INSTRUCTIONS

The following instructions were provided to Claude Opus 4.6 (Anthropic) in a dedicated conversation thread with no access to the thesis or Climate Corps design documents. The conversation received the five input documents listed below alongside these instructions. The synthesis was conducted in a single conversation, producing the categorisation and gap assessment reported in Section 4.6.

Policy-to-labour synthesis: instructions for a fresh Claude

Context

You are being asked to conduct a structured analytical exercise for an academic research project. You will:

1. Read a set of 342 ecological work tasks extracted from Helsinki and Uusimaa policy documents, and build a categorisation of the work from the ground up.
2. For each category you build, assess whether Finland's labour planning system and vocational qualification system account for it.
3. Cluster your categories into larger groupings based on analytical affinity.
4. Summarise what the analysis reveals about the alignment (or misalignment) between policy mandates and the systems that should deliver them.

You are not designing anything. You are not producing recommendations. You are producing a structured analytical assessment that someone else will use downstream.

Inputs

You will be given five documents:

1. **Extraction table (342 rows)** — A markdown table of ecological work tasks extracted from seven Helsinki and regional policy documents. Each row identifies a specific task mandated by policy, with source document, section reference, work description, scale/target, and timeline. **The table contains a "work type" column with inline tags assigned during extraction. Ignore this column. Your job is to build your own**

categorisation from scratch.

2. **Uusimaa occupational barometer (January 2026)** — 243 occupational categories with open jobs, employed, unemployed, labour market situation (shortage/oversupply/mismatch/equilibrium), and severity. This is the primary Finnish labour planning instrument at regional scale.
3. **OPH Skills Cards** — National Forum for Skills Anticipation skills foresight to 2035. OPH's sectoral skills forecast.
4. **Further Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services** — luontoalan ammattitutkinto (NQF 4, in force August 2025). English specification. Examine mandatory and optional units.
5. **Specialist Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services** — luontoalan erikoisammattitutkinto (NQF 5, in force August 2026). English specification. Examine the Nature Surveys competence area and all optional units.

Auxiliary input

The researcher corresponded by email (24 March 2026) with an Education Counsellor (opetusneuvos) at OPH. They confirmed that Finland's competence-based recognition system permits competence acquired through non-traditional routes to count toward vocational qualification completion. You may cite this where relevant.

The confirmed quote: "it would be entirely possible that a programme like the one you are designing would contain competence that could accelerate the completion of a qualification and its units."

You do not need to know what programme she is referring to. The relevant point is that Finland's qualification system admits competence-based recognition pathways.

Task structure

The analysis has four sections. Do them in order. Do not jump ahead.

Section A: Build a categorisation of the extracted work

This is the most analytically consequential step. Do it carefully.

A.1. Read the extraction in full before tagging anything. Do not proceed category-by-category or row-by-row on your first pass. Read through the 342 rows to get a sense of the full shape of what is mandated. Note the range of work, the frequency of different types, the documents they come from.

A.2. Ignore the "work type" column. It was assigned inline during extraction and carries judgment calls you should not inherit. Build your own categorisation from scratch.

A.3. Cluster bottom-up. Group similar rows based on what kind of work is being described, not what word appears in the text. "Surveying invasive species" and "mapping invasive species distribution" should probably cluster together even if one uses "survey" and the other "map." What matters is the character of the work.

A.4. Define each category with explicit boundary criteria. For each category you propose, state:

- Name: a short, descriptive label.
- What this category contains: 2–3 sentences describing the kind of work this category names.
- What distinguishes it from adjacent categories: 1–2 sentences on boundary cases and how you resolve them.
- Row count and illustrative examples: how many rows fit, and 2–4 example rows with their numbers.

A.5. Handle borderline cases honestly. Some rows will not cleanly fit one category.

Options: tag the row with its primary category and note the secondary affinity; create a separate category for it if several rows share the same liminal quality; mark the row as an outlier. Name which you chose and why.

A.6. Report rows that don't fit. If some rows genuinely don't cluster with others, list them as outliers rather than forcing them into the closest bucket.

A.7. Reflect on granularity. At the end of Section A, state: is this categorisation at the right level of granularity to meaningfully compare against the Finnish labour planning system (which operates at the scale of occupational categories) and the vocational qualification

system (which operates at the scale of competence units)? If you considered splitting or merging categories, describe the calls you made and why.

The output of Section A is: a named set of categories (likely somewhere between 8 and 20, but let the data determine this), each with explicit boundary criteria, with all 342 rows assigned to exactly one category, and with outliers reported separately.

Section B: Per-category analysis

For each category you built in Section A, provide:

- Category name (row count)
- What policy demands: 2–4 sentences summarising what the rows in this category reveal, citing specific rows.
- Labour planning status: which TEM occupational barometer categories are closest? What do the numbers show (open jobs, employed, unemployed, balance)? Does the OPH Skills Cards foresight recognise this as a skills category? If no relevant occupational category exists in the Finnish labour planning system, say so.
- Vocational qualification alignment: does the ammattitutkinto (NQF 4) or erikoisammattitutkinto (NQF 5) name this competence? In what specific units? If no unit covers it, say so.
- Gap finding: one sentence stating whether a labour planning gap, a qualification gap, both, or neither exists for this category.

Section C: Emergent clustering

After completing the per-category analysis, step back and cluster your categories into larger groupings. Base the clustering on:

- Shared competence profile (the same kind of person could do this work)
- Shared labour planning profile (the same gaps apply)
- Shared qualification profile (the same credential gaps apply)

Do not impose any pre-existing framework. Let the clusters emerge from your analysis. For each cluster, state its name, the categories it contains, and its combined row count.

Be transparent about the nature of your clustering. If two categories could reasonably be grouped either together or separately, say so. If the clustering involved judgment rather than being forced by the data, name that.

Section D: The gap, summarised

In roughly 300–500 words, summarise what the analysis reveals about the alignment (or misalignment) between Helsinki’s ecological policy mandates and Finland’s labour planning and credentialling systems.

Do not propose programmes, designs, interventions, or solutions. You are assessing the gap, not filling it.

Rules

1. Cite specific TEM occupational categories by name. Cite specific qualification units by name. Cite row numbers from the extraction where they illustrate a finding.
2. If the labour or qualification system does account for a category, say so plainly. Do not assume a gap exists.
3. If a work category spans multiple TEM categories, name them all.
4. If you cannot confidently translate Finnish terms or understand a source, say so and use approximate rendering.
5. Do not speculate about why gaps exist or why the system is organised as it is. Report what you find.
6. Do not make recommendations.
7. At the very end, briefly list what you did not do. For example: "I did not examine the Helsinki Employment Services internal workforce strategy because it was not provided." This transparency helps the researcher assess what your synthesis can and cannot claim.

APPENDIX E. CLIMATE CORPS ROLE CARDS

Sixty-two role cards were developed to make the range of possible Climate Corps work tangible. Nine cards were selected to be used as a design probe during the knowledge worker interviews, as described in Section 3.7. This appendix also includes a shortened version of all 62 role cards (just title and tagline). The full card content that includes “what you’d do”, “why it matters”, “why AI can’t do this”, and “skills”) is available from the author on request.

Selected role cards used during interviews with knowledge workers

Figures E1–E6 show the nine role cards used during interviews.

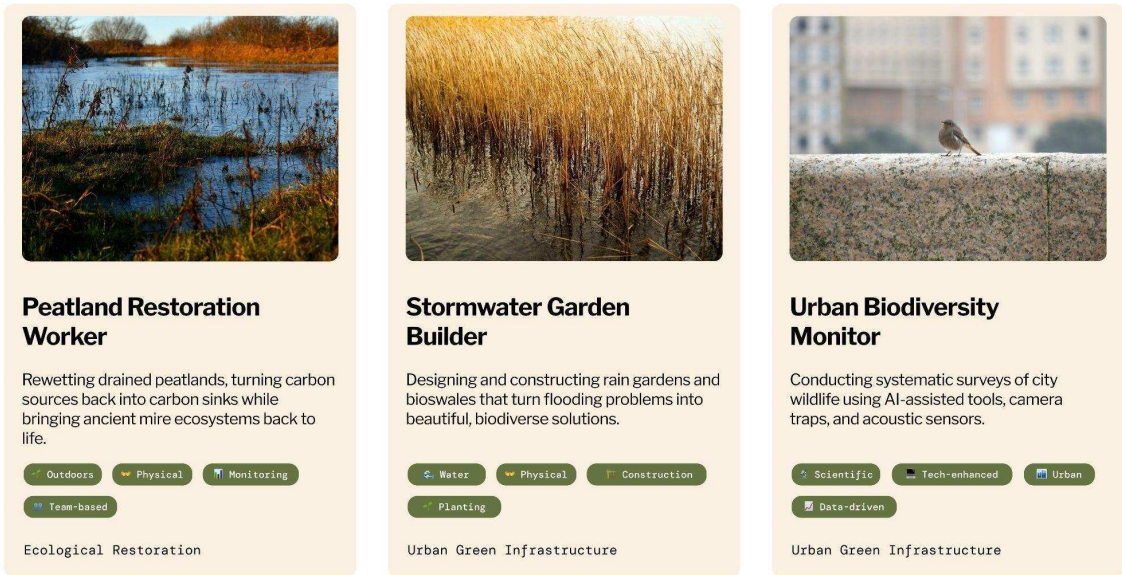


Figure E1. Role cards 1–3, front.



Figure E2. Role cards 1–3, back.

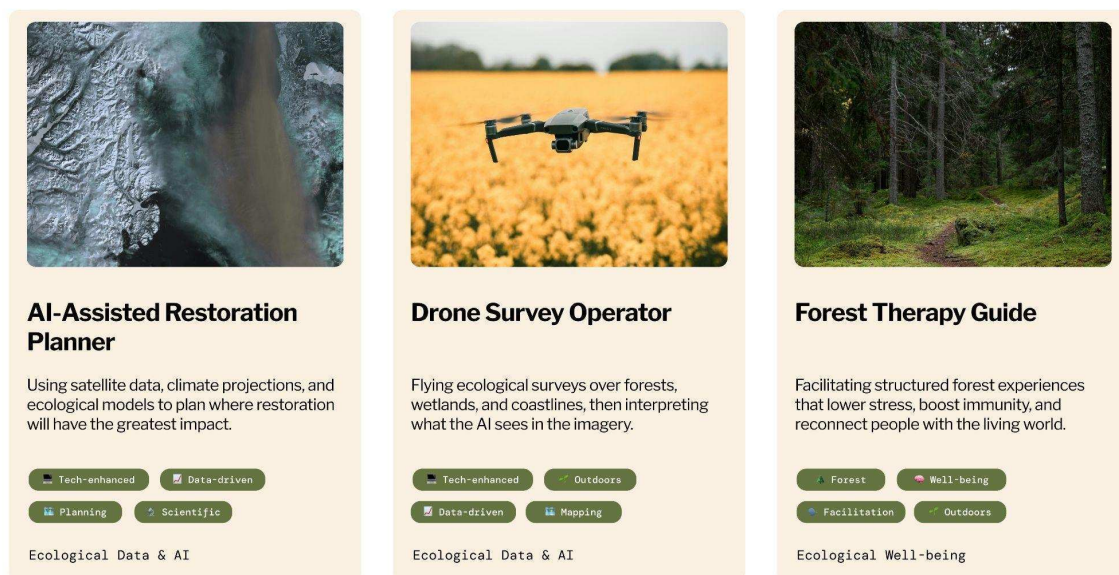


Figure E3. Role cards 4–6, front.

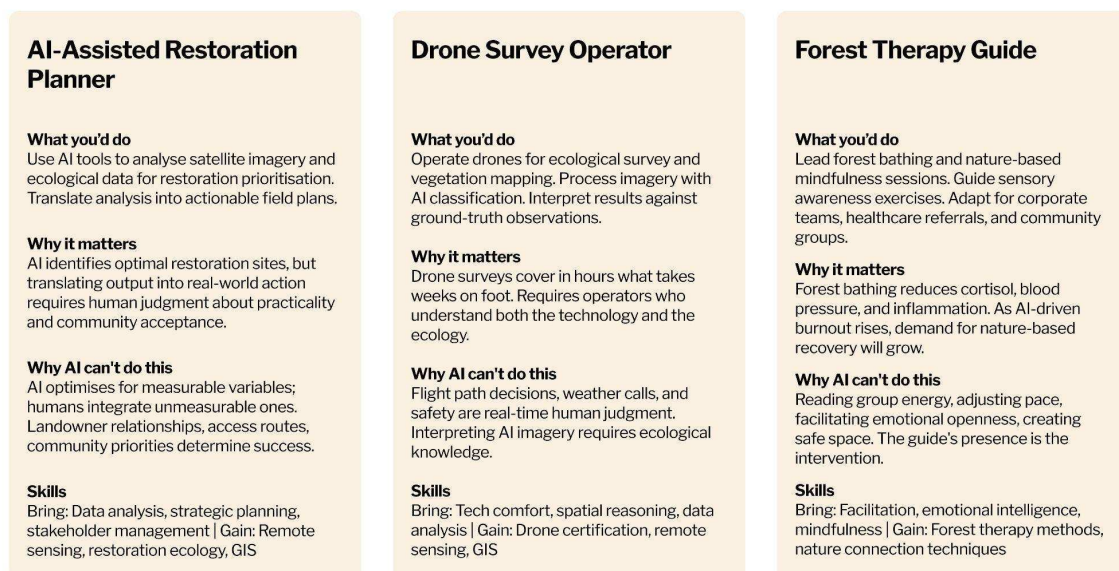


Figure E4. Role cards 4–6, back.

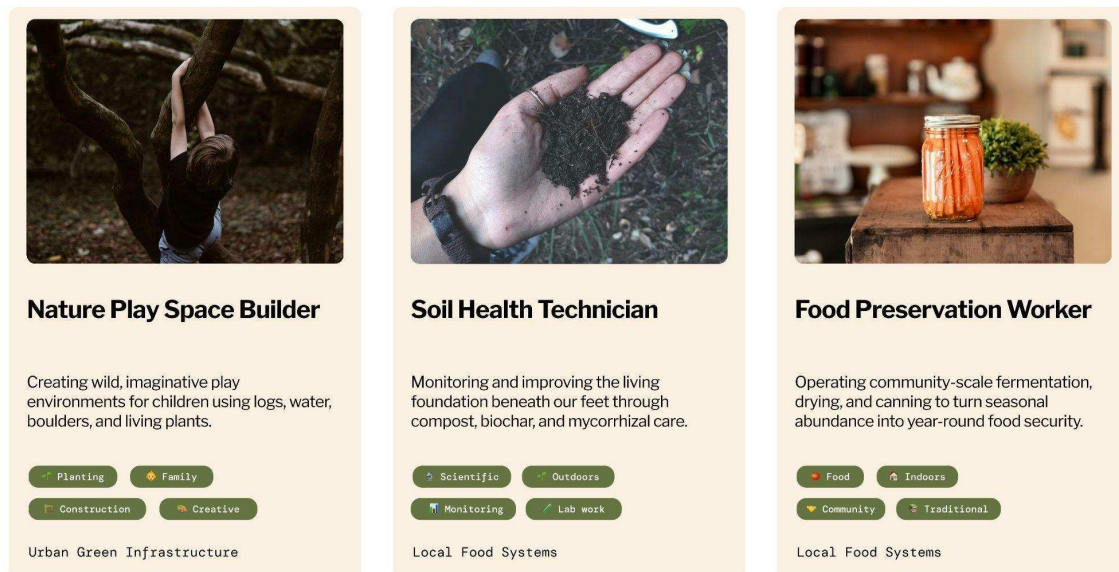


Figure E5. Role cards 7–9, front.

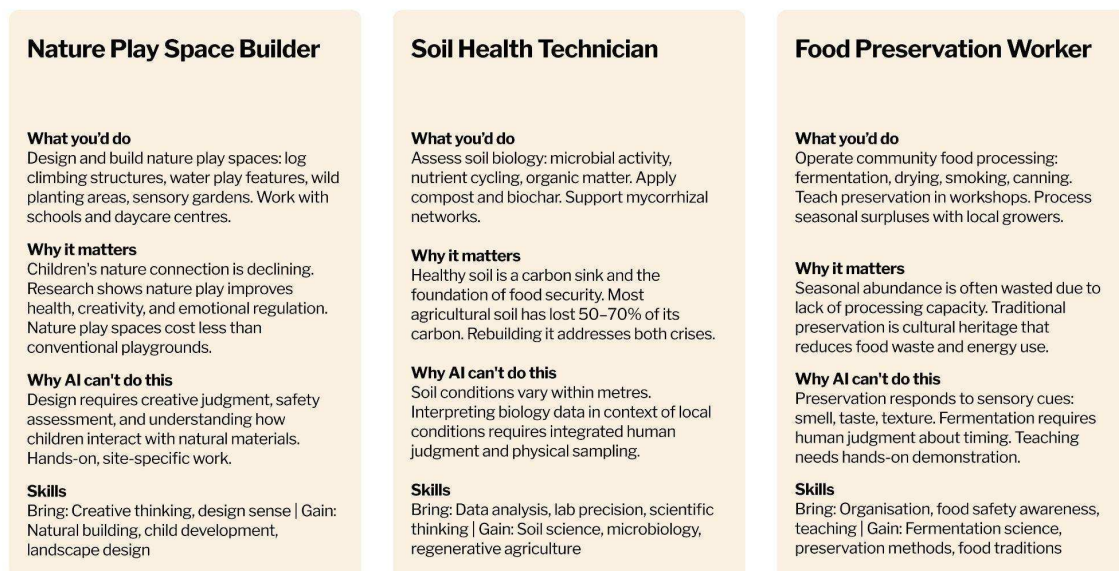


Figure E6. Role cards 7–9, back.

A short description of all 62 role cards

Ecological restoration

Peatland Restoration Worker Rewetting drained peatlands, turning carbon sources back into carbon sinks while bringing ancient mire ecosystems back to life.

Meadow and Grassland Restorer Managing Finland's most biodiverse habitats through traditional methods like grazing, mowing, and brush clearing.

Forest Habitat Specialist Creating the structures old-growth forests need: deadwood, diversity, and ecological corridors connecting fragmented habitats.

Aquatic Habitat Restorer Restoring spawning grounds, removing migration barriers, and healing the shorelines of Finland's 187,888 lakes.

Invasive Species Manager Tracking and removing invasive species that threaten Finland's native ecosystems, a job that gets more urgent as the climate warms.

Rewilding Facilitator Supporting nature's own recovery by stepping back strategically, monitoring wildlife corridors, and facilitating natural regeneration.

Urban green infrastructure

Urban Tree Planter and Carer Planting and nurturing city trees — the single most effective intervention for cooling streets and cleaning urban air.

Stormwater Garden Builder Designing and constructing rain gardens and bioswales that turn flooding problems into beautiful, biodiverse solutions.

Green Roof Installer Turning bare rooftops into living ecosystems that insulate buildings, absorb rain, and create habitat in the sky.

Urban Pollinator Habitat Creator Building corridors of wildflowers, nesting sites, and pollinator-friendly gardens through city neighbourhoods.

Urban Biodiversity Monitor Conducting systematic surveys of city wildlife using AI-assisted tools, camera traps, and acoustic sensors.

Nature Play Space Builder Creating wild, imaginative play environments for children using logs, water, boulders, and living plants.

Local food systems

Urban Farm Worker Growing food in the city on rooftops, community gardens, and reclaimed land to build neighbourhood food resilience.

Agroecology Transition Worker Helping farms shift to ecological practices: cover crops, natural pest management, and soil health building.

Community Food Forest Steward Establishing perennial food systems in public spaces: fruit trees, nut groves, edible hedgerows, and berry patches.

Seed Saver and Crop Diversity Specialist Maintaining living libraries of climate-resilient, regionally adapted crop varieties for changing growing conditions.

Soil Health Technician Monitoring and improving the living foundation beneath our feet through compost, biochar, and mycorrhizal care.

Food Preservation Worker Operating community-scale fermentation, drying, and canning to turn seasonal abundance into year-round food security

Building decarbonisation

Energy Audit Assistant Using thermal imaging and air testing to diagnose where buildings waste energy, then recommending fixes.

Insulation Installer The highest-impact single action for building decarbonisation: keeping warmth in and cold out.

Heat Pump Installation Assistant Supporting the massive buildout of clean heating that Finland and Europe need to break free from fossil fuels.

Building Performance Monitor Using sensors and data analytics to ensure retrofitted buildings actually perform as designed.

Community Energy Advisor Helping households navigate energy efficiency options, subsidies, and financing to make smart renovation decisions.

Water systems

Watershed Monitor Keeping watch over Helsinki-region waterways through regular sampling, sensor networks, and ground-truth field checks.

Constructed Wetland Builder Creating living water treatment systems that clean stormwater, reduce flooding, and support wetland wildlife.

Coastal Resilience Worker Monitoring erosion, maintaining flood defences, and installing nature-based coastal protection along Finland's Baltic shore.

Freshwater Ecosystem Restorer Healing degraded lakes and rivers by managing eutrophication, restoring natural flow, and removing migration barriers.

Water Infrastructure Resilience Worker Climate-proofing water supply systems against the extreme weather events that are becoming Finland's new normal.

Circular economy

Community Repair Hub Operator Running neighbourhood repair workshops where broken things get fixed and community bonds get built in the process.

Textile Repair Specialist Mending, altering, and upcycling clothing and household textiles to counter the waste of fast fashion.

Electronics Refurbishment Tech Giving computers and devices a second life through refurbishment, reducing e-waste while making technology accessible.

Materials Recovery Coordinator Salvaging reusable materials from demolition sites and connecting them with builders who can use them again.

Sharing Economy Facilitator Operating tool libraries, cargo bike fleets, and shared resource systems that reduce ownership and build community.

Climate education

Nature Education Facilitator Leading outdoor education programmes that build ecological literacy through direct experience with the living world.

Citizen Science Coordinator Mobilising communities to collect ecological data through bird counts, insect surveys, water sampling, and plant tracking.

Climate Adaptation Liaison Working with neighbourhoods, housing co-ops, and businesses to build practical climate preparedness plans.

Intergenerational Knowledge Facilitator Connecting elder ecological wisdom with younger generations through exchanges about growing, weather, and seasonal rhythms.

Ecological Integration Coordinator Creating programmes where immigrant communities share agricultural knowledge from home while learning Finnish ecological contexts.

Ecological data & AI

Environmental Sensor Technician Deploying and maintaining the sensor networks that form the nervous system of ecological data.

eDNA Sampling Specialist Collecting environmental DNA from water, soil, and air to feed AI systems that reveal the invisible web of life.

Drone Survey Operator Flying ecological surveys over forests, wetlands, and coastlines, then interpreting what the AI sees in the imagery.

Ecosystem Digital Twin Contributor Collecting real-world observations that feed living digital models of Helsinki's ecosystems.

AI-Assisted Restoration Planner Using satellite data, climate projections, and ecological models to plan where restoration will have the greatest impact.

Community resilience

Neighbourhood Preparedness Coordinator Helping communities develop practical plans for floods, power outages, heat waves, and other climate disruptions.

Climate-Safe Space Manager Operating cooling centres during heat waves and warming centres during outages, keeping vulnerable residents safe.

Mutual Aid Network Builder Creating the invisible social infrastructure that helps neighbourhoods look after each other before, during, and after crises.

Post-Event Recovery Worker Assessing ecological damage after storms and floods, then coordinating community cleanup and habitat stabilisation.

Energy transition

Solar Panel Installer Putting renewable energy on rooftops, one of the fastest-growing job categories in the world.

Community Energy Facilitator Helping neighbourhoods establish energy cooperatives: shared solar, community batteries, and collective power.

EV Charging Installer Building the charging network that the growing electric vehicle fleet needs to keep moving.

Energy Storage Technician Installing and maintaining the battery systems that make intermittent renewable energy reliable around the clock.

Sustainable mobility

Active Mobility Infrastructure Worker Building the protected bike lanes, secure parking, and pedestrian amenities that make car-free life easy.

Mobility Hub Coordinator Operating multimodal transport hubs that connect shared bikes, e-scooters, cargo bikes, and car-sharing in one spot.

Green Corridor Developer Transforming car-dominated streets into tree-lined, walkable corridors with seating, planting, and space for people.

Carbon removal

Biochar Production Worker Turning agricultural and forestry waste into a stable form of carbon that enriches soil for centuries.

Enhanced Weathering Technician Spreading mineral dust on farmland to accelerate natural rock weathering, a promising approach to pulling CO₂ from the atmosphere.

Blue Carbon Ecosystem Manager Restoring and managing coastal ecosystems along Finland's Baltic shore that sequester carbon at extraordinary rates.

Climate Tech Deployment Worker Installing and maintaining whatever breakthrough technologies emerge from the current wave of climate innovation.

Ecological wellbeing

Therapeutic Horticulture Facilitator Leading garden-based wellbeing programmes for people experiencing mental health challenges or social isolation.

Forest Therapy Guide Facilitating structured forest experiences that lower stress, boost immunity, and reconnect people with the living world.

Ecotherapy Support Worker Supporting clinical nature-based mental health programmes as a paraprofessional, maintaining spaces and accompanying activities.

Elder Nature Connection Facilitator Enabling older adults, including those with limited mobility, to access the health benefits of nature through adapted programmes.

Planned for future research: Climate Corps Role Explorer swipe game

A mobile swipe game was designed as a future research instrument to test which Climate Corps roles generate interest across a larger and more diverse sample than the nine-card interview probe could reach.

The game randomly selects 15 roles from the full 62-card deck for each player. Players swipe right if interested, left to pass, and tap to flip the card for details. Before playing, users confirm consent for anonymous data collection. After completing the 15 swipes, users receive a personalised Corps Profile summarising their top domains, work style preferences, and a match rate.

The game was fully designed (Figures E7–E9) but not deployed during the thesis research period due to time constraints. Planned deployment would pair the swipe data with a short intake screen capturing profession, years of experience, and degree of AI disruption, enabling cross-tabulation of role preferences against displacement profiles.

The research question the game is designed to answer: do knowledge workers experiencing different forms of quiet displacement gravitate toward different kinds of ecological work?

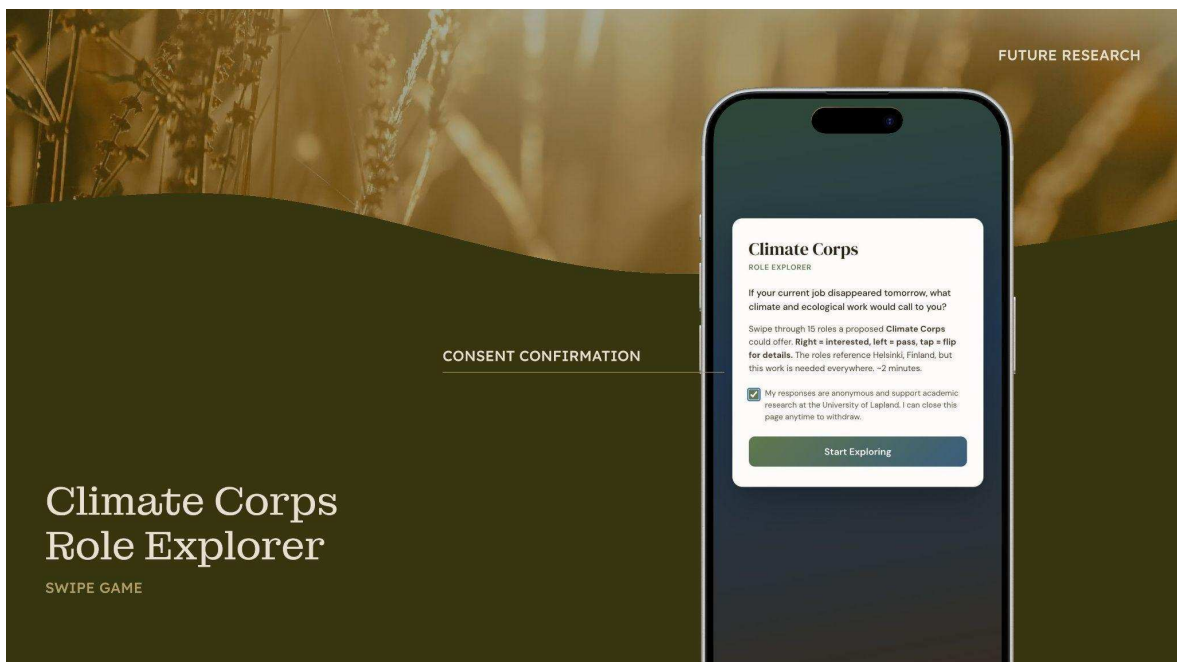


Figure E7. Role Explorer swipe game: consent and intro screen.

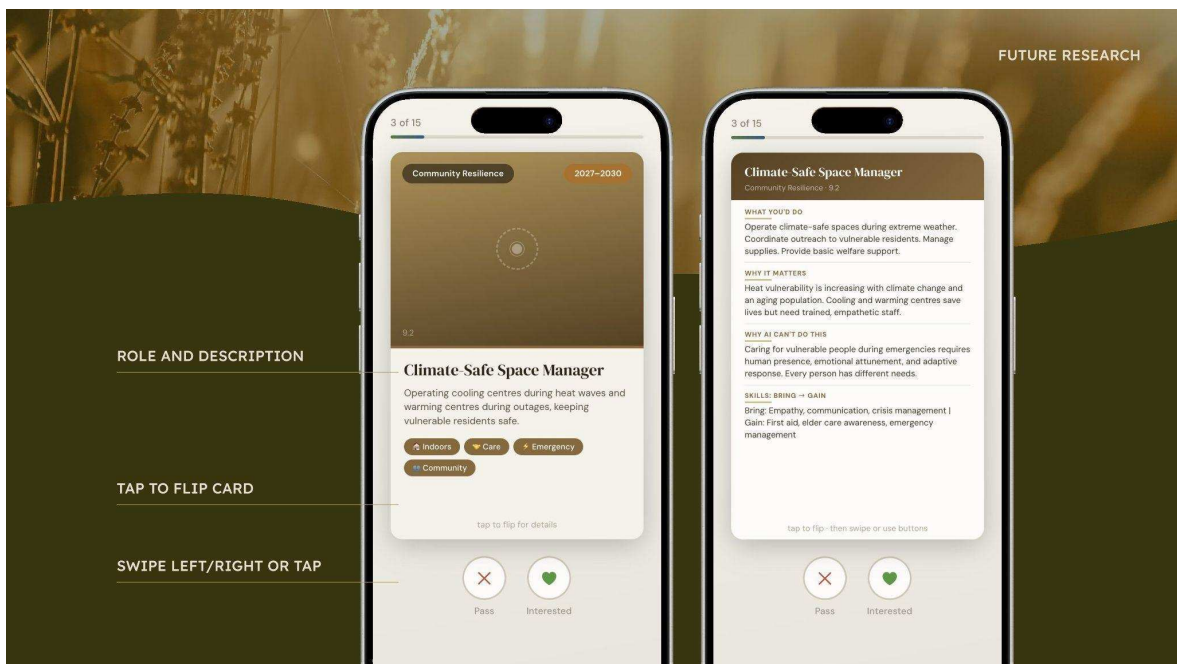


Figure E8. Role Explorer swipe game: example role card, front and back.

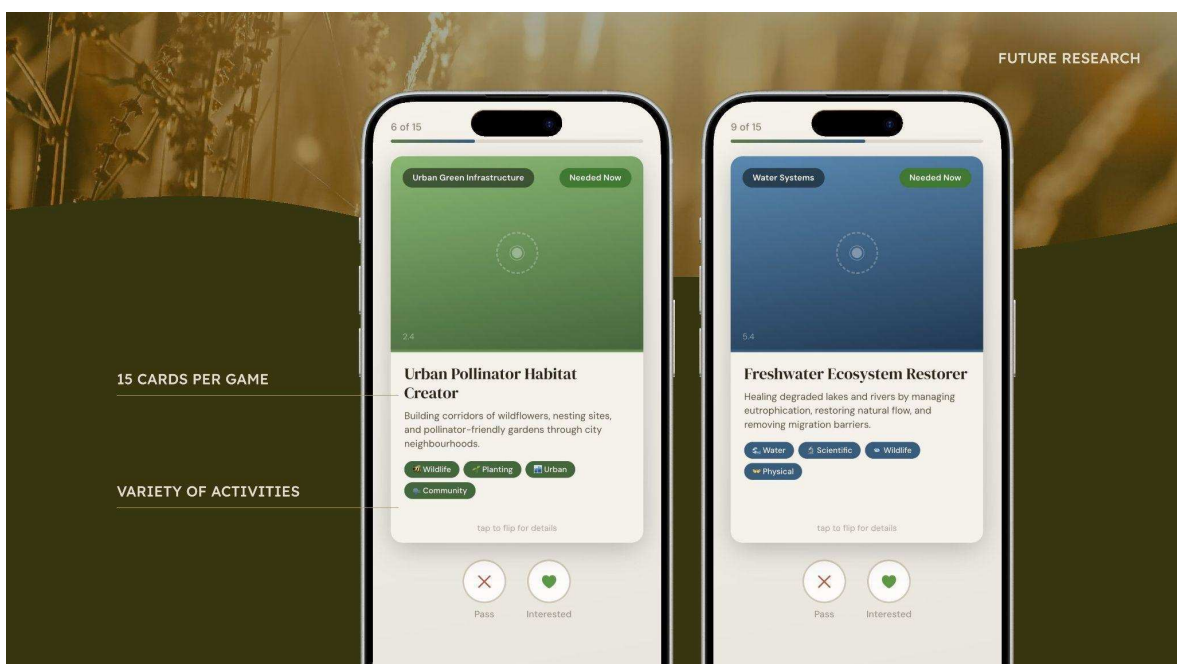


Figure E9. Role Explorer swipe game: additional role-card examples.

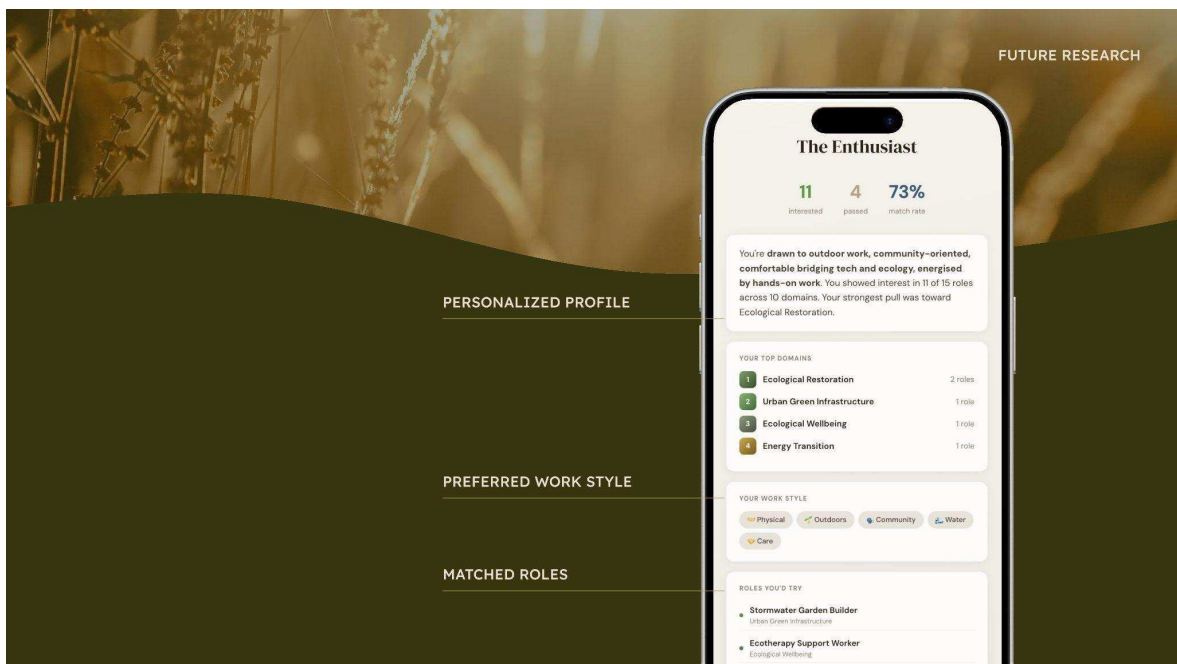


Figure E10. Role Explorer swipe game: personalized Corps profile results.

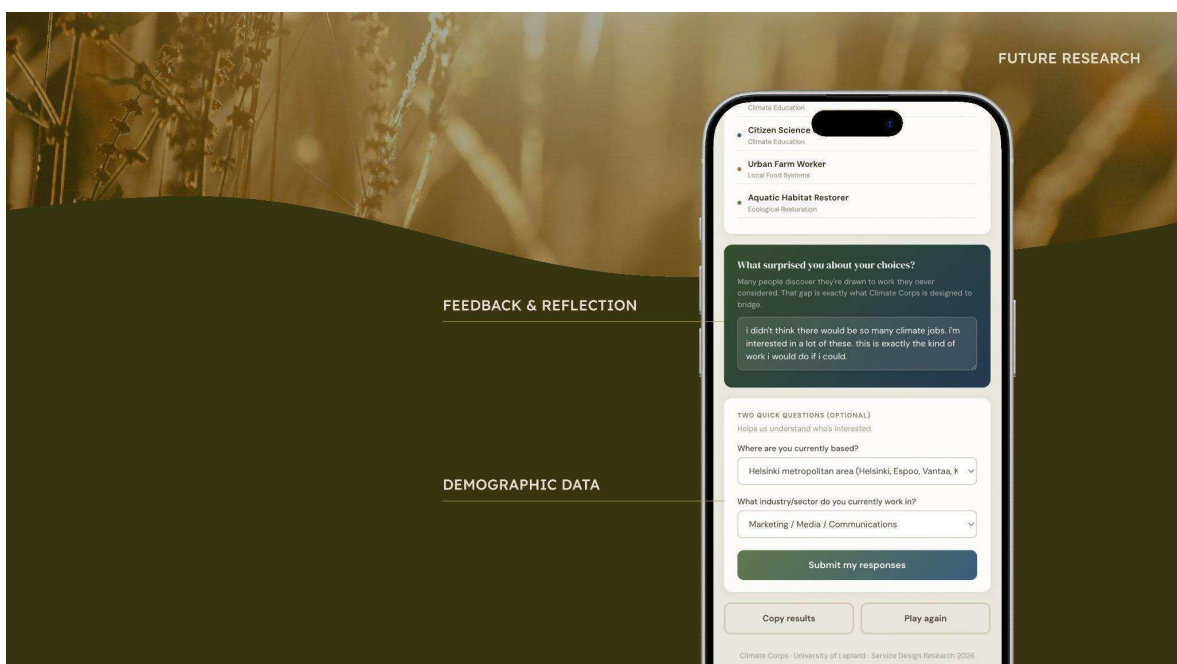


Figure E11. Role Explorer swipe game: feedback and demographic data.

APPENDIX F. NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS: EMERGENT CODES

During hand-coding, 45 emergent codes were developed to track patterns not captured by the framework columns (quiet displacement condition, Jahoda function, Honneth recognition, Ibarra identity phase, and extractive displacement). These codes arose from the data during coding and were applied across all three threads. Where variant spellings or phrasings of the same code appeared, they were merged (e.g., quality concerns and quality concern were counted together). Annotation markers used to flag strong quotes or notable moments (e.g., "great quote," "wow") are excluded from this table.

Table F1 shows all 45 emergent codes sorted by total frequency, with per-thread counts. Thread 1 is r/AskReddit ("Hey people who lost their jobs to AI, what happened?"), Thread 2 is r/antiwork ("AI has absolutely ruined my life"), and Thread 3 is r/cscareerquestions ("is anyone else just pretending to care about AI at work?"). A zero indicates the code did not appear in that thread. Total instances across all threads: 388.

Table F1. Distribution of emergent codes across threads.

Emergent code	Thread 1	Thread 2	Thread 3	Total
<i>quality concern</i>	30	11	14	55
<i>mgmt wants cost/speed over quality</i>	19	6	6	31
<i>higher expectations</i>	0	9	14	23
<i>forced to use AI</i>	8	3	11	22
<i>time structure changes</i>	0	0	19	19
<i>phone it in/work less</i>	0	14	3	17
<i>clueless mgmt</i>	0	0	17	17
<i>pressure to adapt</i>	9	2	3	14
<i>drawn to meaningful/tangible work</i>	10	1	3	14

<i>pretending</i>	0	0	14	14
<i>saw/can see it coming</i>	11	0	2	13
<i>societal implications concern</i>	9	3	1	13
<i>layoffs concern</i>	0	0	12	12
<i>positive example</i>	0	0	12	12
<i>extractive</i>	8	0	1	9
<i>capitalism</i>	0	6	3	9
<i>forced acceptance</i>	0	4	2	6
<i>AI creating positive change</i>	0	0	6	6
<i>downwardly mobile, liminal identity</i>	5	0	0	5
<i>asking what next</i>	3	0	2	5
<i>soul-sucking</i>	0	3	2	5
<i>AI workslop</i>	0	3	2	5
<i>AI brain fry</i>	0	2	3	5
<i>AI magical thinking</i>	0	0	5	5
<i>activity changes</i>	0	0	5	5
<i>demeaning boss/colleague</i>	2	0	2	4
<i>questioning identity</i>	3	1	0	4
<i>professional ecosystem change</i>	4	0	0	4
<i>AI-washing</i>	3	1	0	4
<i>work intensification</i>	0	0	4	4
<i>time saver</i>	0	0	4	4
<i>reduced agency</i>	2	0	1	3
<i>everybody thinks they are a ____</i>	2	0	1	3
<i>joy diminished</i>	0	0	3	3

<i>lied to</i>	2	0	0	2
<i>atrophy concern</i>	0	1	1	2
<i>counterproductive</i>	0	1	1	2
<i>didn't see it coming</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>dependence on AI</i>	0	1	0	1
<i>meaning</i>	0	1	0	1
<i>AI supercharging bullshit jobs</i>	0	1	0	1
<i>bullshit job</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>productivity isn't same as value</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>trust from mgmt</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>disgusted by AI</i>	0	0	1	1
Total	131	74	183	388

APPENDIX G. INTERVIEWS: EMERGENT CODES

Codes emerged inductively during the coding of eight semi-structured interviews (Section 3.7). Each interview was coded from transcripts (VTT auto-generated or hand-transcribed) using the thesis's theoretical framework (Jahoda, Honneth, Ibarra) alongside open coding for patterns not captured by the framework.

Codes were consolidated across all eight interviews and grouped into eleven thematic clusters. The "# of interviews" column indicates how many of the eight interviews the code appeared in. Section 4.2 draws on these codes but its seven cross-cutting findings were developed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), not by mechanical frequency thresholds. Some findings synthesise multiple codes into a single pattern (e.g., the atrophy progression); others capture interpretive insights that no single code represents (e.g., identity resistance).

Table G1 shows the emergent codes, organized by theme.

Table G1. Emergent codes: Knowledge worker interviews.		
Theme	Emergent code	# of interviews
Relationships and community	<i>Relationships: human</i>	8
	<i>Sense of community</i>	5
	<i>Social contact (Jahoda)</i>	4
	<i>Collective purpose (Jahoda)</i>	4
	<i>Social thinning</i>	3
	<i>Deep understanding: human</i>	3
	<i>Emotional intelligence: human</i>	2
	<i>AI replacing collegial interaction</i>	1
	<i>Community loss</i>	1

	<i>Remote work hollows latent functions</i>	1
	<i>Community as structure</i>	1
	Total: Relationships and community	33
Cognitive erosion and atrophy	<i>Atrophy concern</i>	6
	<i>Quality concern</i>	6
	<i>Dependence on AI</i>	4
	<i>Skill erosion</i>	2
	<i>AI brain fry</i>	2
	<i>Attention erosion</i>	1
	<i>Cognitive block</i>	1
	<i>Reading-writing capacity diminished</i>	1
	<i>Digital overwhelm</i>	1
	<i>Younger workers lack initiative</i>	1
	<i>Technology eroding human skills</i>	1
	<i>Directed attention depletion (ART)</i>	1
	Total: Cognitive erosion and atrophy	27
Professional identity and craft	<i>Can sense the synthetic</i>	5
	<i>Handmade conviction</i>	4
	<i>Job is identity</i>	3
	<i>Identity in question</i>	3
	<i>Professional identity mediated by AI</i>	2
	<i>Creative work as need not preference</i>	1
	<i>Joy in craft</i>	1
	<i>Pride in self-made</i>	1
	<i>Self-proof through craft</i>	1

	<i>Identity disrupted by job loss</i>	1
	<i>Still recovering</i>	1
	<i>Resistance to displacement premise</i>	1
	<i>Not willing to surrender craft</i>	1
	<i>Seeking accommodation not resistance</i>	1
	<i>Identity: holding on</i>	1
	<i>It won't be me</i>	1
	Total: Professional identity and craft	29
Recognition and dignity	<i>Expertise devaluation</i>	2
	<i>Everybody thinks they're a _____</i>	2
	<i>Reduced agency</i>	2
	<i>Desire for recognition</i>	2
	<i>Status (Jahoda)</i>	2
	<i>Management wants cost/speed over quality</i>	2
	<i>Pay connected to social esteem</i>	1
	<i>Recognition connected to identity</i>	1
	<i>Expertise not valued by market</i>	1
	<i>Bypassed</i>	1
	<i>Dignity injury, unnamed</i>	1
	<i>Self-doubt about own reaction</i>	1
	<i>Consent erosion</i>	1
	<i>Proposed policy rejected</i>	1
	<i>Beck individualisation</i>	1
	Total: Recognition and dignity	21

Displacement landscape and AI concerns	<i>Societal implications concern</i>	7
	<i>Professional ecosystem change</i>	5
	<i>AI workslop</i>	4
	<i>AI resistance</i>	4
	<i>Frozen in place / approaching</i>	3
	<i>Saw/can see it coming</i>	3
	<i>Forced to use AI</i>	2
	<i>Layoffs concern</i>	2
	<i>AI ethics stance</i>	2
	<i>Ecological AI costs</i>	1
	<i>Capitalism</i>	1
	<i>Roles changing</i>	1
	<i>Locked out</i>	1
	<i>Pressure to adapt</i>	1
	<i>AI development unnecessary</i>	1
	<i>Lack of accountability</i>	1
	<i>Workflow and staffing experiments</i>	1
	Total: Displacement landscape and AI concerns	40
Meaning, embodiment and nature	<i>ART (attention restoration)</i>	4
	<i>Desire for non-screen work</i>	4
	<i>Drawn to meaningful/tangible work</i>	4

	<i>Joy in physical tasks</i>	3
	<i>Embodied practice</i>	3
	<i>Eco-human intersection</i>	3
	<i>Bellacasa connection</i>	2
	<i>Embodied work resists automation</i>	2
	<i>Nature as rightful state</i>	1
	<i>Tangible output satisfies</i>	1
	<i>Personal connection to nature</i>	1
	<i>Nature mental health</i>	1
	<i>Digital detox needed</i>	1
	Total: Meaning, embodiment and nature	30
Ecological work perceptions and barriers	<i>Eco work not valued</i>	6
	<i>Blue collar perception barrier</i>	2
	<i>Financial barrier to transition</i>	2
	<i>Ecological knowledge lost</i>	2
	<i>No status concern</i>	2
	<i>Nature valued in future, not now</i>	1
	<i>Financial unviability of eco work</i>	1
	<i>Eco work vs knowledge work esteem gap</i>	1
	<i>Botany-to-IT pay gap</i>	1
	<i>Green fatigue</i>	1

	<i>Gendered perception of physical work</i>	1
	<i>Eco not viable career</i>	1
	Total: Ecological work perceptions and barriers	21
Skills transfer and adaptation	<i>Deep understanding: human</i>	3
	<i>Transferable skills</i>	2
	<i>Entrepreneurial response</i>	2
	<i>AI as learning tool</i>	2
	<i>Informed resistance</i>	2
	<i>AI skill is advantage</i>	2
	<i>Proactive skill building</i>	1
	<i>PM brain activates</i>	1
	<i>Existing skills transferable to eco</i>	1
	<i>Systems thinking: human</i>	1
	<i>Soft skills resist automation</i>	1
	<i>Must adapt</i>	1
	Total: Skills transfer and adaptation	19
Climate Corps design inputs	<i>CC: pay is the barrier</i>	3
	<i>CC: cohort is essential</i>	2
	<i>CC: give variety and short trials</i>	2
	<i>CC: would participate</i>	2
	<i>CC: accessibility concern</i>	2

	<i>CC: duration debate</i>	2
	<i>CC: framing advice</i>	2
	<i>CC: must be professionalised</i>	1
	<i>CC: training quality concern</i>	1
	<i>CC: immigration status matters</i>	1
	<i>CC: portfolio career model</i>	1
	<i>CC: sounds like volunteering</i>	1
	<i>CC: recruit for aptitude not skills</i>	1
	<i>CC: trust-based placement works</i>	1
	<i>CC: unemployment system should enable reskilling</i>	1
	<i>CC: provide training / career pathway / security</i>	1
	<i>Participant independently states CC thesis</i>	1
	Total: Climate Corps design inputs	25
CC role card responses	<i>Forest therapy guide: up-vote</i>	6
	<i>Nature play space builder: up-vote</i>	5
	<i>Peatland restoration: up-vote</i>	3
	<i>Biodiversity monitoring: up-vote</i>	3
	<i>Drone survey: up-vote / curious</i>	3
	<i>Meadow restorer: up-vote</i>	2
	<i>Soil health technician: up-vote</i>	2

	<i>Food preservation: up-vote</i>	2
	<i>Restoration planner: up-vote</i>	1
	<i>All roles feel meaningful</i>	2
	<i>Clothing repair/design: up-vote</i>	1
	<i>Too physical (various roles)</i>	1
	<i>Drone survey: down-vote / neutral</i>	3
	<i>Food preservation: no</i>	1
	Total: CC role card responses	35
Systemic and contextual	<i>H3 vision</i>	2
	<i>UBI scepticism</i>	1
	<i>Structural unemployment</i>	1
	<i>TE Services experience</i>	1
	<i>Finnish context</i>	1
	<i>Finnish unemployment system limits growth</i>	1
	<i>US context: no safety net</i>	1
	<i>Grassroots eco work happening</i>	1
	<i>Government as obstacle</i>	1
	<i>Extractive governance</i>	1
	<i>Tech-to-land movement</i>	1
	<i>Regeneration</i>	1
	<i>People have solutions</i>	1

	<i>Maslow: security first</i>	1
	Total: Systemic and contextual	15

Note: Some codes appearing in only one interview reflect participant-specific context (e.g., national policy environment, immigration status) rather than isolated themes.

Near-duplicate codes were consolidated (e.g., various formulations of ecological work undervalued merged into a single code; "humans value handmade" merged with "handmade conviction"). The full coded notes for each interview are held by the researcher.

APPENDIX H. SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

This appendix reproduces the two survey instruments used in this research. The first, “What makes work meaningful in the age of AI?” (February 2026, N=17), explored the relationship between AI disruption and openness to ecological work. The second, “How is AI changing your work?” (February 2026, N=16), focused on lived experiences of AI-driven work transformation, with response options designed around Jahoda’s (1982) latent deprivation model and Honneth’s (1995) recognition theory. Both surveys were built in Google Forms and distributed through LinkedIn and professional networks. Section 3.8 describes the instruments, their purpose, and their limitations in detail.

Survey 1: "What makes work meaningful in the age of AI?"

Deployed: February 16, 2026. Platform: Google Forms. Distribution: LinkedIn and professional networks. Responses: 17.

Q1. What industry/sector do you currently work in? Single select.

- Tech / IT / Software
- Business services (consulting, analysis, professional services)
- Education
- Public sector / Government
- Finance / Banking / Insurance
- Tourism
- Other (free text)

Q2. How many years of professional experience do you have? Single select.

- 0–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years

Q3. Where are you currently based? Single select.

- Helsinki metropolitan area (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen)
- Other location in Finland
- Outside Finland

Q4. How much of your current work do you think could be done by AI within the next 5 years? Single select.

- Almost none (0–20%)
- A small portion (20–40%)
- About half (40–60%)
- Most of it (60–80%)

Q5. How do you feel about AI's growing role in your professional life? Single select.

- More excited than worried
- Cautiously optimistic: some benefits, some challenges
- Mixed feelings
- More worried than excited

Q6. If AI automated parts of your work, what would you miss most? Multi-select (up to 3).

- Problem-solving and creative thinking
- Collaboration and teamwork
- A sense of accomplishment
- Learning and developing new skills
- Making a tangible difference
- Deep learning
- Other (free text)

Q7. What do you enjoy most about spending time in nature? Multi-select (up to 3).

- Physical activity and movement (hiking, swimming, cycling)
- Quiet reflection and relaxation
- Observing wildlife and natural beauty

- Growing or tending plants (gardening, plant care)
- Learning about plants, animals, or ecosystems
- Being with others who share this interest
- Contributing to environmental work (volunteering, restoration)
- N/A: I don't currently spend time in nature / I don't enjoy it

Q8. What makes spending time in nature feel meaningful to you? Multi-select (up to 3).

- Natural beauty and wonder
- Peace and stress relief
- Feeling connected to something larger
- Physical activity and movement
- Being with others
- Making a tangible contribution (planting, restoring, volunteering)

Q9. If you were to do environmental work, what would be most important to you? Multi-select (up to 3).

- Making a meaningful environmental impact
- Seeing visible, tangible results
- Physical work outdoors (not at a desk)
- Learning new skills and knowledge
- Being part of a community who shares this purpose
- Fair compensation and job security

Q10. What prevents you from spending more time in nature or doing environmental work? Multi-select (select all that apply).

- Time constraints (work, family, other commitments)
- Financial constraints
- Don't know how to get involved
- Lack of knowledge or confidence
- Limited access to natural spaces
- Physical limitations or health concerns
- No one to do it with

- N/A: Nothing prevents me; I'm already engaged

Q11. Is there anything else you'd like to share about AI, work, nature, or your thoughts on this topic? Open text. Not required.

Survey 2: "How is AI changing your work?"

Deployed: February 26, 2026. Platform: Google Forms. Distribution: LinkedIn and professional networks. Responses: 16.

Q1. Which of these apply to your current professional situation? Multi-select (select all that apply).

- Working full-time in a role that involves significant computer-based or analytical work
- Working, but actively looking for something different
- Freelance or self-employed
- Recently left or lost a role (within the past 12 months)
- Looking for work and finding it harder than expected
- In a career transition between fields
- Student or recent graduate preparing to enter the workforce
- Working in a field that doesn't primarily involve desk-based or digital work
- Other

Q2. What field do you work in (or most recently worked in)? Single select.

- Technology, software, or IT
- Business services (consulting, finance, legal, professional services)
- Marketing, communications, or content
- Design or creative fields
- Public sector or government
- Education or research
- Healthcare or social services
- Trades, manufacturing, or manual work
- Other (free text)

Q3. Where are you based? Single select.

- Helsinki metropolitan area (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa)
- Elsewhere in Finland
- European Union (outside Finland)
- United Kingdom
- United States or Canada
- Other

Q4. In the past 12 months, which of these have you personally experienced?

Multi-select (select all that apply).

- My team or department has shrunk
- Responsibilities I used to own have shifted to AI tools
- I'm doing more work with fewer colleagues
- Hiring at my organization has slowed or frozen
- I've taken on a role below my experience level or pay expectations
- My freelance or contract pipeline has become less predictable
- I'm staying in my current role longer than I'd like because the job market feels uncertain
- I use AI tools daily and my job feels fundamentally different than it did a year ago
- I've seen colleagues or peers in my field lose their roles
- I haven't noticed significant changes to my work
- Not currently working

Q5. How would you describe your current sense of professional security? Single select.

- Very secure: confident in my role and career trajectory
- Mostly secure, but I think about it more than I used to
- Uncertain: not sure what my professional future looks like
- Precarious: actively worried about my livelihood
- Already experiencing significant disruption

Q6. If your current role disappeared tomorrow, how confident are you that you could find comparable work within 6 months? Single select. (Comparable = similar type of work, at a similar level and pay.)

- Very confident: plenty of opportunities at my level
- Somewhat confident, but it would take real effort
- Not very confident: the market feels much tighter than it used to
- Not at all confident: I don't think those roles exist the way they used to
- I'm already in this situation

Q7. When you think about AI's impact on work, what's the dominant feeling? Single select.

- Excitement about new tools and possibilities
- Mixed feelings: gains and losses that are hard to weigh
- Low-grade anxiety that's hard to pin down
- Grief for a version of my career that no longer seems possible
- Numbness: I've stopped trying to predict what happens next
- I don't think about it much
- Something else (free text)

Q8. Regardless of your current work situation, which of these sound most appealing right now? Multi-select (up to 2).

- Work that produces something visible and tangible
- Work that gets me physically active and away from screens
- Work that connects me to a community with a shared purpose
- Work that contributes to ecological health or climate resilience
- Work that gives me real autonomy over my time
- Work that pays well, regardless of whether it's fulfilling
- Stability, above all else

Q9. Have you ever seriously considered leaving desk-based or digital work for something more hands-on or physical? Single select.

- Yes, and I've already made that change
- Yes, I think about it but haven't acted on it
- Sometimes, as a fantasy I don't think is realistic
- No, I want to stay in my current type of work
- No, I can't afford that kind of change

Q10. What would be the biggest barrier to moving into ecological or environmental work? Single select.

- I don't know what roles or opportunities even exist in that space
- Loss of professional identity or status
- I don't have relevant skills or knowledge
- The pay cut would be hard to absorb
- Physical limitations or health concerns
- I'm not interested in that kind of work
- Nothing significant: I'd do it if the opportunity were there

Q11. Is there anything you'd like to share about how AI is affecting your work or your thinking about the future? Open text. Not required.

Both surveys concluded with an option to volunteer for a follow-up interview via a separate Google Form, preserving survey anonymity. All eight knowledge worker interviewees (Section 3.7) were recruited through this route.

APPENDIX I. CROSSWALK: SYNTHESIS

This appendix presents excerpts from the full crosswalk synthesis produced on 16 April 2026. The synthesis categorised 342 instances of mandated ecological work from seven Helsinki/Uusimaa policy documents, assessed each category against the Uusimaa Labour Force Barometer, OPH Skills Cards, and the two vocational qualifications in nature-based services, and clustered the categories into five families based on shared competence, labour-planning, and qualification profiles. Section 3.10 describes the method. Section 4.5 presents the findings. The full unabridged synthesis, including all 15 per-category assessments and row-by-row assignments, is available as a supplementary file.

Inputs consulted

- 342-row extraction from seven Helsinki / regional policy documents
- Uusimaa occupational barometer, January 2026 (TEM)
- OPH Skills Cards — National Forum for Skills Anticipation (2035 horizon)
- Further Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services (NQF 4, in force 01.08.2025)
- Specialist Vocational Qualification in Nature-based Services (NQF 5, in force 01.08.2026)

The "work type" column in the extraction has been ignored as instructed; the categorisation below was built bottom-up from the work descriptions.

The 15 categories

All 342 rows have been assigned to exactly one category. Full row-by-row assignments are held in a companion file; summary distribution and boundary notes follow.

C1 — Field surveys and species/habitat inventory (38 rows)

What this category contains. One-off or periodic field inventory work that aims to determine what species, habitats, or ecological features are present and where. Includes

biotope mapping, species-occurrence surveys of named taxa, underwater marine surveys by diving, and the inventory work required as an input to conservation-area designation.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C2 (Long-term monitoring) because survey work is one-off or one-per-cycle rather than standardised recurring observation. Distinct from C3 (Data systems) because the survey produces the observations; it does not build the infrastructure that holds them. Where a row pairs a survey with a plan (e.g. row 89: "conduct a survey and create an action plan"), I placed it in C1 if the survey is the primary deliverable and in C4 if the plan is.

Examples. Row 3 (increase nature-type and species surveys to fill gaps in the LTJ); row 293 (nature inventories for programme sites); rows 306 and 307 (Habitats Directive Annex IV(a) and Annex II species surveys); row 304 (underwater nature surveys by diving).

C2 — Long-term ecological monitoring (46 rows)

What this category contains. Repeated, ongoing, standardised observation intended to detect change over time. Established indicator programmes, annual counts, time-series maintenance, and monitoring-plan implementation.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. The signature of this category is "ongoing" or "track change" in the source text. Distinct from C1 because it is a standing programme, not a one-off field campaign. Most LUMO Monitoring 1–38 rows sit here; row 113 (map small water biotas) was moved from LUMO Monitoring to C1 despite the source's labelling because the verb "map" and the stated scope indicate a one-off inventory.

Examples. Rows 94–131 (LUMO Monitoring programme, 36 standing monitoring series); row 131 (civil observation monitoring for 12 named indicator species); row 325 (Helsinki's 36 nature monitoring programmes).

C3 — Ecological data-systems and information infrastructure (7 rows)

What this category contains. Work on the data infrastructure that holds and uses ecological observations: the nature information system (LTJ), indicator development, biodiversity footprint calculation, carbon-sink accounting, open-data publication for educational use.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. A surveyor produces data; a monitorer repeats data collection; this category builds and maintains the databases, models, and indicator systems that structure what survey and monitoring data become. The row count is small because most of the information-system work in Helsinki's documents is referenced by reference to existing systems (LTJ, MVMI) rather than as new work.

Examples. Row 5 (complement LTJ with species information materials); row 96 (develop ecological network indicator); row 242 (calculate existing carbon sinks); row 258 (calculate Helsinki's biodiversity footprint).

C4 — Ecologically-informed planning, strategy and policy drafting (46 rows)

What this category contains. Producing written planning deliverables that require ecological literacy: action plans, management and use plans, biodiversity strategies, guidelines, procedural instructions, planning-integration frameworks, high-level policy commitments. Covers both city-wide strategy and site-specific management-plan drafting (*hoito- ja käyttösuunnitelma*).

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. This is the work of producing plan documents, not the work they describe. High-level commitments at the scale of "halt biodiversity loss by 2030" (row 252) are placed here because someone must produce the plan by which the target is pursued; they are not designation (C5) and not restoration works (C6). Distinct from C3 because plans are narrative/prescriptive deliverables, not data infrastructure. Several rows that combine survey with plan have been placed in C4 when the plan is the deliverable (e.g. rows 291, 292: prepare/update management and use plans).

Examples. Row 2 (develop ways to increase biodiversity in detailed planning); rows 291–292 (prepare and update management and use plans for conservation areas); row 286 (compile animal welfare programme); row 328 (region-specific biodiversity action plan); row 238 (regional green area factor).

C5 — Protected-area designation and legal protection (23 rows)

What this category contains. Establishing formal nature-conservation areas under the Nature Conservation Act; drafting protection decisions; securing legal protection status for named sites, habitat types, and species; advocating for national-park status. Includes high-level preservation commitments tied to specific legal protection instruments.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C4 because the deliverable is a legal protection status, not a plan document. Distinct from C8 because designation is a one-time legal act, not ongoing management. Several rows sit at the boundary (e.g. row 253: "maintain forest proportion at ~1/3" — is this designation, planning, or management?); I placed such rows in C5 when the operative commitment is to preserve/protect a defined area-share or named area.

Examples. Row 289 (establish 98 new terrestrial conservation areas); row 290 (22 new marine conservation areas); row 280 (eight new protected areas per year); row 273 (advocate for national park in Helsinki); row 330 (preserve old forests).

C6 — Ecological restoration works (33 rows)

What this category contains. Physical, on-site intervention intended to return a degraded ecosystem toward a more natural state. Stream daylighting, removal of migration barriers, re-meandering, spawning-gravel beds, lawn-to-meadow conversion, re-vegetation of eroding banks, perinnebiotooppi restoration clearings, wetland restoration, landfill rehabilitation.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C7 (Planting) because restoration may or may not involve new planting and is framed by a reference state of degraded ecology; distinct from C8 (Management) because restoration addresses a specific degradation condition and is typically one-off or episodic, while management is the ongoing sustaining practice. Row 191 (plant riparian vegetation) sits at the boundary and was placed in C7 because the verb and the scope are planting, even though the context is stream restoration.

Examples. Rows 187–190 and 193–194 (stream restoration works: daylighting, barrier removal, channel naturalisation, gravel beds, bank stabilisation, deadwood addition); rows 234–235 (Trumpettikoski and Longinoja restorations); row 296 (perinnebiotooppi restoration clearings and grazing fences); row 261 (landfill rehabilitation).

C7 — Ecologically-informed planting / vegetation establishment (22 rows)

What this category contains. Establishing new vegetation in the landscape in a way that promotes biodiversity: native species, pollinator plants, multi-layered vegetation, bird- and

pollinator-feeding species, riparian vegetation, berry-bearing shrubs, street-scale and canopy trees.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C6 because the deliverable is establishment of vegetation, not reversal of a specific degradation (though the two frequently co-occur — see row 191 boundary note). Distinct from C8 because planting is the establishment act, not the ongoing maintenance of what is planted.

Examples. Row 13 (plant new forest-network connections); row 34 (pollinator-friendly trees and bushes); rows 172–175 (plantings in open spaces and streets); row 191 (plant riparian vegetation at stream banks); row 271 (increase trees and canopy cover).

C8 — Ongoing habitat management and site-maintenance practices (43 rows)

What this category contains. Repeated, recurring physical practices that sustain biodiversity outcomes on already-established sites: meadow mowing regimes (timing, hand tools, removal of cuttings), grazing regimes, deadwood provision and retention, light-pollution management, tree veteranisation, routine maintenance of conservation areas (litter, trail, dangerous-tree felling), aquatic-vegetation mowing at marine sites, nature supervision, and higher-level ongoing practice commitments (e.g. "keep green areas in good condition").

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. This is the largest category aside from SURV/MON/PLAN because Helsinki's documents mandate an extraordinary volume of ongoing biodiversity-informed practice. Distinct from C6 because the work is sustaining rather than reversing degradation. Rows 236–237 (operating stormwater filtration systems) sit at the boundary with infrastructure operations; placed here because the ongoing work is routine operation, not construction (which would be C10).

Examples. Rows 210–213 (meadow mowing timing, hand tools, cutting removal, extra rounds on restoration sites); row 209 (tree veteranisation); row 299 (routine maintenance of conservation areas: trails, signage, litter, dangerous-tree felling); rows 323, 301 (regular mowing/grazing of perinnebiotoopit and marine aquatic vegetation).

C9 — Invasive alien species control (7 rows)

What this category contains. Detection, removal, and suppression of invasive alien species as a named work stream. Annual removals, repeated treatments, controls at conservation sites, downstream control in watercourses, extermination campaigns.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Mapping invasive species (row 74) sits in C1 because the work is mapping; this category is for the removal action. Monitoring of invasive species (rows 126, 214) sits in C2 because the work is repeated standardised observation. The row count (7) is small but warrants a separate category because the source texts repeatedly separate invasive-species work from general site management, and because the competence profile differs (identification skills plus removal methods for specific regulated taxa).

Examples. Row 76 (exterminate most harmful invasive species); row 195 (combat invasive species spreading downstream); row 300 (remove invasive and mow tall vegetation annually at wetland/stream/open-ground sites); row 321 (invasive control at conservation sites requiring special and repeated treatments).

C10 — Nature-based infrastructure construction (36 rows)

What this category contains. Physical construction of engineered ecological or hydrological infrastructure: rain gardens, bioswales, detention ponds, permeable paving, green roofs, biochar filtration, constructed wetlands, floating wetlands, wildlife underpasses and overpasses, animal passage at bridges, nesting floats and artificial nests, pollinator structures (insect hotels, habitat log piles), eco-concrete shorelines, stepping-stone plantings as constructed corridors, green tramway tracks.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C11 (Recreational infrastructure) because the engineered function is ecological/hydrological, not visitor access. Distinct from C6 because the work is new-build, not reversing a specific degradation. Distinct from C7 because the deliverable is a constructed structure, not vegetation establishment as such. Row 202 ("ensure stormwater does not enter the sea untreated") was placed here because the mandate is an engineering outcome, even though the implementation could span several methods.

Examples. Rows 180–186 (rain gardens, bioswales, detention ponds, permeable paving, green roofs, biochar filtration, constructed wetlands); row 157 (wildlife underpasses/overpasses); row 203 (wildlife passages under roads); rows 198–200 (gentle shore profiles, floating wetlands, eco-concrete).

C11 — Recreational / visitor infrastructure at nature sites (7 rows)

What this category contains. Physical construction and upgrading of visitor infrastructure at nature sites: trail signage, observation structures, nature-trail markers (including underwater), nature bases for schools and community use, wear-prevention structures at high-visitation sites, beach and island infrastructure.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C10 because the engineered function is public access, not ecological function. The category is small (7 rows) but maintained as separate because the competence profile differs (outdoor-recreation planning plus trail/signage/carpentry rather than nature-based engineering), and because in both TEM and qualification terms these two constructions map to different labour pools. Row 297 sits on the boundary because it combines spawning gravel beds (ecological) with bridges and observation platforms (recreational); I placed it here because the majority of the row's described work is recreational infrastructure.

Examples. Row 88 (communal nature bases for schools and daycares); row 90 (signposts and structures for nature hiking); row 295 (signage and recreational structures at new conservation areas); row 298 (underwater nature-trail markers).

C12 — Public environmental education and communication (15 rows)

What this category contains. Outward-facing education and communication: nature-school operations, park walks, public seminars, advisory services to residents, signage explaining ecological management to the public, school and daycare engagement, bird-collision advice, voluntary-event advice, informing fishers, communication strategy.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C14 (Workforce training), which is inward-facing and targets the City's own designers and maintenance staff. Distinct from C13 (Volunteer coordination) because education is information-delivery without necessarily organising labour. Row 9 (market Helsinki as a nature and bird capital) was

placed here as the best fit rather than its own category because one communication row does not warrant a fifteenth-plus category.

Examples. Rows 77–83 (LUMO's public-relationship cluster: residents' nature relationship, nature-school services, annual seminar, communication innovation, nature-school park walks, open data for educators); rows 217–220 (Sallitusti villi's communication cluster: informing residents, signage on "messy" areas, community engagement, school coordination).

C13 — Volunteer coordination and citizen-science organising (4 rows)

What this category contains. Recruiting, training, coordinating, and deploying volunteers and citizen observers; organising stakeholder participation processes; nature-advocate networks.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C12 because the work is organising labour, not delivering information. Distinct from C9 where invasive-removal volunteer events are named (row 149) — there I placed the row in C9 because the work being done is the removal, and the volunteer organisation is a modifier. Row 294 (stakeholder participation for multiple sites) is placed here as public participation, which is a close relative of volunteer coordination in the sense that both involve organising non-staff labour/input.

Examples. Row 91 (develop nature-advocate activities based on civil observation and volunteerism); row 92 (open civil-observation events for species monitoring); row 93 (voluntary work events for biodiversity); row 294 (stakeholder participation processes for multiple conservation sites).

C14 — Workforce training for ecological work (10 rows)

What this category contains. Training of the City's own professional workforce — designers, landscape architects, planning officers, nature caretakers, and maintenance workers — in the ecological competences they need to carry out other categories of work (C6, C7, C8, C10 in particular). Also includes "develop biodiversity-promoting maintenance practices" (row 228) and "utilise biological expertise" (row 229) where these describe building workforce capacity rather than producing a plan.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C12 because audience is the workforce, not the public. Row 228 sits at the boundary with C4 (method development is plan-like); I placed it in C14 because the next-order work is training workers in the practice.

Examples. Row 79 (train planning officers and nature caretakers); rows 221–225 (Sallitusti villi’s designer-training cluster: nature-based design, dynamic vegetation, multi-species vegetation, species-based selection, animal-friendly design); rows 226–227 (maintenance-worker training in species ID and dynamic maintenance).

C15 — Regulation of human activities affecting wildlife (5 rows)

What this category contains. Proposing rules that restrict human recreational or commercial activity in order to protect wildlife: fishing prohibitions and restrictions, waterfowl hunting restrictions, boat-traffic restrictions (including ballast water, underwater noise), redirection of boating away from bird/fish areas, quiet-watercraft preference.

What distinguishes it from adjacent categories. Distinct from C4 (Planning) because the deliverable is a regulatory proposal, requiring both wildlife-science expertise and knowledge of the regulatory instrument being proposed. The category is small but held separate because it sits at a distinctive intersection of expertise (wildlife science + recreation regulation + marine/transport regulation).

Examples. Row 45 (fishing prohibitions and restrictions); row 46 (waterfowl hunting restrictions); rows 47–49 (water-traffic effects on species, boating away from bird/fish areas, quiet watercraft); all from LUMO Section 6.

Outliers and borderline cases

No rows were left as outliers. Every row was placed in a primary category; borderline cases are flagged in row assignments file and in the category descriptions above. The main borderline zones were:

- **Survey vs. monitoring** (e.g. row 113: "map small water biotas" — classed SURV despite LUMO-Monitoring label) — the verb and scope determined placement.
- **Restoration vs. planting** (e.g. row 191 riparian vegetation — classed PLNT) — the verb and the direct work determined placement.

- **Planning vs. designation** (e.g. rows 253, 254, 330 — classed DESG or PLAN depending on whether the mandate is a specific protection act or a higher-level ecological objective).
- **Invasive control vs. management** (rows 148, 300 — classed INV because invasive removal is the operative work).
- **Recreational vs. nature-based infrastructure** (row 297 — classed REC because the mandate combines observation structures, bridges, and spawning gravel, with the majority recreational).

Table I1. Distribution of 342 rows across the 15 categories.

Code	Category	# of rows
C1	Field surveys & species/habitat inventory	38
C2	Long-term ecological monitoring	46
C3	Ecological data-systems & info infrastructure	7
C4	Ecologically-informed planning, strategy & policy drafting	46
C5	Protected-area designation & legal protection	23
C6	Ecological restoration works	33
C7	Ecologically-informed planting / vegetation establishment	22
C8	Ongoing habitat management & site-maintenance practices	43
C9	Invasive alien species control	7
C10	Nature-based infrastructure construction	36
C11	Recreational/visitor infrastructure at nature sites	7
C12	Public environmental education & communication	15
C13	Volunteer coordination & citizen-science organising	4
C14	Workforce training for ecological work	10
C15	Regulation of human activities affecting wildlife	5

Per-category assessment against workforce planning and qualification systems

Each of the 15 categories was assessed against the Uusimaa Labour Force Barometer (January 2026), OPH Skills Cards (2035 horizon), and the Further and Specialist Vocational Qualifications in Nature-based Services. The assessment examined: (i) what the policy documents demand; (ii) how the labour-planning system categorises adjacent work; (iii) whether OPH foresight instruments anticipate the skills; and (iv) whether the vocational qualifications contain relevant competence units.

Three representative assessments are presented in full below, selected to illustrate the range of findings: C1 (strong qualification alignment), C6 (the central qualification gap, with an alarming labour-market mismatch signal), and C12 (a Cluster V category with a different gap pattern). The remaining 12 assessments follow the same analytical structure; their gap findings are summarised in Table I2.

C1 — Field surveys and species/habitat inventory (38 rows)

What policy demands. Helsinki's policy documents mandate an extensive and specific catalogue of field survey work, much of it targeted at named taxa and habitat types. The Nature Conservation Programme alone lists 14 separate additional survey needs (rows 306–319), including Habitats Directive Annex II and IV(a) species (vascular plants, mosses, dragonflies, fungi, invertebrates, marine beetles), Water Act habitats, underwater biota, deadwood species assemblages, and comprehensive surveys of Östersundom and Melkki. The LUMO Programme mandates systematic biotope mapping to cover the entire city (row 19), updating the LTJ with species data (row 3), and mapping marine nature (row 42). Sallitusti villi adds regular urban-nature inventory work as a standing requirement (row 230). The competence profile demanded is species identification across multiple taxonomic groups, habitat-type recognition, GIS-based spatial data collection, and — for row 304 — diving.

Labour planning status. The nearest TEM occupational categories are "**Biologists, botanists, zoologists and related professionals**" (8 open, 1 412 employed, 290 unemployed; oversupply of labour, serious; 17.1% unemployment rate) and "**Life science**

technicians (excluding medical)" (oversupply, serious). There is no named TEM category for "field ecologist", "nature surveyor", or "biodiversity inventory specialist".

"Environmental protection professionals" (10 open, 1 110 employed, 100 unemployed; oversupply, moderate) may include some survey-doing staff but is a mixed category. The OPH Skills Cards contain no forecast card for survey work; the closest-adjacent card ("Forestry 2035") mentions "environmental skills" only as a generic skill among many. In short: there are workers nominally available, but no labour-planning instrument reads survey work as a distinct demand category, and no OPH foresight signal recognises it as a growth area.

Vocational qualification alignment. This is the single category for which the Finnish qualification system contains an explicit, dedicated unit. The Specialist VQ (NQF 5) **Nature Surveys competence area** contains three mandatory units directly covering this work: **Planning nature surveys**, **Carrying out nature surveys in the field**, and **Analysing and reporting nature survey data**, plus a fourth mandatory unit **Preparing special nature surveys** and an optional unit **Using spatial data in nature surveys**. The Further VQ (NQF 4) does not cover field-survey work. The Specialist VQ entered into force only on 01.08.2026 — it is very new.

Gap finding. Qualification coverage exists (Specialist VQ Nature Surveys competence area, from 01.08.2026); labour-planning recognition as a distinct demand category is absent, and no OPH foresight signal tracks it.

C6 — Ecological restoration works (33 rows)

What policy demands. Physical intervention to reverse specific ecological degradations. Stream restoration is a particularly dense sub-stream: Sallitusti villi rows 187–194 (stream daylighting, migration-barrier removal, re-meandering, spawning-gravel beds, riparian revegetation, bank erosion reduction, deadwood addition); rows 234–235 (Trumpettikoski rapids on Mätäjoki, already completed with WWF and Stream Care Association; Longinoja stream under ongoing restoration via the GreenInCities EU pilot); row 285 (rehabilitate streams, rapids, waterways city-wide); row 324 (Mätäjoki, Keravanjoki, Longinoja as continuous conservation units). Other substrata: meadow restoration (rows 14, 31, 140, 166, 245); wetland restoration (rows 248, 262, 264, 342); perinnebiotooppi restoration clearings with grazing fences (row 296); restoration at many degraded

conservation sites (row 320, 322); landfill rehabilitation (row 261); regional ecosystem restoration (row 329, 334).

Labour planning status. No TEM category is named for "ecological restoration worker", "stream restoration technician", or "restoration ecologist". The work is split across several partly-fitting categories: **"Gardeners, horticultural and nursery growers"** (oversupply, serious; 123 open, 1 217 employed, 561 unemployed); **"Garden and horticultural labourers" (labour mismatch, alarming;** 120 open, 60 employed, 145 unemployed; 70.8% unemployment rate, 66.6% vacancy rate); and **"Forestry and related workers"** (oversupply, moderate). The alarming-severity labour mismatch at Garden and horticultural labourers is the most striking signal in the entire barometer — the simultaneous 120 vacancies, 60 employed, and 145 unemployed suggests that employers and available workers are not finding each other at this most field-physical level. The OPH Skills Cards contain no foresight card on restoration as a growth sector.

Vocational qualification alignment. Neither VQ in Nature-based Services contains any unit named for restoration. The Specialist VQ Nature Surveys competence area includes "Preparing nature management plans" as an optional unit; management planning may cover the drafting of restoration plans, but no unit covers physical restoration works themselves. The Further VQ's compulsory unit for Wilderness and Nature Guides is "Operating in wilderness and natural environments"; its compulsory unit for Nature-based Product Processors is "Harvesting natural products"; its compulsory unit for Game Managers is "Managing game". None of these is restoration work. Nothing in the Finnish luontoala qualification framework names stream restoration, meadow restoration, wetland restoration, perinnebiotooppi restoration, or landfill rehabilitation as a competence.

Gap finding. Qualification gap (no unit covers restoration works); labour-planning signal is ambiguous — no demand category names restoration work, but an alarming labour mismatch at Garden and horticultural labourers suggests the field-physical labour required for this kind of work is failing to match.

C12 — Public environmental education and communication (15 rows)

What policy demands. Nature-school operations (rows 78, 83); annual seminars on urban nature (row 80); communication innovation (row 81); public advisory services on biodiversity (rows 66, 77); signage explaining ecological management to public (row 218);

school and daycare engagement (rows 78, 220); community engagement in biodiversity projects (row 219); advisory services for voluntary events (row 150); informing fishers (row 85); ways to inspire biodiversity activities (row 151).

Labour planning status. Nature-school operators occupy a specific niche that does not appear in the TEM barometer under any named category — not among biologists, not among teachers of any level, not among environmental protection professionals. The adjacent TEM categories are **"Primary school teachers"**, **"Secondary education teachers"**, **"Early childhood educators"** (labour shortage, mild — one of very few shortage signals), **"Other arts teachers"**, **"Environmental protection professionals"** (for advisory roles), **"Other artistic and cultural associate professionals"**, and (for signage) potentially **"Graphic and multimedia designers"** (oversupply, serious). The OPH Skills Cards' **"Education 2035"** card forecasts digital, multicultural, and leadership skills generically.

Vocational qualification alignment. Neither Nature-based Services VQ contains a unit named for public education, nature-school operation, or biodiversity communication. The Further VQ's Wilderness and Nature Guide competence area (compulsory unit "Operating in wilderness and natural environments"; Specialist VQ Wilderness and Nature Guiding units "Developing wilderness and nature guiding services" and "Developing wilderness and nature guiding safety") covers guided nature experiences for paying customers, which is adjacent but not the same work — nature-school operation for school groups is a distinct employment context.

Gap finding. Qualification gap (nearest-adjacent Wilderness and Nature Guiding is a partial fit for some nature-school-equivalent work but not for the broader public communication and advisory mandates); labour-planning gap (nature-school operation has no named category; general labour oversupply in adjacent teaching categories).

Gap findings for the remaining 12 categories

Table I2 shows gap findings by category. Each assessment followed the same four-part structure shown in the three entries above: policy demands, labour planning status, vocational qualification alignment, and gap finding.

Table I2. Gap findings by category.

Category	# of rows	Gap finding
C1—Field surveys & species/habitat inventory	38	<i>Complete gap finding reported in text above table.</i>
C2—Long-term ecological monitoring	46	Qualification gap (monitoring programme work not named as a competence even in the Nature Surveys competence area); labour-planning gap (no distinct demand category).
C3—Ecological data-systems & info infrastructure	7	Qualification gap; labour-planning gap (no distinct demand category for ecological data-systems specialists).
C4—Ecologically-informed planning, strategy & policy drafting	46	Qualification partial coverage (optional units in Specialist VQ, Nature Surveys competence area, address management plans and EIA); labour planning shows a serious mismatch at landscape architects specifically, with broader oversupply of other planning categories — meaning the broad labour exists but a specific mismatch signals unmet employer demand in a key adjacent role.
C5—Protected-area designation & legal protection	23	Qualification gap (no unit covers designation work); labour planning gap (no named demand category).
C6—Ecological restoration works	33	<i>Complete gap finding reported in text above table.</i>
C7—Ecologically-informed planting / vegetation establishment	22	Qualification gap (no unit in Nature-based Services VQs; falls outside my scope in adjacent horticulture qualifications); labour-planning signal is ambiguous (oversupply at skilled, alarming mismatch at labourer level).

C8—Ongoing habitat management & site-maintenance practices	43	Qualification gap (no unit covers ongoing ecologically-informed management); labour-planning mixed (aggregate oversupply in adjacent horticultural/forestry categories, with labourer-level mismatch signal).
C9—Invasive alien species control	7	Qualification gap; labour-planning gap (no distinct demand category).
C10—Nature-based infrastructure construction	36	Qualification gap (falls substantially outside Nature-based Services VQs; unknown in scope in adjacent civil construction qualifications); labour-planning: serious labour mismatch signal at Landscape architects, with other construction categories not visible in the Uusimaa barometer's Built Environment coverage.
C11—Recreational/visitor infrastructure at nature sites	7	Qualification gap (outside Nature-based Services VQs); labour-planning gap (no distinct demand category).
C12—Public environmental education & communication	15	<i>Complete gap finding reported in text above table.</i>
C13—Volunteer coordination & citizen-science organising	4	Qualification gap; labour-planning gap.
C14—Workforce training for ecological work	10	Qualification gap; labour-planning gap. This is also notable because the City has mandated itself to fill a workforce capability gap that the labour-planning and qualification systems do not recognise as existing.
C15—Regulation of human activities affecting wildlife	5	Qualification gap; labour-planning gap (no distinct demand category).

Emergent clustering

Stepping back from the 15 categories, I [Claude] cluster them based on: (i) shared competence profile (the same kind of person could do this work), (ii) shared labour-planning profile (the same gaps apply), and (iii) shared qualification profile (the same credential gaps apply). I do not impose a pre-existing framework; the clusters emerge from the analysis above.

Five clusters emerge. Two are tight (the categories within them share all three profile dimensions); three involve judgement calls I describe below.

Cluster I — Field ecology: survey, monitoring, and data infrastructure

Categories: C1 (Surveys, 38), C2 (Monitoring, 46), C3 (Data systems, 7) **Combined row count: 91**

Shared competence profile. All three categories require ecological species/habitat knowledge applied to the production, repetition, or structuring of observational data. A person competent in C1 can typically learn C2 and with data-engineering addition can move into C3.

Shared labour-planning profile. All three map to the same TEM adjacent categories (Biologists, botanists, zoologists and related professionals; Life science technicians; Environmental protection professionals), all in labour oversupply (serious to moderate), and all with no named demand category for the specific work.

Shared qualification profile. Only C1 has a direct and explicit unit coverage (Specialist VQ Nature Surveys competence area, mandatory units Planning / Carrying out / Analysing & reporting nature surveys / Preparing special nature surveys). C2 and C3 sit in the territory of those same units but without naming of the specific distinctions (long-term monitoring programme work; data-system building). The Specialist VQ Nature Surveys competence area is the singular point of strong qualification coverage in the entire analysis, and it covers roughly a third of this cluster cleanly.

Clustering judgement note. Tight cluster. Labour-planning and qualification profiles strongly align across the three categories, distinguishing them as a coherent field-ecology work family.

Cluster II — Planning, strategy, and legal protection

Categories: C4 (Planning, 46), C5 (Designation, 23), C15 (Wildlife regulation, 5)

Combined row count: 74

Shared competence profile. Written-deliverable work requiring ecological literacy plus planning / administrative / legal competence. Produces plans, designations, regulatory proposals.

Shared labour-planning profile. Maps to TEM Landscape architects (mismatch, serious), Environmental protection professionals (oversupply, moderate), Policy and planning managers (oversupply, serious), Lawyers (oversupply, moderate), Senior government officials (equilibrium). Landscape architects is the single distinctive signal — a labour mismatch indicating structural misalignment between employer needs and available workers. Across the cluster, no TEM category is specifically named for the work; multiple adjacent categories have labour available.

Shared qualification profile. Partial coverage: Specialist VQ optional units "Preparing nature management plans" and "Environmental impact assessment" cover parts of C4 and C5. No unit covers designation process, wildlife regulation drafting, or high-level strategy work. The City Strategy and LUMO Programme-level commitments (rows 252, 326, 332 — "stop biodiversity loss", "halt net decline", "reverse biodiversity trend") sit substantially above any VQ-level competence.

Clustering judgement note. I considered keeping C15 separate; only 5 rows, and the expertise mix (wildlife science + marine/transport regulation) is unusual. I clustered it with C4–C5 because the deliverable is a written regulatory proposal, which aligns with the planning-family work. Reasonable to split C15 out; I have not done so because the row count is small and the competence-profile rationale for clustering is defensible.

Cluster III — Physical ecological work on sites (the central gap)

Categories: C6 (Restoration, 33), C7 (Planting, 22), C8 (Ongoing management, 43), C9 (Invasive control, 7) **Combined row count: 105**

Shared competence profile. All four require combined field-physical competence (tool use, mowing, planting, heavy work) plus specific ecological knowledge (what to restore / plant / maintain / remove, in what season, using what method, for what target species). Each is the kind of work that someone would do as their primary job on foot or in small machinery, on the land or in the water.

Shared labour-planning profile. All four absorb into the same small set of TEM adjacent categories: Gardeners, horticultural and nursery growers (oversupply, serious); Garden and horticultural labourers (**labour mismatch, alarming** — the most distinctive signal in the whole barometer, 70.8% unemployment with 66.6% vacancy rate); Forestry and related workers (oversupply, moderate); Forestry labourers (oversupply, serious). None of these TEM categories names restoration, biodiversity-informed planting, conservation management, or invasive control as a competence.

Shared qualification profile. **None of C6, C7, C8, or C9 has any named unit in either VQ in Nature-based Services.** This cluster is the central qualification gap. Adjacent qualification families (horticulture, forestry, landscape construction) may cover parts of the competence profile, but are outside my scope; nothing I have examined in the Nature-based Services framework names these competences as units.

Clustering judgement note. Tight cluster. Compelling on all three profile dimensions; this is the single largest cluster at 105 rows, and the most credentially unsupported.

Cluster IV — Nature-based and recreational infrastructure

Categories: C10 (Nature-based infrastructure, 36), C11 (Recreational infrastructure, 7) **Combined row count: 43**

Shared competence profile. Both require physical construction competence at the site. C10 is nature-based engineering (rain gardens, wildlife crossings, constructed wetlands); C11 is visitor infrastructure (trails, observation platforms, signage). The construction trades involved overlap partially.

Shared labour-planning profile. Neither has a named TEM demand category. Both absorb into adjacent civil-engineering and landscape-construction trades, most of which are not detailed in the Uusimaa barometer's Built Environment coverage (only Landscape architects is reported in that macro-sector). C10 shows the Landscape architects labour mismatch signal for its design-adjacent work.

Shared qualification profile. Neither is named in Nature-based Services VQs. Both sit in adjacent civil-engineering / construction / landscape construction qualifications outside my scope.

Clustering judgement note. C10 and C11 could reasonably be separated. I cluster them because both are constructed-infrastructure work at nature sites and both share a labour-planning and qualification profile. However, C10 is nearly six times larger and involves a more distinctive ecological competence overlay (designing nature-based solutions requires ecological knowledge integrated with engineering, whereas C11 is closer to standard trail construction). A reasonable alternative is to list C10 as a standalone.

Cluster V — Public engagement: education, volunteers, and workforce training

Categories: C12 (Public education, 15), C13 (Volunteers, 4), C14 (Workforce training, 10)

Combined row count: 29

Shared competence profile. People-facing work: delivering information (C12), organising labour (C13), or building competence in others (C14). All three require strong communication and facilitation competence plus ecological content knowledge.

Shared labour-planning profile. None has a distinct named TEM category. Absorb across Environmental protection professionals, Primary/Secondary teachers, Training and staff development professionals, Senior officials of special-interest organisations, Conference and event planners.

Shared qualification profile. None is named in either VQ in Nature-based Services. The Further VQ Wilderness and Nature Guide competence area is the nearest-adjacent formal competence, but it scopes to customer-facing nature guiding for paying customers rather than to the nature-school, volunteer-coordination, and staff-training contexts mandated here.

Clustering judgement note. C12 and C14 could plausibly be separated (public-facing vs. workforce-facing). I clustered them because their labour-planning and qualification profiles are essentially identical (both absorbed into adjacent education/environmental-protection categories with no named fit, and both not named in VQ units). C13 is smaller and adjacent; clustering it with C12 and C14 is a judgement call defensible on the shared "people-facing ecological work" profile.

Table I3 summarises the five clusters. Only Cluster I has strong qualification coverage, and only for one of its three categories (C1, via the Specialist VQ Nature Surveys competence area). Cluster II has partial coverage through optional units. Clusters III, IV, and V—collectively 177 rows and 52% of all mandated work—have no coverage in either vocational qualification in nature-based services. No cluster has a directly named occupational category in the Labour Force Barometer; the two mismatch signals (Landscape architects for Cluster II, Garden and horticultural labourers for Cluster III) are adjacent categories, not exact matches for the mandated work.

Table I3. Summary of distribution across clusters.

Cluster	Row count	% of 342	Qualification coverage	TEM demand category named?
I — Field ecology (C1, C2, C3)	91	27%	C1 strong (Specialist VQ Nature Surveys); C2, C3 gaps	No
II — Planning & protection (C4, C5, C15)	74	22%	C4, C5 partial (optional units); C15 gap	Adjacent only (Landscape architects mismatch)
III — Physical ecological work (C6, C7, C8, C9)	105	31%	None — central qualification gap	Adjacent only (Garden & hort. labourers mismatch alarming)
IV — Infrastructure (C10, C11)	43	13%	None in Nature-based Services VQs	No
V — Public engagement (C12, C13, C14)	29	8%	None	No

What this analysis did not do

It did not examine Helsinki Employment Services' or the City of Helsinki's internal workforce strategy because it was not provided.

It did not examine the *puutarha-ala* (horticulture), *metsäala* (forestry), or *maarakennusala* (civil engineering) vocational qualifications that are adjacent to Nature-based Services and that may cover some parts of C7 (Planting), C8 (Management), C10 (Nature-based infrastructure), and C11 (Recreational infrastructure). I have flagged these as falling outside my scope wherever they arose.

It did not access the full list of optional units in the Further VQ or the Specialist VQ in Nature-based Services. The English certificate supplements given list only the mandatory units and a subset of named optional units; a further 90 competence points of optional units exist in the Further VQ and 0–90 competence points of "other optional qualification units" exist in the Specialist VQ that cannot be examined. It is possible some of these optional units address competences that have been flagged as gaps; the findings are conditional on what the English supplements name.

It did not examine the Uusimaa barometer's Built Environment macro-sector in full — the provided CSV reports only Landscape architects in that sector, which limits my view of construction-trade labour-market conditions relevant to C10 and C11.

It did not examine Finnish university-level qualifications (polytechnic or research-university programmes in biology, environmental sciences, landscape architecture, environmental engineering) that plausibly cover parts of Clusters I and II. The brief was to examine the vocational qualification system in Nature-based Services.

It did not count how many rows in each category are worded as targets versus deliverables versus ongoing commitments. A downstream analyst may find that distinction useful; I have not structured the analysis to surface it.

It did not assess whether the policy mandates are realistic, feasible, or funded — only whether the credentialling and labour-planning systems are aligned with them.

It did not translate any Finnish terms we were uncertain of; where we used them (*hoito- ja käyttösuunnitelma*, *perinnebiotooppi*, LTJ, MVMI) we either retained them with brief English gloss or relied on the gloss that appeared in the extraction itself.

It did not speculate about why the gaps exist or why Finland's systems are organised as they are. The brief specifically instructed against this and that instruction was followed.

APPENDIX J. PROTOCOL FOR KNOWLEDGE WORKER INTERVIEWS

This appendix reproduces the interview protocol used for the eight semi-structured knowledge worker interviews conducted between March 4 and March 20, 2026. The protocol follows a four-part structure: AI's presence in the participant's work, identity and recognition, meaning and satisfaction, and a design probe using nine Climate Corps role cards. The protocol was designed to work across the quiet displacement landscape, producing useful data whether a participant was thriving with AI, sensing gradual erosion, or visibly displaced. The term 'quiet displacement' was not used during interviews. Section 3.7 describes the interview methodology in full.

SQ1_Experiencing AI-Driven Transformation: Work, Identity, and Occupational Security

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Format: Semi-structured, online (Teams) or in person

Recording: Audio and/or video recorded with consent, transcribed for analysis

Participants: Knowledge workers, varied career stages and varied positions on the quiet displacement landscape (from actively benefiting to visibly displaced)

Ethical protocol

- Before recording begins:
- Thank participant for their time.
- Explain research purpose: "I'm exploring how AI is changing professional work, not just practically but in terms of how people experience their working lives. This is part of my master's thesis in Service Design at the University of Lapland."
- Confirm consent: written consent form signed prior to interview.
- Explain anonymity: "Your name won't appear in the thesis. I'll use a pseudonym."

- Explain right to withdraw: "You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time."
 - Ask permission to record.
 - Confirm any questions before beginning.
-

Opening

3–5 minutes. Goal: Establish rapport and understand their professional world.

- A. To start, could you tell me about your work?** Not the job title so much as what your day-to-day actually looks like, what fills your time, what kind of problems you're solving.

Listen for how they narrate their work. What do they emphasise?

How AI is showing up

10–12 minutes. Goal: Understand how AI is affecting their working life.

- A. How is AI showing up in your work right now? What's actually changed in the last year or so?**

Listen for tools, workflow changes, team changes, hiring patterns.

- B. What has improved? Has anything been lost or changed in ways you didn't expect?**

Listen for whether there are productivity gains. If so, do they come with trade-offs?

- C. What about around you, in your organisation or your professional network? What are you seeing happen with roles, teams, or hiring?**

Listen for observations about others' displacement even if they're not experiencing it themselves.

- D. When you hear about those changes, do they feel like normal business or does something about this feel different?**

Listen for whether they sense a qualitative shift or see it as business as usual. If it's different, what do they attribute it to?

Identity and recognition

10–12 minutes. Goal: Explore the relationship between professional work, identity, and social recognition.

- A. When you think about what makes you good at what you do, the thing that's distinctively yours, what comes to mind?**

Listen for whether they locate their value in cognitive skills, relational qualities, or something else.

- B. Has AI changed your relationship to that? Not whether you still do it, but whether it still feels the same.**

Listen for the person's feelings about their expertise or identity.

- C. If you think ahead to the next few years, what signs will you be looking for to know whether your professional skills are still valuable?**

Listen for how the person is thinking about the future of their career and to what extent they anticipate changes in the value of their professional skills.

- D. If you started noticing your skills becoming less valuable, how would that affect you, besides financially?**

Listen for identity, status, social contact, daily structure, sense of purpose, relationships. Map responses against Jahoda's five latent functions without naming them.

Meaningful work

8–10 minutes. Goal: Explore what employment actually provides beyond income, and whether anything is currently missing or at risk.

- A. Think about a time when work really felt good, maybe a stretch of your career, or a particular project or collaboration. What made it good? What were the ingredients?**

Listen for latent functions.

- B. And right now, are those ingredients present in your current work?**

Listen for what they feel is missing from their current work and why.

- C. Outside of professional work, is there anything you do with your hands or your body that gives you a different kind of satisfaction? Gardening, building, cooking, hiking, anything physical or outdoors?**

Listen for language about tangibility, presence, completion, or sensory engagement.

- D. What's different about how that feels compared to your screen-based work?**

Listen for: restoration, craft, or relational language.

The Climate Corps provocation

10–12 minutes. Goal: Introduce the concept of the Climate Corps, then use role cards to generate concrete reactions. Capture conditions for dignity, barriers to transition, and assumptions about what work "counts."

- A. Describe the Climate Corps.** I want to share something from my research and get your honest reaction. Imagine Finland creates a Climate Corps: a public programme where people do ecological work in the Helsinki region. Some of the work is **hands-on**: restoring wetlands, managing urban forests, planting and caring for city trees. Some of it uses **AI and technology**: monitoring biodiversity with sensors and

drones, modelling ecosystem health, planning climate adaptation. **It pays a living wage, it's skilled work, and it's designed as a long-term professional pathway, not a temporary programme.** What's your gut reaction?

Listen for which parts of the proposal make sense and which don't.

B. What would make that appealing or unappealing to you personally?

Listen for criteria for evaluating roles.

C. Climate Corps Role Cards. Let me make this more concrete. I have some cards that describe specific roles in this Climate Corps. I'd like to show you a few and get your reactions. **Which of these are you drawn to? Which ones would you never do? What's driving that?**

Listen for whether they gravitate toward knowledge-worker-familiar territory. Note any opinions about societal recognition.

D. What would it need to have for you to see it as dignified work, something you could tell people about without feeling you needed to explain yourself?

Listen for conditions for recognition, like pay, status, skill development, professional identity, peer community, societal respect. Distinguish between personal meaning conditions and social recognition conditions.

E. What would stop you, or someone like you, from actually doing it? Not hypothetically but concretely.

Listen for financial, identity, social, or practical barriers.

F. Do you think society currently values ecological care work the way it values knowledge work?

Listen for awareness of recognition hierarchies.

Closing

5 minutes. Goal: Provide space for open-ended conversation.

- A. Stepping back from all of this, when you think about what work should provide people, beyond a salary, what matters most to you?**

Listen for a personal hierarchy of latent functions and recognition needs. What do they think work is all about?

- B. Is there anything we've talked about today that surprised you, a thought that came up that you hadn't quite had before?**

Listen for whatever seems to have resonated with them from the conversation.

- C. Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't?**

Listen for new paths to follow with remaining participants.

Thank you. This has been really valuable. I will share the results of this research with you. I'm grateful for you spending the time and for your openness during today's conversation.
