

The Story of WisdomAccelerator.org and WisdomHouseDavos.org (2015-2024)

Introduction

This document describes the evolution of two initiatives developed around the concept of “Accelerating Wisdom”, specifically focusing on supporting the youth and nonprofit entities. It started with [WisdomAccelerator.org](https://www.wisdomaccelerator.org) – a platform established in 2019 to help teenagers become wiser faster and [WisdomHouseDavos.org](https://www.wisdomhousedavos.org) – a venue hosted since 2020 during the World Economic Forum (WEF) in mid January offering qualified NGOs and social enterprises affordable space to host their events because commercial rooms are incredibly expensive that week.

Origins of Wisdom Accelerator for Youth (WAY)

The “Wisdom Accelerator for Youth” (WAY) concept evolved over several years, starting when co-founder Lucca was 12 years old in 2015, travelling around Brazil with her father Marcelo visiting their family.

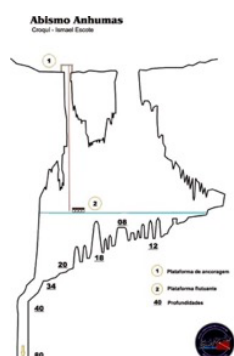
Part of the trip was near one of the most beautiful caves in the world and being an experienced rock climber, Marcelo showed Lucca the incredible pictures of the crystalline lake at the bottom, and she was convinced to try it for the first time in her life, of course doing the safety training a day earlier. What she had not realized was that the only entrance to the cave was from the top, meaning that a descent with a rope as long as a 25 stories high building was needed to get to the lake 80 meters below.

When she saw the scale of the challenge, even though it was done with highly experienced guides her reaction was naturally to say “you don’t really expect me to do this...” and stall for a while – after which exposing a series of rational arguments such as “it’s a unique opportunity as these caves are seldom accessible to the public”, “we have to leave tomorrow and won’t be able to do it again if you change your mind”, “you know how beautiful it is down there and that we are going with the people who discovered the cave” eventually got her to a mind space in which she decided to muster the courage to try the experience.

Pictures: Stunning Cave System “Abismo Anhumas” in Brazil



Only way down... and up



150m deep cave system



A truly unique experience

It also helped that coincidentally she was wearing a t-shirt with “Never Give Up” written on it and that fortunately served as additional motivation when Marcelo teased her with “if you decide not to go down at least change that t-shirt”. Apparently the anger of realizing that contradiction helped her overcome the fear of a challenging unknown experience.

They both slowly went down the cave together and at the bottom Lucca displayed probably the biggest smile of her life, with a mix of exhilaration, joy and sense of accomplishment – meanwhile Marcelo was mightily impressed that at such a young age she actually managed to overcome her understandable fears, achieving a remarkable feat that very few people in the world would even dare to try.

Pictures: First Speleology Experience (2015)



Not exactly delighted with the idea



Deciding to go for the prize



Joy of overcoming the challenge

A few years passed, but the idea that teenagers can do so much more than most actually experience in life never went away because that was such a memorable moment. Luckily Marcelo is blessed with having strong connections with several really interesting global networks: United Nations agencies, World Economic Forum communities, the Blockchain sector, Telecommunication companies, the Film Industry, etc. That makes it much easier for him to spot “hidden connections” between these groups which others may miss.

The Idea Takes Shape

The next trigger for the Wisdom Accelerator for Youth idea was nonetheless quite unexpected – Lucca was 14 in 2017 when out of nowhere she sent Marcelo a message asking “can I go to the World Economic Forum with you one day?”. He told her that it was a pretty grown-up event and asked why she wanted to go and her answer was spot on: she had been following their social media, liked the work they did and wanted to meet people there to become more involved. So even though it was very unlikely to happen, he started paying attention to things he could do to take her closer to that goal of one day going to the Davos WEF on her own merits rather than just accompanying him.

A few weeks later they were spending a week together in Switzerland and he casually asked “what do you want to do when you grow up?”. When she was five years old the answer was “work at a flower shop”. A few years later it was “be a nurse like grandma”. A few more years and it became “be a doctor like grandpa”. That evening her answer was “I like Particle Physics”.

The story behind that answer was that a PhD from CERN had recently given a presentation at her school and she found atom-smashing a fascinating topic. Well, it turns out that a good friend who’s a WEF Global Shaper worked at CERN at that time and Marcelo was going to speak about Refugee Connectivity at the United Nations the day after, having to drive to Geneva anyway.... so he just had to send his friend a message asking if by any chance he was organizing a tour around lunchtime and luckily there was one specially prepared for a group of students from the Norwegian Technical University – and being Danish Lucca could understand some Norwegian, therefore what they were talking about.

The tour was really enjoyable and afterwards Marcelo asked his friend if it would be possible for Lucca to have a weeklong apprenticeship at CERN. He said that they did have an unofficial program for teenagers, that it would be a pleasure to vouch for her and be her mentor during that week... so basically 18 hours after declaring that she liked Particle Physics she was offered a “job” at CERN.

A few weeks later Marcelo had the opportunity to take her to a huge Blockchain Symposium that he orchestrated for the Omani government in Muscat and cutting a long story short, she ended up reading a speech about “Children and Blockchain” in front of 800 VIP guests during a panel on “Future Opportunities”, which was a great success because the impact of having a teenager talking about the future to an adult crowd is very powerful.

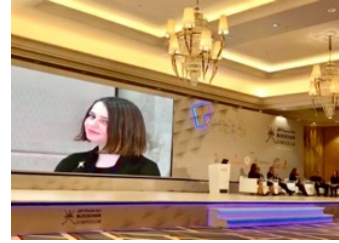
Pictures: First Time as a Public Speaker (2017)



Feeling what it's like to be on stage



The day before her presentation



Giving a speech to 800 participants

Early Achievements and the Evolution of WAY

At that point in time the idea behind Wisdom Accelerator for Youth clearly started to evolve – initially as a classroom during the Davos WEF week where teens could learn unusual topics from Greek and Roman times like Public Speaking, Rhetoric and Debate while having fun in the snow, supporting the development of lifelong friendships between children from around the world.

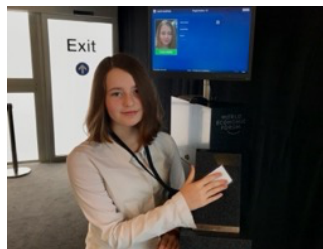
A few weeks afterwards another interesting thing happened... as Marcelo was so busy preparing for the event in Oman, he didn't realize that the United Nations had provided a booth for his other non profit BroadLights.org during their massive Internet Governance Forum (IGF) happening just a few days later – and his co-founder was unavailable, so he had to ask Lucca to come and help manage that exhibition space. The UN security initially refused to give a badge to a 14 years old, but as she was officially “staff” they simply didn't have a choice... so she became the youngest delegate out of around 15'000 participants that year, met the ITU Secretary General, folks who invented the original Internet protocols, etc.

A few weeks after that, Marcelo ended up organizing three large events during the World Economic Forum week and Lucca finally had her wish granted to come to Davos to help host two of them – especially as she had proven herself really useful at managing the IGF booth the month before. The little twist of fate here is that his event co-organizer in Davos watched her video speaking in Oman and asked if it was OK for her to join a panel on “Blockchain and the Future of Humanity”. So basically four months after asking Marcelo “can I go with you to the World Economic Forum one day” she was in Davos moderating part of a senior panel about Blockchain with several corporate chairmen. She was also the only person below 18 to get a high security badge with a special authorization from the Davos Chief of Police... solely because she was an event organizer (on top of becoming a speaker). She even had her own BroadLights business cards with “Advisor” as a job title, which many people found amusing as it was so unexpected for someone so young.

Pictures: World Summit on the Information Society (2017) and World Economic Forum (2018)



With ITU Secretary General



Only <18yo WEF'18 hotel badge



Moderating Senior Exec session

Expanding Opportunities: The First Editions

The idea behind Wisdom Accelerator for Youth continued to evolve quickly after Marcelo saw her remarkable progression in such a short time and morphed into thoughts like “she’s very fortunate to have the right attitude needed for this steep learning curve as well as access to my multiple networks, but what about all the other highly motivated teens out there without that kind of facilitation to open doors?”. Her life is fortunately full of magic, but how to scale magic to as many global teenagers as possible?

That’s pretty much when the concept of “Wisdom Acceleration” consolidated – an event where qualified teenagers from around the world from as many cultural and economic backgrounds as possible could “discover their superpowers” (whatever those might be) and build an awesome global community similar to what Marcelo had already done in his previous initiatives. A particularly interesting concept would be to help connect teenagers whose parents/grandparents attend the WEF conference and those from a diverse range of backgrounds (refugee teenagers, young leaders, early high achievers, etc.) so that they could eventually establish partnerships in the future to start new companies, charities etc. after many years of being friends.

Pictures: Moderating a World Trade Organization Blockchain Session (2018)



In front of WTO headquarters



Moderating 90mins WTO session



WTO room was packed with Trade Diplomats

As an added bonus, after this initial boost Lucca’s “career path” flowed smoothly by itself – for instance while working at CERN she joined Marcelo during a dinner with Omani diplomats and sat next to their representative at the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the end of the dinner the diplomat stated that she should definitely propose a workshop during the WTO Public Forum, the largest yearly event that they host because it could certainly benefit from more younger participants, more women and more Blockchain topics (and she represented all three)... so a few months later she was the moderator of a full 90 minutes panel on “Blockchain and Trade” with top speakers and a room full with 50+ international trade delegates – some of them up to five times older than her.

At this point in time the WAY concept had already evolved into an international platform starting at the WEF in Davos as it is not only a stunning location but also hosts thousands of highly accomplished professionals from a huge variety of industry and geographic backgrounds who could be invited as speakers every year.

The first edition in January 2019 was composed of 16 families representing 12 countries staying at a great mountain hut location with a certified mountain guide leading a very unique activity program during the whole week – including building an igloo, learning how to rescue an avalanche victim with a trained dog, sledging down the mountain where the sport was invented etc. They also met several great speakers such as the ex-CTO of the WEF, an early investor in Uber, representatives from major corporations – while learning a lot from one another.

Pictures: First Wisdom Accelerator for Youth (WAY) Edition (2019)



First WAY edition during WEF'19



Igloo building team



Evening sessions with remote speakers

The second edition in January 2020 was also comprised of 16 families from all around the world and in addition to a similar program, a new location for them also open to the general public called [WisdomHouseDavos.org](https://www.wisdomhousedavos.org) was organized with support from the Davos city government and so well received that it was featured on the cover page of the local newspaper.

Pictures: Second Wisdom Accelerator for Youth (WAY) and Wisdom House Davos (2020)



Front page news in Davos



2nd WAY edition winter rescue demo session



Inaugural Wisdom House edition (2020)

Adapting to the Pandemic and Future Plans

With the pandemic consequences becoming evident just a few weeks after the second edition, an online edition was quickly developed and launched in May 2020 via an online WAY platform. Around a year and a half later almost 500 speakers representing 110 countries shared their wisdom during interactive sessions generating 200+ hours of original content (tiny.cc/NeoTube).

In 2023 and 2024 the two initiatives [WisdomAccelerator.org](https://www.wisdomaccelerator.org) and [WisdomHouseDavos.org](https://www.wisdomhousedavos.org) were integrated, with the teenager participants actively engaged doing a weeklong internship similar to the structure of the CERN program, learning skills useful for life related to how to host large events and interacting with WEF participants not as passive listeners but as co-hosts therefore developing higher levels of engagement and responsibility at a very young age. The outcome of these experiences was so successful that we intend to keep it as the standard format for future editions during the WEF Week.

Pictures: Second and Third Wisdom House Davos Editions (2023 and 2024)



Location of 2nd Wisdom House (2023)



2nd Wisdom House session (2023)



3rd Wisdom House (2024)



Oldest building in Davos (13th c.)



All staff members were teenagers 13-17 yo



A WEF week venue for nonprofits

“Survival Skills” event with Ukrainian Refugee Teenagers

Due to the risk of the borders being closed during the WEF week in January by pandemic regulations, we decided to only have a single teenager to help as Wisdom House staff during the 2023 event (as Lucca had done in 2018), which worked remarkably well. As we had the mountain hotel reserved already, we decided to design a new concept still during the winter season in March by inviting refugee families from Ukraine based in Switzerland – which was logistically easier because they have a special permit allowing them to move freely around the country, the teenagers speak English well and it was a good fit to offer them confidence building activities plus valuable professional skills in case they wish to work for sports shops etc.

During the day the program was similar to the original WAY concept, including igloo building, dipping in a frozen lake, hiking and a mission to find a frozen waterfall at the end of the Sertig Valley. In the evenings we had sessions with survival experts who volunteered to share their knowledge, which when all combined delivered a powerful boost to the morale of the participants and is likely to be a positive formative memory which will last for the rest of their lives. Once again the local paper was interested in covering the story, which was very much welcomed by local residents.

Pictures: “Survival Skills Week” for Ukrainian Refugee Teenagers (2023)



Our 2nd article in local paper



Teens built this gorgeous igloo



Took some convincing, but all dipped

The Concept Evolution (2018-2025)

Since 2018 we have developed several operational models for the Wisdom concepts:

- In **2018** one teenager (Lucca) joined the WEF week, actively participating in the organization of nonprofit events in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, as well as joining panels representing next generations. She was the only person that year younger than 18 years old to get hotel badge accreditation, which was only possible with a special authorization from the Chief of Grisons Cantonal Police because she was one of the event organizers.
- In **2019** we created “Wisdom Accelerator for Youth (WAY)” which became a Swiss nonprofit structure still operational today. 16 families from 12 countries and five continents around the world joined for the whole WEF week, with physical activities taking place in the mornings (igloo building, hiking, cross country), mini-lectures with WEF participants in the afternoons and remote sessions with book authors etc in the evening before bedtime.
- Also in **2019** we tested a summer edition of WAY at a school in Interlaken having their holidays period, therefore with a few rooms available to rent. This was a very small pilot with only five participants, but the activities possible around the region were remarkably interesting, including visiting four mountain passes in a single day while hiking in the Rhône glacier, where it is possible to enter ice caves prepared every year. Because of accommodation restrictions (availability, cost) during the Summer season and the lack of speakers present there that week it was decided that this location was not an ideal fit.
- In **2020** a similar event took place again with 16 families present the whole week and we were granted by the city government a large venue (250m²) located at the local primary school to host the inaugural

edition of Wisdom House Davos. This concept was developed to give a voice to qualified nonprofits with representatives present that week which could not afford the exorbitant rental costs of commercial venues. Both activities were considered very successful and on the final day we also managed to host a pilot “Wisdom Film Festival” at the school, screening the most watched ever TED talks, as well as a full feature film premiere of “Coup 53” with the director giving a presentation to the audience at the end. These initiatives were very welcome locally, earning us the coveted cover page of the local newspaper Davoser Zeitung during the WEF week, plus a full page article about the concept – even though at that point it was just an untested idea.

- In **2021** we hosted a second summer pilot in Venice, where the accommodation limitations of Interlaken are less of a concern. Once more with a small group, we designed a highly attractive Wisdom program engaging teenagers to learn several skills that most schools do not teach. The advantage there other than being a stunning place to visit which is also attractive to parents to come as tourists is the possibility to rent up to hundreds of rooms on an island not far from the city center and connected via public transportation. This event concept is still being considered for future editions of the Wisdom Accelerator once the winter edition in Davos is further developed.
- Up to **2022** during the pandemic we could not host live events, therefore developed an online alternative called “NeoWAY” in which remarkable individuals were invited over Zoom give presentations 20-30 minutes long with the following theme: “If you could travel back in time to spend half an hour with your younger self, how would you use that time to maximize your chances of leading a fulfilling life?”. We recorded a total of almost 500 podcasts representing 200+ hours of programming, many of them published to our YouTube channel (tiny.cc/NeoTube).
- In **2023** we hosted Wisdom House in a significantly larger venue (400m²) also provided by the city government, the SAMD secondary school theater – which had been used by the WEF for their Open Forum for more than two decades until they moved to larger facilities nearby. Several large sessions were hosted by nonprofits including the BMW Foundation and the Katapult Foundation. We also rented the city cinema one day to run the “Wisdom Film Festival”, this time testing new concepts beyond film screenings such as having a moderator onstage in conversation with the audience, rapid fire pitches of ideas and group interactions around sustainability topics.
- Also in **2023**, because of the risk of having borders closed again, we postponed the Wisdom Accelerator event to March and hosted it with Ukrainian Refugee Teenagers, earning us a second appearance with another full page article on the local newspaper. Local and remote survival skills experts kindly donated their time to give lectures to the group and the event agenda can be considered a resounding success, combining physical and intellectual development which is valuable not only to refugees, but also to the general public.
- In **2024** the WEF Open Forum went back to the secondary school theater, therefore we had to find a new venue for Wisdom House. Fortunately the local church was interested in supporting our work and we were the first external parties in the history of the WEF to be allowed to use the oldest building in Davos, the St. Johann’s church (with a tower from the 13th century). We had access to two rooms, one measuring 50m² with vaulted ceilings therefore great for intimate sessions like book author readings etc. – with the other being the 250m² balcony above the church nave, a stunning space with stained glass windows and a white wall for presentation/film projections. The total capacity for these two venues is of around 250-300 guests, which makes it of the largest venues in Davos outside those used by the WEF like the Congress Center, Kirchner Museum and SAMD secondary school theater (our 2023 venue). It is worth mentioning that 100% of the Wisdom House staff were teenagers 13-17 year old and that they were effectively doing a weeklong internship there like the program offered by CERN in Geneva, something that almost certainly will make their academic and professional profiles get highlighted when applying to top universities and jobs in the future. Another highlight of the week was hosting half a day of sessions with lectures from members of the Explorers Club (Explorers.org), who shared their expedition stories with the audience including our teenager staff members.
- In **2025** we plan to combine Wisdom Accelerator and Wisdom House again during the World Economic Forum week – depending on resources available, we would also like to invite another group of refugee teenagers to be part of a program similar to the one we hosted in 2023. The model remains aligned with the 2024 structure, with families making a donation to participate as this is how we fund our expenses thorough the year and to develop additional programs such as the summer edition concept in Venice, Survival Skills Week for Ukrainian Refugee Teenagers, etc. We are also actively seeking corporate and institutional sponsors to support our nonprofit work.

How to Get Involved

As a Swiss nonprofit association, we depend on donations to operate. We have tested multiple models, from corporate sponsorships to families and speakers donating recommended amounts to participate and use our venues. For the World Economic Forum week in **20-24 January 2025** we are proposing the following:

Weeklong Internship for Teenagers

- Families willing to submit an application for their teenagers to work as Wisdom Accelerator interns at Wisdom House during WEF'25 will be able to book earlier if they donate amounts allowing us to invite teenagers from refugee families as well, therefore effectively sponsoring the participation of two teenagers (their own and a refugee).
 - The acceptance still depends on our criteria being met, particularly the age group 13-17 with an adult present to be responsible for them, as well as the level of maturity required to be effective interns during the very busy WEF week
 - We had five interns during WEF'24, but could grow that number to up to 15 teenager participants based on the accommodation options available. They would still be required to come with an adult responsible for them and go through an interview to qualify.
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Hosting Nonprofit Sessions at Wisdom House

- Wisdom House was created to support qualified nonprofits, preferably those with representatives already in Davos during the week because for instance they were invited to speak at a panel in a commercial venue. We offer them the possibility of hosting and moderating their own sessions at Wisdom House promoting their work, with the added benefit of having many amazing people around during the week to invite as panelists.
 - We would like to offer our space to nonprofits for free, but still need to cover our costs and fundraise to host our own future events – therefore we welcome companies willing to donate on behalf of the nonprofit concerned and have one of their representatives participating in the panel – with the condition that the session is about the nonprofit's work and no promotional activities take place.
 - We also welcome grant giving foundations willing to promote the work of the nonprofits that they support, as well as of course recognized international organizations such as the UN and assimilated, particularly ECOSOC accredited NGOs with formal consultative status.
 - Nonprofits interested in hosting sessions at Wisdom House but without any budget to contribute can still be waitlisted and considered to be given space still available at the beginning of the WEF week.
 - For a more detailed overview of our WEF'24 program and how the Wisdom House operates, please refer to WisdomHouseDavos.org.
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Recommended donation amounts for both WAY internships and Wisdom House sessions have suggested amounts, which are variable depending on the circumstances involved and in any case are significantly lower than the costs of participating independently as a family or in the case of nonprofits the rental fees of commercial venues.

Any surplus amounts from our events are allocated to the establishment of the Wisdom Foundation, which aims at accelerating corporate philanthropy worldwide and support the development of nonprofit initiatives such as Wisdom Accelerator for Youth and Wisdom House (concept note: tiny.cc/WisdomFoundation).

Please contact us via marcelo@wisdomaccelerator.org or +41 79 329 7926 for more details.

Lucca studied Ancient Greek and Latin at school in-between countless wisdom accelerating experiences and after becoming a snowboard instructor is now enrolled in a Japanese bachelor's degree at Copenhagen University; [Lucca's LinkedIn](#)

Marcelo is constantly impressed with what teenagers can achieve when given access to opportunities to become wiser faster. He is the Chairman of the Explorers Club in Switzerland, a fellow of three Royal Societies (RGS, RCGS and RSA) and the founder of ExplorersWeekend.org, a three day event focused on promoting Field Sciences worldwide; [Marcelo's LinkedIn](#)