# FUTURES LITERACY TOOLBOX

BUILDING FUTURES LITERACY FOR AND WITH YOUNG LEARNERS: EASY-TO-USE RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND YOUTH WORKERS

Future is Now

youth watch

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# INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This document contains a set of educational modules that were designed and tested during the "Future is Now" project, in order to develop the "Futures Literacy" of young publics (teens and young adults).

Various Futures Literacy activities (methods, set of activities, tools, games, etc.) have been tested during seven training sessions in Bratislava, Brussels and Paris. Depending on the context, goal, duration and participants of the session, different modules were used in different orders during each session.

# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "FUTURES LITERACY"?

The term "Futures Literacy" was coined by Riel Miller when he was in charge of futures activities at Unesco. It came from the recognition that (1) everyone anticipates, but most people are not aware of how they do it, (2) the future exists only in our imagination, which means we can explore it in various ways. He wrote:

> "Futures Literacy [FL] is a capability. It is the skill that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do. Being futures literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur.

The term Futures Literacy mimics the idea of reading and writing literacy because it is a skill that everyone can and should acquire. And it is a skill that is within everyone's reach."

Futures Literacy is for everyone. It does not require full mastery of any specific "futuring" technique but is rather an evolving set of skills and experiences, mostly learned in action. It allows individuals to:
· Better understand the role that, through anticipation, the future plays in what they (and others) see and do;
· Understand the real-world effects of imagining futures;
· Articulate the differences between various uses of the future, depending on context and purpose.

There is one thing for which Futures Literacy is not meant: knowing the future. The future is fundamentally uncertain. The sheer fact of imagining it and discussing it with others changes it. There is knowledge involved in Futures Literacy, and it can be used, for example, to identify whether some futures are more likely than others, but it should never be used to affirm the existence of one single future.

# USES AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is free for you to use, copy, circulate and modify, provided you quote your source.

It provides a collection of modules that can be used for courses, workshops, or any other group activity involving accessing, creating, and discussing futures. It is designed with young participants in mind, but

1.  Future Is Now is an Erasmus+ project led by Youtwatch (Slovakia), BrusselAvenir (Belgium) and the Plurality University Network (France).

can probably be used for all audiences. In Appendix 5, you will find practical examples of how we have used these modules in our work with young people.

Depending on your goals, target group, and on the available time, practitioners (educators, youth workers, etc.) should feel free to use some modules and not others, to choose a different sequence of modules, etc. We have, however, identified four stages that you should probably follow in most cases:

1. "Connecting to your inner future": everyone has images of the future in mind, be they conscious or unconscious - what Futures Literacy calls "anticipatory assumptions". It is essential to make them visible to each participant. By doing this in a group setting, participants will also realize (1) that these images inform much of what they feel and do about the present, and (2) that there can be many images of the future.

2. "Identifying trends, weak signals and factors of change" is about becoming conscious of the forces of change active in the present, and being able to assess their significance and their likelihood of generating significant changes.

3. "Crafting stories and images of the future" refers to mobilizing our knowledge and imagination in order to consciously imagine different futures – and bring back insights and possibilities for the present, which is of course the only tense in which we can act.

4. "Your part in creating the future": if there is one superior reason to make people "futures literate", it is to make them feel that they can be part of the future, and that they have a role to play in shaping it. Therefore, it is important to conclude Futures Literacy activities with moments in which participants (1) imagine themselves, or maybe

their children, in the futures they have imagined, (2) imagine paths from the present to these futures, and/or (3) discuss the possibility and desirability of alternative futures - which is, in fact, the essence of what politics should be.

The following graph describes the typical articulation between the four stages and the activities within them, some of them forming a logical sequence, while others are alternatives (either one or the other).

# How to organise your own Futures Literacy training

**STAGE 1: connecting to your inner futures**

1.1 Polak Game

1.2 Futures Fragments

**STAGE 2: identifying trends, signals and factors of change**

2.1 Traces of the Future

*Choose between*

2.2 Horizon Scanning

2.3 Simplified Factors of Change

**STAGE 3: crafting stories and images of the futures**

*Choose between*

3.1 Probable, Desirable and Robust Futures

3.2 Speculative Futuring

*If needed*

3.3 Gaming the Future

**STAGE 4: your part in creating the future**

4.1 The Story of Change

*If you haven't role-played in 3.2*

4.2 Projecting Yourself in the Future

4.3 Wrapping Up and Taking Stock

# FRAMING A FUTURES EXERCISE

# FRAMING A FUTURES LITERACY TRAINING

How you frame an exploration of the future is essential to its success, and to how you will lead that exploration. You can't just look for "the future": you want to work on the futures (plural intended) of something, usually somewhere, at a specific horizon, and for specific reasons.

As an example, when working on "the future of education", are you thinking about: Education in general (and it's probably a bit too wide)? Education in your country? Formal, or informal education? Education and technology? 5, 10, 20 years from now? If you're doing that with youth, is it to influence your country's policy by making their voice heard? Or to imagine interesting innovations? Or to influence educators? Or because you want the participants to reflect on their own learning path and decisions?...

Here are the main questions that usually need to be answered before you gather people to work on futures:

## THE FUTURE OF WHAT?

What are we looking at, and what is of lesser interest to us?

You want to define at least:
· A topic that is important both to you, and to the participants - that has influence over their lives, and on which they may have some influence.
· Most often, a geographical parameter: a city? Country? Europe?...
· You usually do not want these to be either too broad ("the future of mental health" is too large to grasp) nor too narrow ("the future of TikTok").

Examples of framing:
· The futures of Slovakia's public education system
· The futures of fashion...
· The futures of (a city)

## THE FUTURE OF WHO?

Who are the persons with a stake in this future? Whose life is influenced by what this future will be? Who can influence it?

Too often, the future of a specific group - and this is especially true of young people - is determined by others. One important aspect of Futures Literacy is that it is a skill accessible to everyone.

From this, two considerations are important when deciding who will participate in the futures exercise:
· Diversity: no social group is truly homogenous (this is especially true for "youths"), and diversity is one of the best ways to produce interesting, meaningful ideas. It is also essential for participants to learn to debate different futures. Build diverse groups in terms of gender, age, social class, culture, ethnicity, etc.

· The role of expertise, and of experts: Futures work, especially futures trainings, should be accessible to anyone, including people who do not consider themselves experts on the topic.

It is of course important to have or to acquire some knowledge of the topic at hand, as well as on the trends that are affecting it. Knowledge helps participants to assess the likelihood of the futures they imagine, as well as to come up with possible paths towards the futures they prefer. Participants can gain that by searching for information (see below, 1.3), by listening to experts, or by having some experts among them (in the case of youths, students of the topic at hand, activists, etc.)

However, an excessive reliance on expertise can also stifle a group's creativity: by asserting authority on what can and can't be imagined, or by drowning the group under the weight of specialized knowledge which becomes difficult to grasp, let alone question. Beware of power dynamics in your group: no participant should have a higher status than others. If you want to call on experts (e.g. experts on climate change or other specific topics), do it at specific moments, give them a limited amount of time, and ask them to help rather than affirm or criticize.

## THE FUTURE IS WHEN?

The time horizon is another important parameter.
· A short horizon (3-5 years) is easy to envision. The futures work can help frame concrete decisions. However, it is unlikely that major changes can take place during that time.
· A long horizon (20-50 years) is by definition more uncertain; the conclusions of your work can provide directions, or interesting new questions, but not a well-structured plan. However, this is when you can explore major structural changes (for example, a radically new technology, or a new climate policy, a major cultural shift, or even war or collapse), and imagine how to respond to these changes, influence them, benefit from them...

∗ *Recommendation for young audiences: choose a horizon slightly longer than their age (ex. 20 years if they are 15-18 years old). It is a time period that they can relate to, but it is also just beyond their experience, therefore likely to open their minds to new ideas.*

## WHAT DO YOU WANT TO USE THE FUTURE FOR?

In gathering a group to explore the future, you have an intention, there is something you want to achieve: what is it? How does this influence the way you will work, and what this work will produce?
· If you want to influence policy decisions, your topic will be close to how policy and government are organized. The horizon will be relatively short, you will want to reach fairly operational conclusions, and you will want participants to agree on a common, forceful vision;
· If you want to support robust strategic planning for an organization, your topic will be fairly narrow and closely related to the organization's mission, the horizon will be close to the lifetime of major investments in your industry, you will discard unforeseeable disruptions and "wildcards";
· If you want to make sense of emerging phenomena and identify opportunities for innovation and change, your topic will be broader, your horizon both longer and less precisely defined, you will focus on disruptions and new ideas, and the result will be focused towards a generative, adaptive path rather than a perfect plan...

# STAGE 1: CONNECTING TO YOUR INNER FUTURES
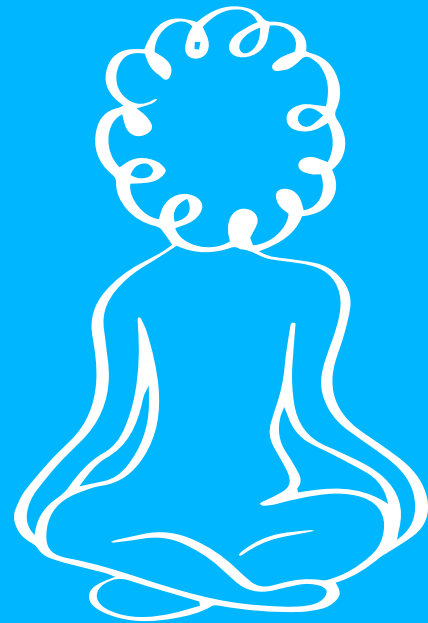
# STAGE 1: CONNECTING TO YOUR INNER FUTURES

Goal: to Understand one's basic relationship with, & engage in conversations about, the Future(s).

All our decisions are, at least in part, based on anticipation, that is, on images of the future that form in our conscious or unconscious mind[2].

We anticipate:
· When we cross a street - subconsciously making multiple calculations on moving things (including our body) and assessing what others may or may not do.
· When we choose a new phone - foreseeing its uses, evaluating whether this model will remain relevant  long enough, imagining how our friends will react to it…
· When we take on this or that direction for  our studies.
· When we choose a place to live - perhaps, today, incorporating into our thinking the effects of climate  change on what life will be there in a few decades…
· When we discuss politics and policy issues -  most political decisions are made in the name of a better future (which also shows that we  can have differing views on, either, what the  future holds, or what 'better' should mean)…

Our knowledge drawn from the past, and our experience of the present, provide us with data, evidence, models. Thanks to these, we are reasonably good at explaining how the past and present justify our decisions.

On the contrary, we are not as good at explaining (even to ourselves) what forms of anticipation have also influenced our decisions. What assumptions did we make about the future: is it very different or very similar to the present? Easy to foresee or fundamentally uncertain? Full of opportunities, or threatening? Are we focused on adapting to a future we can't influence, on reacting to future events we can't predict, or on making the future we prefer come about? What do we consider to be a desirable or undesirable future?…

The modules contained in this initial stage are designed to make participants become conscious of the way in which they, and others, currently imagine the future, and understand the different ways in which the future can be "used".

2.  If you wish to read more on Futures Literacy for young audiences, download our booklet "What Is Futures Literacy and Why Is It Important for Youngsters?"

# 1.1. THE POLAK GAME

*The "Polak Game" is a simple game wherein participants are asked to move around the room (or position themselves on a grid if the workshop is online) depending on how they stand about the future.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Goal** | Allow participants to characterize their position towards the future, and understand how others characterize it, along two questions:<br>· Do you believe the future will be better or worse than the present?<br>· Do you believe you can influence what happens in the future? |
| **Duration** | 30-45 minutes |
| **Setting** | Whole group in a physical room or around a basic grid. |
| **When?** | At the beginning of a foresight workshop - works as an early initiation as well as an icebreaker. Can be repeated at the end, in order to see whether participants' positions have changed. |
| **Reference** | Peter Hayward, Stuart Candy, **"The Polak Game, Or: Where Do You Stand?"**, ↗ *Journal of Futures Studies*, December 2017, 22(2): 5–14 |

## Prompt #1

*I have a question for you, and I will ask you to answer by moving. The question is about your expectations for the future. When you imagine the world in 20XX [XX needs to be defined!], do you expect it to be better than the one we live in — better as defined by you — or do you imagine it as being worse? If you feel optimistic in your expectations for how the world will look in 20XX, then when I say "go", you should step forward, and the stronger that feeling is, the further forward you should move. If on the other hand, you feel pessimistic or doubtful in your expectations about the state of the world in 20XX, then when I say "go", step backward, and again, the more strongly you feel that way, the further you should move.*
*Go! Move as far forward or as far back as you like.*

➜ Participants move forward or backward. The facilitator checks whether they are comfortable where they stand. The facilitator asks those who moved furthest in one specific direction to explain their thinking.
➜ Participants are expected to not stay in the middle of the room. If needed, ask them to imagine the middle as a hole in the ground, into which they would fall if they remained there!
➜ Participants may ask clarification questions such as "The future in general, or my personal future?"; "The future in general, or the future of something specific (such as the topic of the exercise)?" Welcome these questions as being important to all futures work – and invite participants to make their own personal choices in answering them.
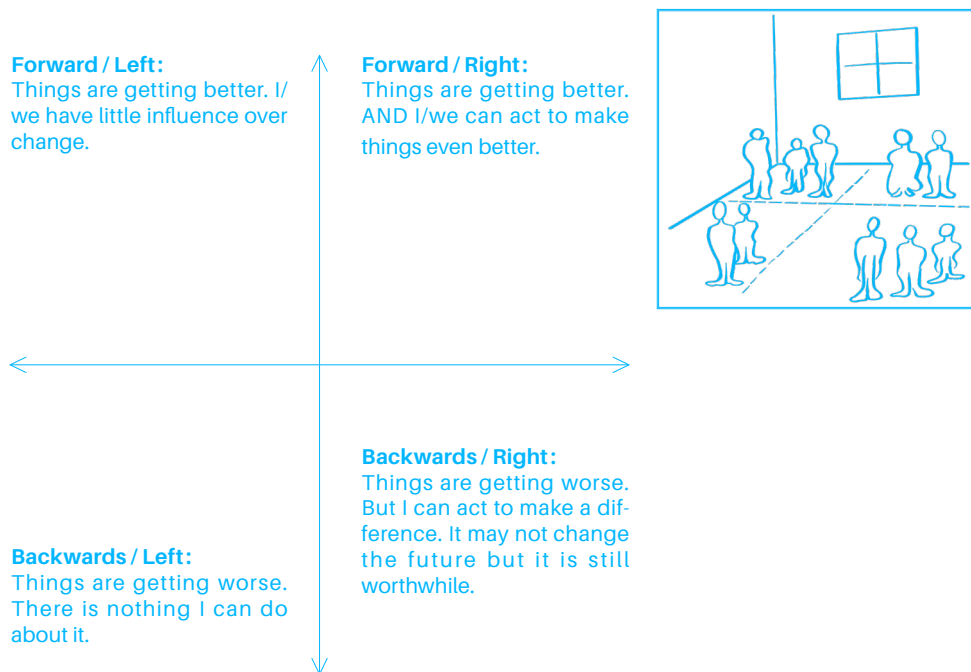
## Prompt #2

*Now I have another question for you, and it is about your personal capacity to influence change at the global level over the next XX years, in directions you personally consider to be positive. If you feel that you can shape the world, when I say "go" please step to the right, and the more strongly you feel that way, the further you are invited to move. If on*

*the other hand, you have your doubts, if you are skeptical or pessimistic about your capacity to shape things on that scale, over that time period, then when I say "go" move to the left, commensurate with your level of doubt.* Go!

➔ Participants move left or right. The facilitator checks they are comfortable where they stand. The facilitator asks those who moved furthest in one specific direction to explain their thinking.

➔ Participants are expected to not stay in the middle of the room.

➔ Participants may ask clarification questions such as "My personal action, or my action within a collective?" Welcome these questions as being important to all futures work – and invite participants to make their own personal choices in answering them.

Participants are therefore spread around the table (or grid) in the following way:

**Forward / Left:**
Things are getting better. I/ we have little influence over change.

**Forward / Right:**
Things are getting better. AND I/we can act to make things even better.

**Backwards / Right:**
Things are getting worse. But I can act to make a difference. It may not change the future but it is still worthwhile.

**Backwards / Left:**
Things are getting worse. There is nothing I can do about it.

## Discussion

· Participants are asked to explain why they stand where they do. Make sure all participants have had a chance to explain themselves at one moment or another during the game.

· Participants from each quadrant are asked about what they feel about those in the other quadrants: Are they unrealistic? Conservative? Courageous? Idealists? Lazy?...

## Conclusion

· Nobody's right or wrong here. We don't know what the future will be. Also, your sense of the direction, or of your own agency, may depend on where you stand in the present.

· However, there are at least three lessons we can learn from this exercise:

  · You have slightly or massively different visions of the future and of what can be done about it.

  · There are indeed many possible futures, and depending on the conditions, you may or may not have influence over them. Futures Thinking intends to explore these futures, and these conditions.

  · The future makes for really interesting conversations!

# 1.2. FUTURES FRAGMENTS

*"Futures Fragments" is a discussion based on artistic or fictional references chosen by participants, that speak to them about what the future of <your chosen topic> could be.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | Allow participants to describe their images of the future through existing fictional or artistic content, thus removing the obstacle of skill and/or prior knowledge. It allows facilitators to grasp to which extent the group feels familiar with the future. |
| Duration | 45-60 minutes (+ small preparation ahead of the session) |
| Setting | Groups of at most 10-12 |
| When? | At the beginning of a foresight project - works as an early initiation as well as an icebreaker. |
| Reference | Plurality University Network, **"Futures Fragments"**. ↗ |

## Prior to the workshop:

Ahead of the workshop, participants have been asked something like this: *"Choose, and bring with you, a reference in arts, fiction, design, utopia, etc. that says something to you about the future of X [X being the topic you will work on]: images, stories, videos, visual arts, sounds, you choose. You have one or more of those in your library, your memory, your phone, your computer, your bookmarks... You do not need to be able to explain your choice rationally: whatever seems right to you, is right to us!"*

➔ If the workshop happens online, create an online white board and allow participants to post their fragments before the workshop. It helps if you've already added some content, preferably diverse: one image, one text excerpt, one video... (preferably content that most participants will recognize).

➔ If the workshop is in person, either use an online white board and a projector, or stick the fragments on a wall or a large sheet of paper. You may want to bring a color printer to print fragments such as book covers, pictures, pages of comics, etc.

➔ Some participants will not have done what was asked from them. Allow them some time to think, to look for content on the Web, etc., and come up with something.

## During the workshop:

· One participant presents their "fragment", briefly describes it and explains why it seems meaningful to them when thinking about the future. There is no discussion, only possible reinforcements.

· "Has someone brought something that seems close to this fragment?" If so, let them take their turn. If not, ask who wants to go next. Repeat.

· If some participants have not brought anything with them, help them think of something and look for it on the web (an image of a film, a book cover, etc.), then come back to them later.

· Once everybody has shared their fragment, try to cluster them in different thematics, or tones, etc. What topics, concerns or ideas seem to emerge? What seems to diverge, or converge?

➔ The result is a board with images, references, texts, plus post-its that explain why the fragments were chosen by each participant. If clusters have been created, try to name them.

## Conclusions

· Again, nobody's right or wrong. We are in the world of fiction and imagination. The point of this exercise is to help people express their "images of the future", and notice the variety of ways in which other people see the future.

　　· However, one possible additional takeaway from this activity may be to understand what feels important, scary, or aspirational, for the group.

· In fact, "the future" itself is, in many ways, a fiction (it doesn't exist, only images of it exist in our minds). However, it is fiction that can produce action.You can use examples of fictions of the future that have produced concrete consequences:

　　· **Science-Fiction and space exploration** ↗

　　· **Futurama** ↗ at the 1937 World Expo, etc.

· How we imagine the future also depends on our culture and on what we experience in the present:

　　· Imagine how other cultures might use different fictions to imagine different futures?

　　· Science-fiction paints more positive futures when times are good, and more dystopian when times are more difficult.

# STAGE 2: IDENTIFYING TRENDS, SIGNALS AND FACTORS OF CHANGE
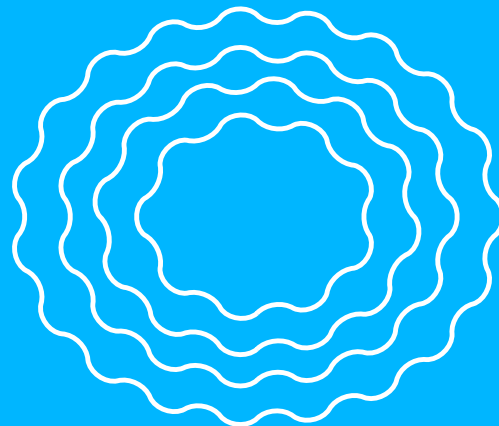
# STAGE 2: IDENTIFYING TRENDS, SIGNALS AND FACTORS OF CHANGE

**Goal: to detect and analyse the forces that shape, or could shape, the future**

How can the future both "not exist" (because it's imaginary) and "already exist" around us? Because it's all about how we make sense of what we see. Here are two exercises to work both our observation and our imagination muscles in order to look and pay attention to the habitual and ordinary in a different way, as well as to what is changing.

Significant social change usually doesn't happen so suddenly. Most of the forces shaping the future are already at work in the present, in more or less visible ways. For example:

· The population of most European countries has been aging for decades (because not enough babies are born to replace the older citizens who die of natural causes) and in many cases, has started to decrease. This will have dramatic effects in the future, and (apart from opening the gates to immigration) there isn't much that can be done about it in the short term. However, because demographic changes are slow and progressive, they are difficult to notice on a day-to-day basis.

· Climate change has also been discussed for decades, however its concrete effects have only become manifest recently because some thresholds were passed: temperatures reached extreme levels, rivers dried (or overwhelmed because of rainstorms), some agricultural activities had to move North, etc.

· Technology moves fast and in very visible ways, and new technologies always come with breathless promises of the changes they will

produce in society, the economy, etc. However, the gap between what the technology's promoters think it will do, and what users really do when they get their hands on it, is often very large. It is therefore much harder to identify which technologies will have significant, lasting effects, and effects on what.

Being able to identify and rate the sources of change (and perhaps, also, of continuity) is an important part of futures literacy. This is the purpose of the three following modules. Depending on your goals, and on how much time you have, you may choose to use one or more of these modules - however, the second (2.2 "Horizon Scanning") and third (2.3 "Factors of Change") modules are mutually exclusive.

# 2.1 TRACES OF THE FUTURE

*In "Traces of the future" participants go out in the street to look for signs that belong to, or point toward, the future.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | Detect & collect elements in the participants' environment that can be interpreted as signs of times to come, bring them back to the workshop, and discuss them. |
| Duration | Ideally, participants could be asked to collect their own traces of the future before they arrive at the training, or in between two sessions.

Duration is 90 minutes - or more, if participants are expected to go out to collect Traces of the Future during the session. |
| Setting | Although the "hunt" should ideally be undertaken in small groups of 2-3 participants, since each participant brings back their own "trace of the future", it can also be done individually. |
| When? | After the icebreakers and perhaps some "theoretical" introductions of Futures Literacy. |

*The science-fiction writer William Gibson <u>once said</u> ↗ : "The future is already here. It's just not very evenly distributed." Of course, it's not exactly true, since we've seen that "the future" doesn't exist in the singular, and that it is a product of our imagination.*

However, there are objects, signs, situations, etc., that:
· Point out to new possibilities [examples: a new technology; indications of how society copes with a new tech, e.g. "Drones No-Fly Zones" signs; alternative communities...]
· And/or are small today, but could become large and deeply transformative tomorrow [examples: teleworking before Covid; electronic implants; wine grown in the UK rather than France...]
· And/or can be considered symbols of much larger, deeper trends [examples: a refugee camp; a new crop that becomes viable here because of climate change; new animal species in the region/city...]

*We will call them "Traces of the future".*

## Prompt:

I want you to go out in the street, in groups of 2 or 3, to each collect one of these "traces of the future", and bring them back here as pictures, recordings, stories, drawings, objects, whatever.
What should you look for? First, not just new technologies. They are relevant, but there are certainly other "traces of the future" around you. For instance, look for:
· Pictures, drawings or notes of signs: ads, furniture, lights, sounds, people, etc. that in your opinion belong to, or point toward, the future.
· Things that didn't exist or weren't visible 5 to 10 years ago [example: masks during Covid, and sometimes after]
· Things that used to work and now don't, or in an entirely different way [example: closed branches of banks, post offices, public services, etc.]

- Things that stimulate or shock you, and seem more and more present [examples: homeless people; climate protests...]
- Media headlines or public controversies that were unthinkable 5 to 10 years ago [example: #meetoo; gender disputes at Eurovision]...

Remember, I want one "trace of the future" per person. Go!

## Why not online?

This activity could conceivably be done online, but we recommend against it for several reasons:

- It forces the participants to move, which is important during training sessions that include long periods sitting down inside rooms;
- It involves collective discussions and sense-making, which is easier outside than if every participant is looking at their phone;
- The signals that will be detected when out in the "real world" will likely be less obvious, less stereotypical, less pre-edited, and therefore more surprising and diverse.

## Sharing the results:

- One participant presents their "trace of the future", briefly describes it and explains why it seems meaningful to them:
  - What is it? (in case it's not obvious)
  - Why do you see it as a sign of the future?
- Do you consider it as a positive or negative sign?
- Do you consider the future it points towards as likely or unlikely?
- Has someone brought something that seems close to this trace? If so, let them take their turn.
- Does someone have a different interpretation of this "trace"?
- If not, ask who wants to go next.
- Repeat.
- ➔ Ideally, display these traces as if they were part of an exhibition.

## Conclusion

As you just saw, you may draw different conclusions from the same observation: for some of you it may make a lot of sense, for others it may not; for some of you it may point to a desirable future, and for others to an undesirable one...

This tells us several things:
- Again, there are many futures.
- The futures are in many ways human-made. They are not pre-written. We write them every minute by what we do and don't do, and also by interpreting things in one way or another. For example, is a refugee camp the first seed of new, future "refugee nations", of hopeful signs of solidarity and intercultural change, or the spearhead of an alien invasion, or the first sign of future massive climate migrations, or the symbol of how Europe has lost its moral bearings? Depending on your interpretation, the future of refugees, and yours, will likely be quite different.
- Collective "futuring" exercises are a lot about trying to find some common ground on how we interpret signs and trends, on what we consider desirable in the future, and on what we consider possible. This is how collectively actionable futures emerge. However, at this stage, there is no need to converge. Understanding why we interpret signs in different ways (and accepting it) is also very important in order to progress as a group.

# 2.2 HORIZON SCANNING

*[Horizon scanning is a classic activity in foresight, however it's a bit demanding in time. You can do this activity if you are going to work with a group over multiple sessions, and if you can ask participants to do some research in between sessions. Otherwise, look for the next section, 2.3 "Factors of Change"]*

While this exercise is less about wandering and collecting signs outside, it is also an invitation to remember, dig and look into signs of change that might have crossed your paths at different occasions in the last months, or years or so: What are the main factors that will, or might, make the future different from the present?

Through a method called "Horizon scanning", we will look for signs of change and choose the most important ones. This is a structured and somewhat demanding approach to look for "traces of the future". However, it is best used (if you have time) after more intuitive approaches that create an initial awareness of possible changes (such as the one mentioned above), especially with youth.

Horizon scanning is also a great way to:
· Involve the group in research and collective knowledge-building;
· Converge on what will make the future different from the present, which does not require to agree on either what the present is like, or what the future will be like.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Goal** | To capture, make sense and assess the importance of early warning signs of change. |
| **Duration** | Initial work: about one half day.<br>Then research for one week or more (can be given as "assignments"), ideally in pairs or small groups.<br>Then group work: 90-120 minutes. |
| **Setting** | · Step #1 "Collecting and documenting": groups of 2-3 or event individual research<br>· Step #2 "Clustering, rating and prioritization": whole group.<br>Horizon scanning benefits strongly from diversity: do not hesitate to involve more people, to interview other sources, etc. |
| **When?** | After an initial introduction on futures and more intuitive exercises such as "Futures Fragments" or "Traces of the Future" (see above). |
| **Reference** | Anna Grabtchak, Futures Platform, **"How to Do Horizon Scanning: A Step-by-Step Guide".** ↗ |

## Important definitions: trends and weak signals

There are two main types of factors of change, and it is important to make the difference between them:

· Trends: Trends are major forces of change, usually well-recognized and documented, and on which current action can have only little influence. The open questions are about the effects or the trend, rather than its existence.
➔ Uncertainty [is this factor real and significant?]: low
➔ Impact [will this factor produce significant change in the future?]: high

*Examples:*
*Demography (birth and death rates change very slowly)*
*Climate change (most of the changes in climate over one or two decades are "locked in", current actions will only have influence on a longer time-frame)...*

· Weak signals are new or emergent phenomena that may or may not last and grow in importance, but, if they do, could have dramatic effects. Current actions can have a significant impact on them, shaping them, accelerating or slowing them down.
➔ Uncertainty [is this factor real and significant?]: very high
➔ Impact [could this factor produce significant change in the future?]: high

*Examples:*
*A new technology (e.g. Blockchain)*
*Degrowth communities*
*Alternatives to meat...*

## Step #1: Collecting and documenting trends and weak signals

*Setting: Groups of 2-3 participants.*
*Duration: at least half a day, possibly more including "homework".*

What factors of change will most profoundly affect our [topic] in the coming years? What are the trends and the weak signals that point toward possible, or even likely changes? In order to answer these questions, we need to do some research.

Each group has been given a 'Foresight Radar"(see below) to help collect and categorise the trends and weak signals that you will identify. Pay attention to:

· The different time horizons: some factors of change may be already manifest today, while some others may only become important later;
· The different angles through which you should look for trends and weak signals: Political, Economic, Social/cultural, Technological, Environmental (PESTE).

You should be able to come up with 6 to 8 trends and/or weak signals, ideally well distributed in the PESTE categories. Not less (you need to look broad), not much more (you should be able to make choices on what's most important).

# The Foresight Radar
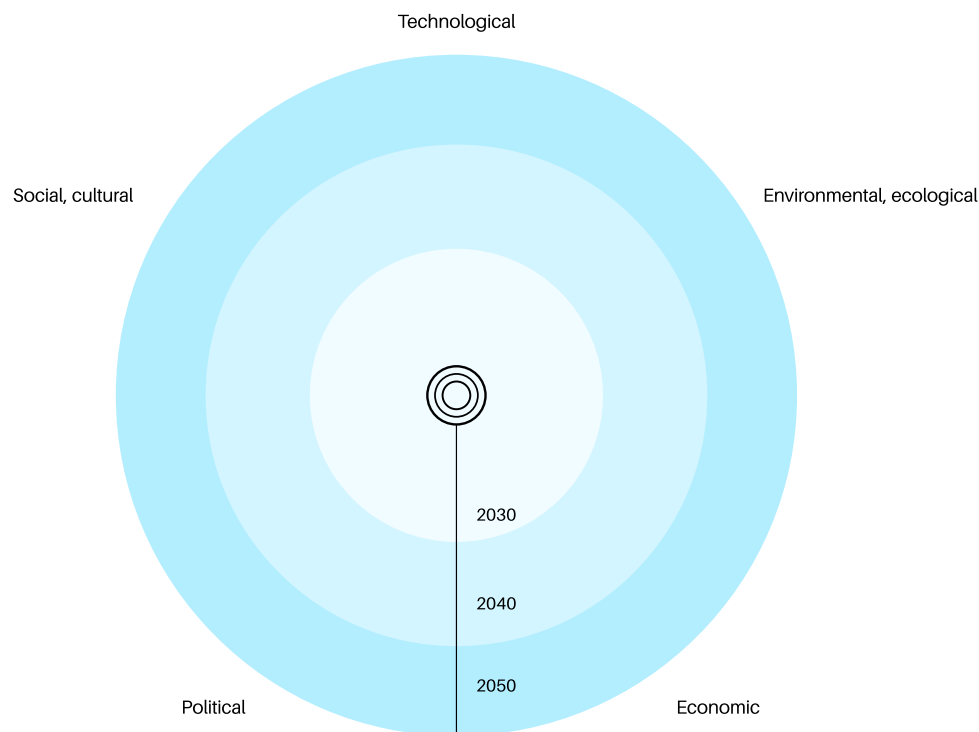


## > How to start?

**Prompt:**
· Use the results of the previous exercises (if you have done them), particularly "Traces of the Future";
· Launch broad-range web searches ("future of…", "disruption of…", "trends in…", "revolutionizing …") then refine them;
· Search social media;
· Look for aggregated information from key experts, official foresight reports, specialized bloggers (as an example, many produce yearly lists of trends, weak signals, "things to look out for"…), etc.

**Instructions:**
Participants will come up with a list of possible trends and weak signals. They need to describe some kind of change, rather than just a category (example: "Aging population", rather than "Demography"). Together, choose the 6-8 that seem most significant, keeping the topic of the training in mind: if the topic is "the future of education in your country", which of these factors seem most significant?

## > Document the selected trends and weak signals

**Prompt:**
Now, you need to support your trends and weak signals with data and analyses. You want to assess:
· Their importance: how massive is this factor (or is it likely to become)? Does it affect everyone, or just some specific people? Every activity, or just selected domains?…
· When they become manifest If the change is continuous, choose a date that corresponds to a threshold (e.g., "by 20XX, X% of the population will be over 65 years old.").
· Their likelihood: is it a trend (already there, and/or highly probable) or a weak signal (which may or may not become big in the future)?

· Their potential effect on your topic: how deeply could it affect the topic? What kind of changes could it produce?

Instructions:

Distribute the trends and weak signals within your group, so that each participant will have 2 or 3 items to document. The goal is to fill in the following template:

## Template: Documenting a trend or weak signal

Factor of change: <e.g. "Aging population">

## Is it a Trend or a Weak Signal? Why?

## Describe the trend or weak signal:

## Provide sources and supporting data:

## Describe the potential impacts on our topic:

## Describe the controversies about this trend or weak signal:

In order to document each trend and weak signal, you need to look for relevant information, but also to be able to take a critical look at your sources of information.
· Reach out to experts and thought leaders (contact them, read their posts or interviews…);
· Scan media and social media;
· Read specialized reports;
· If relevant, try to support qualitative analysis with quantitative data…

## A bit of media literacy

Now is also a good time to learn to critically assess sources of information:
· Where do the data and analyses come from? Does the source have an interest in promoting a trend or signal (like an industry source)? Where did it find its information: firsthand, by doing their own research, or based on other sources?
· Are there convergent, independent sources saying similar things, or is it a single source?
· Is there a controversy about the importance and/or the likelihood of the trend or weak signal, or about its impact on your topic? If so, what are the opposite arguments, and where do they come from?

Do's
· Multiply sources (social and regular media, organizations and individual experts, entrepreneurs or activists…)
· Focus on movement: look for factors that will or could make the future significantly different from the present.
· Diversify: do not follow just one train of thought, but look for factors along several of the PESTE dimensions.
· Pay attention to controversies, uncertainty and contradictions.

Dont's
· Focus exclusively on technology, nor on what happens on social networks.
· Fall to hype (although hype can be a signal) or to conservatism (dismissing whatever seems too new or weird)
· Go off-topic (if something has no significant impact on the future of the topic you're studying, then it's off-topic)

## Step #2: Rating and prioritizing trends and weak signals

*Setting: Whole group.*
*Duration: approx. 2 hours.*

Now is the time to make choices: among all the trends and weak signals documented by the participants, which ones seem most significant to the whole group?

1. Start by comparing the Radars:
   - Are there similar trends or weak signals that could be bundled together? If so, merge them into one.
   - Are there trends or weak signals that need to be better explained so that everyone can understand them?
➔ Together, produce one common Radar where all the remaining trends and weak signals are present.
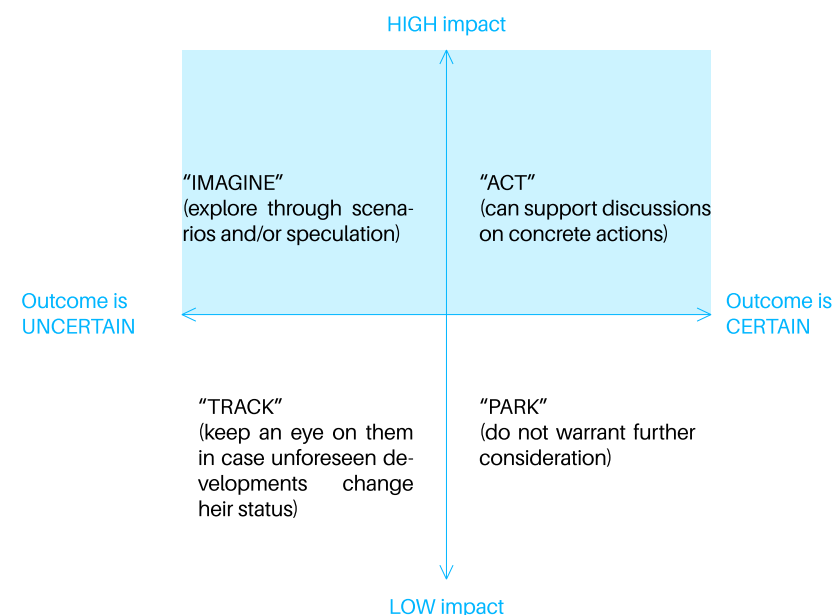
2. Rate each of the remaining trend and weak signal along two axes:
   - Likelihood (highly uncertain/moderately uncertain/reasonably certain/absolutely certain)
   - Potential impact on our topic (Low/Modest/Significant/Major/Revolutionary)

3. Map the factors along the two axes. This will help you focus on the factors with the highest impact (the two top quadrants).

This will be a discussion and sometimes a debate. It is completely OK to have divergent opinions on what is a weak signal and what is a trend. The principle of democracy (who in the groups votes for what) will be a good way to determine trends.

### Horizon Scanning: Rating "Factors of Change" (page 25)

HIGH impact

"IMAGINE"
(explore through scenarios and/or speculation)

"ACT"
(can support discussions on concrete actions)

Outcome is
UNCERTAIN

Outcome is
CERTAIN

"TRACK"
(keep an eye on them in case unforeseen developments change heir status)

"PARK"
(do not warrant further consideration)

LOW impact

### Conclusion

You now have a short and robust list of highly important "factors of change", identified, researched and assessed by the participants. A side effect of producing this list is to bring the group together in the realization that tomorrow will significantly differ from today, and that they can be actors of at least some of these changes.

The selected "factors of change" are also a great content to share outside of the group, to whoever has a stake in the foresight work being undertaken.

# 2.3 A SIMPLE WAY OF WORKING ON "FACTORS OF CHANGE"

*[What follows is a quicker and easier way of familiarizing participants with trends and weak signals, and to prepare for the next stage where participants produce their own stories of the future. This activity is therefore an alternative to a full "Horizon scanning" as described in 2.2.]*

*What are the main factors that will, or might, make the future different from the present?*

*In this activity, participants will be presented with a number of pre-written "factors of change", to which they can add their own, and tasked with selecting which ones are most impactful in regard to the future horizon and topic they are working on.*

*This activity is also a great way to:*
· *Involve the group in research and collective knowledge-building;*
· *Converge on what will make the future different from the present, which does not require to agree on either what the present is like, or what the future will be like.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | To capture, make sense and assess the importance of signs of change that can be found in the present, and will or may have an impact on the future. |
| Duration | 2-3 hours. |
| Setting | Whole group, sometimes subdivided into sub-groups of 2 or 3. |
| When? | After an initial introduction on futures and more intuitive exercises such as "Futures Fragments" or "Traces of the Future" (see above). |
| Reference | Plurality University Network/Société Française de Prospective, **"Scenarios and Narratives for the 21st Century".** ↗ |

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## What is a "Factor of Change"?

A factor or change is a trend or a weak signal (see above, page 22) that is likely to significantly impact the topic of the futures work you are exploring (education, cities, etc.). A factor of change is at odds with the status quo, but does not necessarily determine the effects of change.

There are two main types of factors of change, and it is important to make the difference between them: (describe trends and weak signals, as written above)

### Preparing for this activity

In order to do this activity, you need to have prepared a number of cards describing 8 to 12 Factors of Change that seem particularly significant to the topic at hand, in the time horizon that you have selected.

In Appendix 4, you will find an initial list of generic Factors of Change. However, you may want to adapt them and add your own. How? By doing your own "Horizon Scanning" (see 2.2)! This activity is therefore less demanding than 2.2 for the participants, but it can require more preparation from you.

## Step #1: Discovering and discussing the Factors of Change

*Setting: subgroups of 6-8.*
*Duration: 60-90 minutes.*

Spread out the "Factors of Change" cards on a table, on the floor or on a wall.

Prompt:
We have prepared a list of trends and weak signals (see definitions above) that could transform <topic> in the coming years. However, some are certainly more important than others. Your task will be to choose no more than 5 of these cards, the ones that are most likely to fundamentally transform <topic>.

But first:
What is missing? Are there forces of change that you see around you, or that you have read or heard about, and that you do not see here? Take some time to look at the cards, without having to read through all of them, and let us know if anything is missing.
· Participants have a few minutes to discover the cards.
· If someone finds that a Factor of Change is missing, ask them to describe what is missing. Check with the group: do you agree that this is important? Do you feel this factor is already present in one of the existing cards?
· If the group agrees that it is missing, create a blank card with the missing Factor's title.

Now, you have to choose one Factor of Change that you feel is one of the most significant, and take some time to read it, reflect on it, before presenting it to the group. We would like you to do this by groups of 2

(+ one group of 3 if the participants are an odd number), so that you can discuss together the best way to present your Factor of Change.

· One participant selects one Factor of Change (including the ones that they may have added previously)

→ Who is interested in working with him or her about this? And so on until all the groups are composed.

· Not all Factors of Change have been selected: this is fine, it's a first way of rating which ones feel most important to the group, and which ones do not.

· In subgroups, participants prepare a very short presentation:
*What is this Factor of Change?*
*Is it more a trend or a weak signal?*
*Is there a fact, or a figure, that can illustrate how significant this factor is?*
*What could be the effects of this Factor on the <topic>?*

· Each subgroup presents to all the participants.

## Step #2: Rating the selected Factors of Change

*Setting: whole group.*
*Duration: 45-60 minutes.*

You now have a smaller list of Factors of Change, the ones that the participants have selected and described to one another. However, it is still interesting to rate them: which ones are the most significant? The most likely to happen?
Use a large sheet of paper, or paperboard, with two axes (see below): One for impact, and one for likelihood (from "Very uncertain" to "Very likely").

The group is now ready to generate its own stories of the future!

Rating the "Factors of Change" Cards

Very likely

Impact on <topic>

Very uncertain
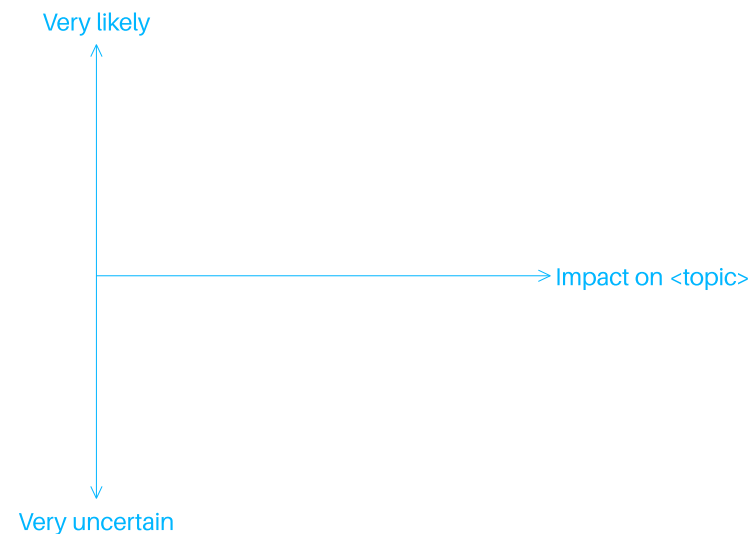
Prompt:
Now we need to determine which of these factors are the most likely to happen and, if they happen, the most impactful.
· Focus on the Factor of Change cards that you have studied and described to one another and place them on this graph.
· The group must agree on which card goes where.

Conclusion

The main purposes of this activity has been:
· To familiarize participants with trends and weak signals;
· To agree on the main reasons why tomorrow will significantly differ from today.

# STAGE 3: CRAFTING STORIES AND IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

# STAGE 3: CRAFTING STORIES AND IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

Futures are plural. There isn't just one predetermined future, but rather multiple potential futures that can unfold based on various factors, decisions, and uncertainties. In futures practices we explore:

- Possible Futures: All futures that could happen, considering the full range of what is conceivable, even if highly unlikely. These include wildcard events like e.g. a global pandemic.
- Plausible Futures: Futures that could reasonably happen based on current knowledge and understanding of how systems operate; new trends, like e.g. TikTok teachers could possibly become important in education, but this is not necessarily probable.
- Probable Futures: Futures that are likely to occur based on current trends, trajectories, and evidence. Hybrid teaching for example is expected to continue shaping the futures of teaching.
- Preferable Futures: The futures that a certain group of people desires or aims to create, based on their values, goals, and aspirations. The ideal scenario of universal access to education can be the vision of educators, for example.
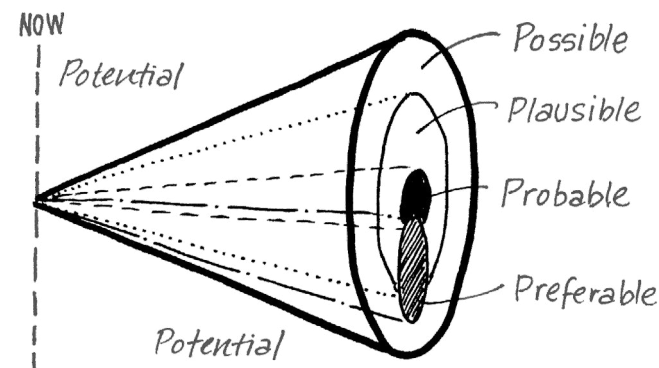


Source: Joseph Voros, a generic foresight process framework (2003)

The "Futures Cone"

By understanding these different categories of futures, we can better navigate uncertainty, make informed decisions, and perhaps work towards creating a future that aligns with our values and goals.

After having identified the factors of change (trends and weak signals), the next goal for our participants should be to generate their own, collective "images of the future": scenarios, stories, visuals, or other representations of what the future of <topic> could, or should, look and feel like.

There are many ways to do this, some very formal, some less so. In this section, we will describe two of the most accessible approaches: the first one is a little bit formal and focuses on "turning our tacit assumptions about the future into explicit, shared meaning" (Unesco); the second one is more playful and focuses on creating good stories of (or from) the future.

# 3.1. PROBABLE, DESIRABLE AND ROBUST FUTURES

Now that we have identified what will make the future different from the present (the "Factors of change"), we should be able to imagine this future - or rather, these futures, since there are many possible futures. However, since the future exists only in our imagination, what we can really do is share our own descriptions of different futures, and maybe try to converge on one that seems preferable to all, or most of the participants.

What we will do together is based on the "Futures Literacy Lab" method designed by Unesco to "turn our tacit assumptions about the future into explicit, shared meaning", with the help of collective intelligence.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Goal** | Make explicit and share the participants' assumptions about the future, and combine "likely" and "desirable" images of the future in order to collectively describe a "robust" future, that seems both desirable and achievable.. |
| **Duration** | Half a day (minimum) to (preferably) one day. |
| **Setting** | Most of the work will happen in groups of 6-8 participants. If there are more participants, plenary sessions will serve to (1) expose participants to the diversity of perspectives about the future, and (2) collect the knowledge produced and accumulate insights. |
| **When?** | After an initial introduction on futures and more intuitive exercises. |
| **Reference** | · Riel Miller, "Transforming the future: Anticipation in the XXIst century", Routledge, 2019 **(free download)** ↗<br>· Unesco Futures Literacy Labs **documentation.** ↗ |

## Step #1: Probable Futures
*Setting: subgroups of 6-8.*
*Duration: 45 minutes.*

Prompt:
"The starting point for the lab is a discussion of probable futures. These are images of the future you would make a bet on. Your best guess of what is likely to happen.

Close your eyes, count to ten, then open your eyes in 2040. Your task is to describe the likely state of <the topic your futures project is about> in <your time horizon>. Try to think of it from different perspectives: those of a citizen, young and old, a public servant trying to do their best, an entrepreneur, a person at work, a vulnerable person... Describe how things work in 2040. If you want, think of it as if you were taking a series of snapshots of daily life. Use the present tense: you are in <horizon year>!"

Instructions:
· Participants individually spend 5 minutes to write or draw, on post-its of the same color, two to three specific descriptions of the most probable characteristics of the future of <topic>. One post-it by statement.

· Each member of the group shares their respective statements. The facilitator places the statement on a flipchart and clusters the similar statements (check that participants are comfortable with each cluster), thus assembling a collective image of the likely future.

· There are no right or wrong statements. No one can claim to know the future; additionally, our purpose here is to make explicit what participants have in mind, rather than scientifically assessing the probability of this or that change. We are also not aiming for consensus or agreement on one single group image: The idea is to generate a collage, an assembly of snapshots of the future.

## Step #2: Desirable Futures
*Setting: the same subgroups of 6-8.*
*Duration: 45 minutes.*

Prompt:
"Again, you awake in <horizon year>. This time you are not in the most likely future, but in what you consider a preferable or desirable future. Describe your preferred image of <topic> in this future. Do not worry about being 'realistic'. Think about the values that inspire your thinking about good or preferred futures. Try to describe concrete situations or scenes, of how things work, of personal experiences, of what happens on a normal day..."

Instructions:
· On post-its of a different color than before,participants individually spend 5 minutes to write or draw , two to three specific descriptions of the desired characteristics of the future of <topic>. One post-it by statement.

· Each member of the group shares their respective statements. The facilitator places the statement on a flipchart and clusters the similar statements (check that participants are comfortable with each cluster), thus assembling a collective image of the likely future.

· Again, the group does not have to agree on what is preferable!

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## Step #3: Ranking and selecting statements about the future
*Setting: the same subgroups of 6-8.*
*Duration: 45-60 minutes.*

Prompt:
In this phase, we will review the statements produced about the likely and the desirable futures, and rank them in the following ways:
· First, we will rank the probable characteristics according to how desirable they are;
· Than, we will rank the preferable characteristics in terms of how likely they are.

In other words, the group must decide which of the statements regarding the probable future is the most desirable – the probable future you most want to happen. And, turning to the statements about the preferred future, the task is to decide which one the group thinks is the most likely to happen – the desirable future that seems most realistic.

Instructions:
· Each participant receives four color dots. With these dots, they will:
  · First, vote for 2 of the probable characteristics that they also find desirable.
  · Second, vote for 2 of the desirable characteristics that they believe are the most likely to happen in <horizon year>.
· This results in the selection of one probable characteristic most desired by the group, and, similarly, one preferred characteristic that the group deems most likely.
  · If there is a draw, let the group discuss so that they remain with only two characteristics to share in the plenary.
· Discuss the picture depicted by the two selected statements.
· Draft a 2-minutes presentation of this future to be shared in plenary (or to outside participants, if there is no plenary) in 2 minutes.

## Step #4: "Robust" Futures
*Setting: whole group (plenary)*
*Duration: 45 minutes.*

Prompt:
Each subgroup has come up with two statements: one about their preferred "likely future", and one about their most likely "desirable future". You now have two minutes to present them. Based on this, we will let a collective image of a "robust" future emerge: One that seems both feasible, and worth fighting for.

Instructions:
Each subgroup presents their two picks to plenary (2 minutes each). There is time to answer brief clarifying questions.
As the groups present, a picture of the future of <topic> in <horizon year> starts to build up.
These descriptors will provide the basis for depicting a 'robust collaborative image' of the future.

Option: Highlighting the differences between the "Robust Future" and the present
· The participants are invited to describe key differences between the "Robust Future" and the present: What has disappeared? What has appeared, that doesn't exist today? *What has fundamentally changed?*
· Individually, each participant writes one post-it for each type of difference (New / Disappeared / Fundamentally changed)
· Participants share their ideas. The facilitator places them on the board and clusters the similar ideas.
· A collaborative image of how different the "Robust Future" is from the present emerges.

## Conclusion

We have learned:

· To make our images of the future explicit, and to discuss them with others;

· To make the difference between "probable" and "desirable" futures;

· To collectively imagine a "Robust Future". This future may not be the one that will actually happen, but it's one that can become the focus of further discussions, projections, etc.

## Highlighting the Differences Between Present and Imagined Future

What is NEW, that didn't exist before?

What is GONE, that doesn't exist anymore?

What is fundamentally DIFFERENT?

Political

Economic

Social / Cultural

Technological

Ecological

# 3.2. SPECULATIVE FUTURING

While the activity described above is a more "intellectual" futures exercise, imagining possible worlds in narratives and fictional terms is generally perceived as more enthusing by young people – and can also contribute to their futures literacy, especially when followed by more reflexive moments (see Stage 4).

A very important tool in futures practices is scenarios: stories about possible future developments. They are not predictions but rather imaginations of what might unfold. Scenario planning usually explores several different futures[3]. They help us explore alternative paths, reduce risk, and shape more flexible mindsets for organizations and individuals. By considering different scenarios, we can better prepare for the uncertainties ahead.

In this activity, we will focus on building one story of the future (one "scenario"), drawing on creative writing methods.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Goal** | Developing a written, fictional story of the future of \<topic\>. |
| **Duration** | ½ day |
| **Setting** | This exercise is preferably done in small groups (8-10 max). |
| **When?** | Can be done following 3.1 ("Robust Futures"), but also directly after a "Factors of Change" activity (see 2.2, 2.3). |
| **Reference** | On the classic "scenarios" ↗ method: European Foresight Platform, **"Scenario Method".** On more playful methods: <br>• Kuo-Hua Chen, Jeanne Hoffman, **"Serious Play: Transforming Futures Thinking Through Game-based Curriculum Design"** ↗; <br>• Kerstin E. Cuhls, **"Mental time travel in foresight processes"** ↗. |

---

3.  Typically, one "business as usual" scenario that continues current trends; one "preferred" scenario; and possibly others.

## Step #1: Creating the story's outline
*Setting: groups of 8-10, possibly less.*
*Duration: 45-60 minutes.*

### Prompt:
We now have:
- <If the group has done 3.1. "Probable, Desirable and Robust Futures"> the characteristics of a "robust future", which is both desirable and probable. Let's now dive deep into it by imagining it as a story.
- <If the group has only done 2.2 or 2.3 "Factors of Change"> an idea of the trends a weak signals that are transforming the future of <topic>. Let's now imagine how different this future is, by writing it as a story.

### Instructions:
- Look at the elements that you have gathered about the robust future and/or factors of change: What are the most important elements that you want to work around? What do you feel is most intriguing, desirable, stimulating…?

- Formulate the main direction of your story as a question beginning with "What if…?"
  - If you base the story on a "Robust Future": focus on one transformative, defining characteristic of your future.
  *E.g. What if, in <location> in <horizon year>, we <what the scenario is about>? "What if, in Brussels in 2035, we focused on building hybrid relationships in a critical way?"*
  - If you base the story on your "Factors of Change": pick one factor of change, imagine it becomes dominant and push it to the extreme.
  *E.g. "What if, in Brussels in 2050, two thirds of the population were over 60?" "What if Brussels in 2050 had entirely remade itself to be adapted to climate change?"*

- Freely imagine the main characteristics of this imaginary future. There are many ways to do that, depending on the facilitator's skills and the group's tastes and aspirations:
  - As a conversation: participants spend a few minutes putting their ideas on post-its (one idea per post-it), before sharing them on a common board. Let ideas flow, encourage participants to build up on each other's idea (rather than criticize them), then help them cluster their ideas by identifying themes.
  - As a construction game: ask participants to imagine a house that is characteristic of this future. Give them material to work with their hands: modeling clay, wooden sticks, string, paper, colored pens…
  - Etc.

- Gather the main elements of your story into a short (½ to 1 page) "pitch":
*E.g. (from the Brussels training) "The online space offers a realm of possibilities to connect with others and explore relationships and identity in ways that we had never imagined before. In the past, we spent a lot of time with and as avatars and had hybrid relationships without really thinking about it. Today, in 2035, we consciously develop a network of people with whom we have deep relationships, based on online or offline face-to-face interaction. When we get to know new people in the virtual world, at some point we unmask ourselves. Friendships are virtual or real as long as there is affection, solidarity and a safe space. Although the physical and digital world are connected seamlessly and combined form the reality, the limitations of both worlds are clear."*

*E.g. (from the Paris training): "Climate change, inequalities, identity conflicts, all exacerbated by social media, created a highly polarized and increasingly violent society. The political priority became to lower the level of emotion and tension between different communities. Paris' answer was to divide into separate districts, each with its specific culture and rules, and highly homogenous population. In one district, it is forbidden to express pain. In another, 'toxic behaviors' are banned, even if unintentional – even children can be banned –, and*

*people have no names because many names have a history of exerting or inciting violence. One district is dedicated to logic, science and efficiency. Montmartre is dedicated to the arts, which are absent from other districts. And so on.*

*As a result, people have lost the habit, and even the ability, to deal with differences and even with strong emotions.*

*A few decades later, many young Parisians feel constrained by this environment. They feel the need to create their own identities, to discover other aspects of their city, and free themselves from the strictures of their strongly enforced district values.*

*This is how Munity emerged. Located in a former campus within what used to be the Latin Quarter, it became a center where scientists studied ways to reduce polarization and conflicts. The division of Paris into separate districts was invented there. After this, it became disaffected, although it wasn't included in any of the districts. Young Parisians looking for a safe space took over the place, discreetly at first. But after they had accessed the place's archives and understood its role, it became an island of resistance and experimentation: Munity."*

· Add as much detail as you wish during the allocated time, but try to be consistent, to not undermine the credibility of the scenario.

### Conclusion:

Writing stories is a useful exercise to explore our aspirations, fears and beliefs about the future, and to let them evolve due to interaction with the group.

## Step #2: Worldbuilding
*Setting: groups of 3-4.*
*Duration: 45-60 minutes.*

Before going deeper into the story, the "worldbuilding" is a useful way to add texture to the world in which it will take place, as well as inviting participants to address complexity – which is a central dimension of Futures Literacy. Often used by science fiction writers before they start writing their stories, worldbuilding can be described as a systematic creative process to construct comprehensive and coherent environments or settings in which stories of the future can unfold.

### Prompt:
Now that we have the outline of our story of the future, it is time to make it concrete. Worldbuilding is used to explore different possibilities and implications of the scenario, imagining what it can entail, and is a very common tool used by science fiction writers and movie makers. We will brainstorm on e.g. what political institutions will be regulating our digital social interactions, which devices we will use to learn new stuff, what kind of art will be made, etc.

### Instructions:
· On a wall or sheet of paper, create a grid made with tape, with 5-7 columns with the seven domains of our futures world (political, economic, social, technical, environmental – you may want to add one or two more ,such as "artistic") each with three rows with the different levels of impact (individual, communal/organizational, societal). Write the title of your story above the grid.
· Let's team up in small groups of 3-4 people.
· Each group gets one (or two) domain(s) of our futures world, and discusses what they see as possible changes in this world, on an individual, communal or organization, and societal level.
· Write your ideas on a post-it.
· Paste the post-its in the right place on the grid.

· Once you have pasted the post-its of your group, read the post-its of other groups and add ideas to other places on the grid as well.

## The Worldbuilding Grid

|  | Political | Economic | Social | Technical | Environmental | ... | ... |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Community / Organization |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Society |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



### Conclusion:

Worldbuilding is an exercise that can last 15 minutes to 10 hours. It makes our futures images of the future more vivid and tangible. Based on the ideas, you can again reflect with the participants. What surprised them, what is cool, what is in common, if they want to live in that world etc.

## Step #3: Role-Playing Futures
*Setting: groups of 3-4.*
*Duration: 1-2 hours.*

You can add a richer dimension to your future story, by mentally travelling between the present and the future. The goal is to explore our future in an embodied way, to transport participants into the future they have begun to imagine. Mental time travel allows us to pre-experience the future, and helps comprehend the complexities of the present.

In futures practices, mental time travel serves as a practical research tool. It involves using the "theater of the mind" to visualize and explore possible futures. So, it's not just about looking back or forward – it's about leveraging our mental capacity to navigate time and anticipate potential outcomes.

The participants of a mental time travel exercise can be transported to the future and be an observer, but it can also lead to an embodiment of a character from the future. They can be themselves in these futures, but they can also become someone else.

The activity happens in two sequences:

> Sequence #1 (individual time travel):

Prompt:
So far our thinking about the futures were intellectual exercises. Let's now visit these futures.

Let's put ourselves in a circle, in a comfortable position, on a chair or seated on a blanket or a pillow.

Think about one person or non-human being/object that you'd like to incarnate in our future. It can be someone you know (a cousin, the night shop operator from around the corner, the dog of your friend, ...) or a fictional character – a beauty salon robot, a metaverse shaman, a brain hacker,... If it is a fictive being/object, take some time to imagine its age, background, relational situation, living situation,...

I then invite you to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

> Breathe in, feel your whole body, breathe out, relax your body.
> We are now traveling to the year <horizon year>, keep your eyes closed and stay with us...
> · Think of the role you all chose to embody.
> · Slowly enter the shoes of this role, and become them.
> · It's the year <horizon year>.
> · What does your environment look like?
> · Is it cold or hot outside?
> · What are the 3 things you see around?
> · What do you wear? How do you look?
> · How do you feel mentally and emotionally?
> · What is your superpower or secret talent?
> · What are your fears?
> · What is most important to you in life?
> · Are you seeing someone today?
> · What do you do right before going to bed?
> You're now slowly going to open your eyes in 5-4-3-2-1 ...
> Welcome to <horizon year>!

Instructions:
This is a personal exercise. Focus on making participants comfortable.

Note:
The "meditation" text can be adapted, depending on the group and its sensitivity. It is important to note that for some of us, future images can be confronting. Therefore it is important to make sure you have a good enough knowledge of your group before proceeding in these types of exercises.

If the role-playing is a first for many participants, it may be good to add a short moment of reflection:
How do you feel?
What happened?
What did you realize?
What were the aha moments for you?

> Sequence #2 (role-playing in small groups):

Prompt:
Let us now imagine little scenes where several of you (or your characters) will interact in our <horizon year> world.
Here are a list of prompts for these scenes (these prompts need to be prepared in advance. See examples below).
I need you to form groups of 3 (ideally) or 2 and pick/choose one prompt.
Then you'll have 30 minutes to imagine a scene where you play characters in <horizon year>.
Finally, you will play your scenes in front of everybody else!

Instructions:
After the mental time travel described above:
· Group with maximum 3 persons
· The facilitators need to have written down a set of prompts for little scenes happening in our future, of course fitting the topic of the whole training. They can be serious, or more playful.
  Here are examples on the topic "The future of leisure time":
  · New technologies offer revolutionary ways to spend leisure time. The three of you spend a Friday evening together. Imagine how you relate differently to what the technology offers, and play the scene.
  · Come up with a holiday plan that could only exist in <horizon year>

and convince the others to go with you.
- A new art/sport activity is proposed for the 2044 Olympics. Imagine a discussion between you where some of you agree or disagree. It can be a private conversation but also a debate on TV (e.g., between a practitioner of the sport and someone opposed to it), a negotiation within the Olympics Committee…
- Design your favorite place to spend your free time in 2040 together. You organize an activity, but there is an incident with the police.
- You're all at home, yet you're spending the coolest, most exciting time together. What is it? (It has to be different than today.)
- …
- Play out one of the scenes based on these prompts, each in your groups
- Share the scenes with the rest of the group as a little performance.
- To end the workshop, the group can be gathered back in the circle and transported back to the present.

## Conclusion:

Role-playing futures plays a crucial role in expanding our imagination and thinking in an embodied way about the future. It enhances the engagement and participation in futures exercises, by letting participants actively immerse themselves in the possible futures. It leads to a deeper understanding of potential futures and the plurality of perspectives on futures, and makes the differences in preferred futures clear.

Seeing the world from different viewpoints can also foster empathy and a better understanding of diverse stakeholder perspectives. It allows participants to explore complex problems dynamically and interactively, promoting creative thinking and the exploration of unconventional solutions. It contributes to interpersonal skills and fosters collaboration in the group. Finally, by involving participants emotionally and cognitively, it helps embed the learning more deeply. The unique and often memorable nature of role-playing exercises makes the scenarios and lessons learned more likely to be remembered and recalled in future contexts.

# 3.3. GAMING THE FUTURE

*What is it like to live in this or that future? What are typical characters, situations, artefacts? This simple activity can be either a catalyst, or an alternative, to role-playing.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | To add flesh to images of the future described in the previous phases. <br> "In this future, there is… (a thing, a situation, etc.) that… (does, evokes, represents something)": imagine what it is! |
| Duration | 30-45 minutes. |
| Setting | Small groups of 2-3. |
| When? | After the group has described futures they are interested in working towards. |
| Reference | Plurality University Network, **"The Narratopias Game"**. ↗ (the cards, and rules can be downloaded from here). <br> This game is also inspired by **The Thing From The Future,** ↗ created by Situation Lab (Stuart Candy & Jeff Watson). |

Prompt:

With this card game, we invite you to continue the story of the future that you have begun to imagine. "In this future, there is... (a thing, a situation, etc.) that... (does, evokes, represents something)": imagine what it is!

· Choose the narrative you wish to continue
· Take a blank "Extend a Future" sheet
· Pick one random "There is..." and one random "... That..." card
· Take your time to imagine what this is and write it on a sheet. Answer with a drawing or a description.
· Share it and discuss it with others.

Done! You can start over as many times as you like.

Instructions:

In groups of 2-3, participants play the game several times, each participant taking their turn to draw 2 cards, imagine something, and discuss it with the others. Participants can keep notes of the things, situations, etc., they have imagined.

Optionally:

· Groups can select the most stimulating idea they have had to report on.
· In plenary, each group shares its most stimulating idea.



## Conclusion

The Narratopias game enables people's deeper engagement in thought and discussion, fostering a more expansive view of potential developments. It can create a bridge between abstract notions of possible futures, and our daily life as we experience it. Sharing it can help people connect with futures in deeper, more visceral, more emotionally resonant ways or even engage people in conversations on futures, who otherwise would not feel comfortable with the topic. Ideas generated during the game can be used as a basis for further discussion, planning, and action, making the learning experience both practical and impactful.

The recommendation is to go through a few examples together so that the participants understand the game.

# STAGE 4: YOUR PART IN CREATING THE FUTURE

# STAGE 4. YOUR PART IN CREATING THE FUTURE

We have familiarized ourselves with different images of the future. We have looked for trends and other signs of the future(s). We have learned to build futures scenarios and discuss them. And we have one collective story of the future, be it more on the creative side, or a desirable future, or a "robust" future coming out of a more rational scenario work...

The next logical phase is to "become the change": to see ourselves, personally and collectively, as actors in the story that leads to this future, who are part of shaping it.

We will be doing three different things in this part:
·   We will learn to continue narratives of the future, to give life to the worlds that they describe, so that are no longer abstract stories from above, but worlds in which many different things happen;
·   We will project ourselves in these futures, and imagine the role we can play in it (and in making it happen);
·   Then we will try to map out the steps between now and the future(s) we are striving for, as a guide for possible action.

# 4.1. MAKE THE FUTURE HAPPEN: THE STORY OF CHANGE

*From the previous stage, we have a story of the future (a "Robust Future", a fictional story, a scenario...). Now, how did it come to be? What started the transition between now and then? What key decisions or actions had to be taken? What were the tipping points, the moments when the change became irreversible? What difficulties or crises had to be overcome? We will try to imagine that as a story.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | To invite participants to write a "storyline" (or draw a timeline) connecting the present to the "image of the future" they produced in the previous stage. |
| Duration | 60 minutes. |
| Setting | Subgroups of 6-8 (may be less, not more). Share in plenary at the end. |
| When? | After the group has described futures they are interested in working towards. |
| Reference | Plurality University Network/Société Française de Prospective, Workshop: **"Scenarios and Narratives for the 21st Century"**. |

Prompt:
· The goal of this phase is to tell the story of the transition, between now and the future(s) that the group has imagined. It is focused around a timeline. The goal is to tell the whole story from beginning to end as one narrative, or storyline.
· Connect triggers (what started the change) and "tipping point" (what made the change irreversible) to the chosen future in <horizon year>, by imagining a small number of key events or decisions events or decisions.
· Look for possible narrative inconsistencies and solve them.
· Add details as you go - everything to make the story more lively and more plausible.

Instructions:
· Triggers: What started the transition?
     · Imagine internal or external factors or events that happened close to <present year> and drove actors to initiate what would become a major transition.
     · Describe them in some detail: When? What? Who? Where?

Examples of "triggers":
· A heat dome in India kills millions in a few days.
· An AI company claims its programs are better educators than 90% of teachers.

· Tipping points: What were the decisive moments?
  Imagine:
  · What had to change, break, emerge... as a condition for the full transition to become possible? [When? What? Who? Where?]
  · and/or - What major decision or event can be dated as the tipping point [When? What? Who? Where?]

· Crises: What made the change difficult?
  Imagine:

· Imagine a crisis, somewhere between now and <horizon year>, that could have jeopardized the evolution towards our future?
· How did we respond [When? What? Who? Where?]
  Examples of "crises":
     · A war, a pandemic, etc.
     · Rural communities decide to stop selling food to the "autonomous" cities.

· Finalize the storyline, preferably in graphic mode



A simple timeline

Triggers: "It began with.."    "What followed was..."    "The tipping point was..."    A crisis

2024          2030                    2040              2050
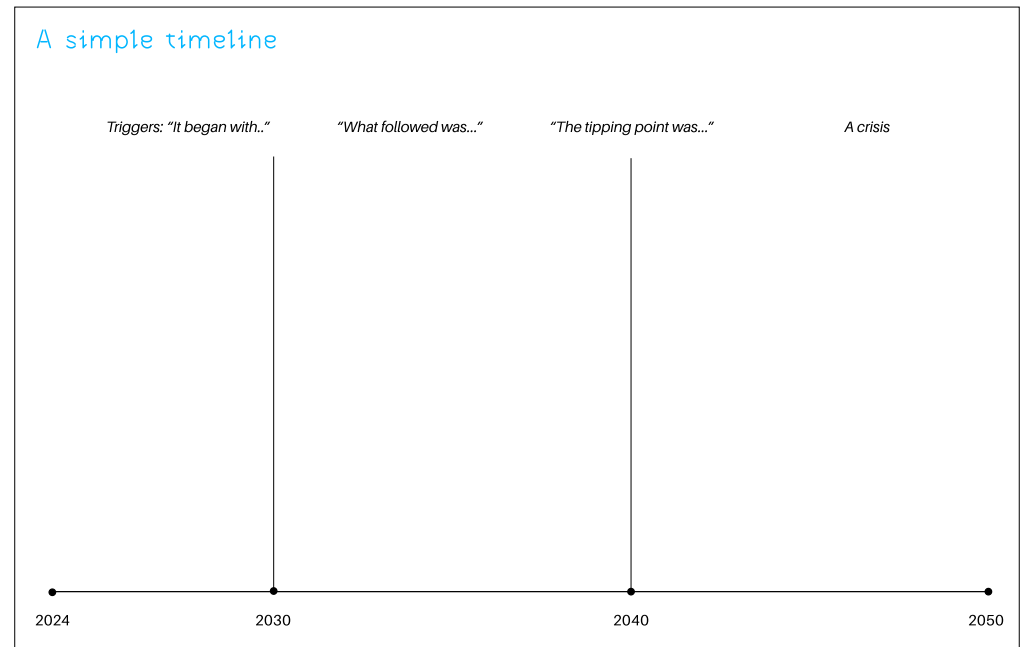
## Conclusion

We have seen that the process of change from now to the future can be seen as a transition. We have understood that it is a complex process, where actions (1) require decisiveness, but (2) do not always produce the intended effects, and where uncertainty must be taken into account all the time.

However, we have also seen that the future depends on our actions, and that you can act towards helping certain futures emerge rather than others!

# 4.2. PROJECTING YOURSELF IN THE FUTURE

[Note: This activity is mostly useful if the "image of the future" produced by the group results from the "Probable, Desirable and Robust Future" activity (3.1), or some classic scenario-building method. If you've been using more creative methods, and especially the "Role Playing" activities in 3.2, this activity is most probably not useful.]

*We have described and/or been given one or several scenarios or images of the future. But where are you personally in this, or these, future(s)? What do you do? What role did you play in helping it emerge? Now is the time to think of yourself, not as a spectator or an analyst, but as an actor.*

| Goal | To invite participants to: Imagine themselves living in the future they have created; Imagine their role in making it happen; Reflect on their role and agency[4] in the future. |
| --- | --- |
| Duration | 90-120 minutes. |
| Setting | Subgroups of 5-7 (may be less, not more). |
| When? | After the group has described futures they are interested in working towards. |
| Reference | Kerstin E. Cuhls, **"Mental time travel in foresight processes"**↗. |

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4. In social science, agency is the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfill their potential. One's agency is one's independent capability or ability to act on one's will. (source: **Wikipedia**). ↗|

Prompt:
*Close your eyes. Imagine yourself in this future. You can choose to be yourself, or an imaginary character; whether you're the same age as to-day (you have traveled time to get there), or whether you're of the age you'll actually have in <horizon year>.*

Note: if, in earlier stages of the training, participants have created charac-ters, they can also keep the same characters. The point of this exercise is to look at the futures through individual eyes, rather than as a third-party narrator.

Instructions:
1. Answer one or several of these questions:
   · What is your name?
   · How old are you? What is your gender? Where were you born?
   · Where, how, and with whom do you live?
   · What is(are) your occupation(s)?
   · What are your passions?
➔ *Participants write down their answers on a sheet of paper, or on an online pad (eg, Etherpad).*

2. Imagine and write down a scene of your daily life.
➔ *Participants write down their scene on a sheet of paper, or on an online pad.*

3. Share your descriptions with the subgroup. Then write a scene where your character interacts with one or more characters imagined by the other participants. You can do this alone, or with 1-2 other participants, or even all together in "role playing mode".
➔ *Participants write down their scene on a sheet of paper, or on an online pad.*
4. Now think of yourself between now and the future. What role, if any, did you play in making it happen?

➔ Participants write down a scene on a sheet of paper, or on an online pad.
➔ The answers are shared within the subgroup.

5. Reflect on your sense of autonomy and empowerment, or lack thereof. As your character, in this future:
- Do you feel you're in control of your life? What, if anything, is missing?
- Do you feel you can really play a role in making this future happen? Or, in influencing this future's future (what happens after 20XX [horizon year])? What would help me?
➔ Each participant is given 1-2 minutes to reflect on the answers.
➔ Collective discussion. Make sure everybody has a chance to speak.

Conclusion

What we have seen here, is that the future is not something abstract that just happens. It happens, not just to you, but with you. You can be an agent of change!

# 4.3. WRAPPING UP AND TAKING STOCK

*The final moment of a Futures Literacy training course should give participants time to reflect on what they have learned and what they take away with them. It is therefore, also, a good time to gather some evaluation data. There are many ways to do all that, and (if you're an educator) you may already have yours, so take what follows as indications and adapt them as you see fit!*

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal | To invite participants to:<br>1. Reflect on what they have learned, and how their relation to the future has changed.<br>2. Reflect on what they will take away, as competencies and abilities.<br>3. Evaluate the process. |
| Duration | 30-60 minutes. |
| Setting | Whole group. |
| When? | At the end of the last session. |
| Reference | (Not applicable) |

## The Polak Game, again

When you've concluded the training or futuring exercise, you can re-peat the Polak Game (see 1.1).

Have the positions of each participant changed? Have their views of how others position themselves changed?

## Discovery report

Ask all participants to write their own "discovery report":
· What surprised me, that I didn't expect or had never thought about?
· What have I learned, that I didn't know or understand before?
· Where did I change my mind, or the way I look at something?
· What do I now consider important, and not before - or the opposite: what I considered important, but no longer?
· What do I want to continue doing or learning based on this course?

All questions do not have to be answered! Encourage participants to focus on the items they find relevant, and not feel obliged to find something to say about all of them.

## Takeaways

You can conclude with a discussion of:
· What participants felt about the course, what they would have done differently.
· What participants take away, that they know they will use (and ideally, how).
· What they would like to work more on, to go deeper.
· What they feel they haven't really grasped.
· How participants plan (or not) to include the future in their actions and decisions...

# APPENDIX 1: NOTIONS TO BE INTRODUCED DURING THE CURRICULUM

## Agency

In social science, agency is the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfill their potential. One's agency is one's independent capability or ability to act on one's will. (source: **Wikipedia**). ↗

## Anticipation

Expectations, predictions, and other images of the future that we form in our conscious or unconscious mind, which often shape our decisions. "The future does not exist in the present but anticipation does. The form the future takes in the present is anticipation." (source: Riel Miller, **Transforming the Future, anticipation in the XXIst century**↗, Routledge, 2018)

## Complexity

Complexity characterizes the behavior of a system whose components interact in multiple ways and follow local rules. The term is generally used to characterize something with many parts where those parts interact with each other in multiple ways, culminating in a higher order of emergence greater than the sum of its parts. The study of these complex linkages at various scales is the main goal of complex systems theory. (source: **Wikipedia** ↗)

Examples of complex systems are Earth's global climate, organisms, the human brain, infrastructure such as power grid, transportation or communication systems, and economic organizations (like cities)...

## Emergence

Emergence occurs when a complex entity has properties or behaviors that its parts do not have on their own, and emerge only when they interact in a wider whole. (source: **Wikipedia** ↗)

Examples include: traffic jams, bird flocks, the formation and growth of most cities, many stock market crises...

## Future

Obviously, the future is the time after the past and present (dictionary). It can not be known or experienced, it can only be anticipated. Anticipation is the only way that the future is expressed in the present. This shifts the focus to the processes that allow anticipation to become an identifiable and active part of the present. (source: Riel Miller, **Transforming the Future, anticipation in the XXIst century** ↗, Routledge, 2018)

## Futures Literacy

Considered by Unesco as one of the "Competencies for the XXIst century", Futures Literacy is a skill allowing us:
· To become aware of how the future plays an active role in what we see and do, and move our anticipation from our subconscious to our conscious mind;
· To articulate the differences between various forms of anticipation ("uses of the future"), in relation to context (why, where, with whom are we using the future?) and purpose (what do we hope to achieve?).
· To connect anticipation to action.
This skill is accessible to anyone. (source: Future Is Now project, "**What is Futures Literacy?**↗")

## Futures Studies, or Foresight

Futures studies is the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future. It is, in a way, the "discipline of anticipation", exploring how to consciously use anticipation to different ends.

Initially rooted in sociology and policy studies, Futures studies is an art as well as an academic discipline, with a strong emphasis on imagination and creativity in creating different possible futures. In the last sixty years, the study of the future has moved from predicting or forecasting the future to mapping alternative futures, to shaping desired futures and sometimes anticipation for emergence, i.e. embracing novelty, uncertainty, complexity and emergence. (source: **World Futures Studies Federation**↗)

### (Weak) Signal

Signals are evidence of the future that we can find in today's world. They are concrete, compelling observations about how the world is changing that give us a hint at where we might be headed - in other terms, that may be indicative of a trend. Think specific products, policies, events, experiences. (source: **Institute For The Future ↗**)

A weak signal is an indicator of a potentially emerging issue or possibility, that may (or may not) become significant in the future. Weak signals supplement trend analysis and they can be used to expand on alternate futures, to challenge our assumptions about the future. Weak signals are usually disruptive or even shocking, difficult to interpret, and their long-term significance is highly uncertain. (source: **Sitra ↗**)

### Speculation

When looking at futures, speculation refers to the free use of imagination, unconstrained by possibility or probability, and therefore close (but not necessarily identical) to "speculative fiction" which encompasses science fiction, fantasy, etc. It is a way of imagining futures happening in a significantly different world than today's and accepting the temporary "suspension of disbelief" which is necessary to enjoy fiction. Speculation often stems from an initial question beginning with "What if... ?"

### Transition

In complex systems, "Transition" describes both the result and the (often long and difficult) process that takes the system from one more or less stable state, to another, different stable state. Examples of "transitions" are: ecological transition (towards a new, sustainable state of development for life on Earth), energy transition (from fossil to renewables), demographic transition (the – contested – hypothesis according to which societies 'advance' from high birth rate-high mortality regimes to low birth rate-low mortality regimes), etc.

Because they relate to complex systems, transitions can not really be managed and remain fundamentally uncertain and messy, although there are ways to steer the system's evolution towards a general direction.
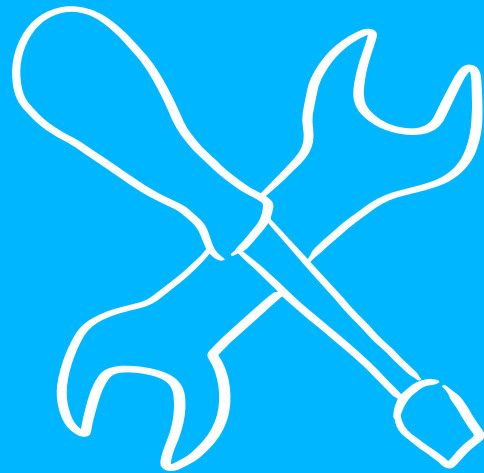
### Trend

In futures studies, a trend is a general development or change in a situation, in people's behavior, in technology, etc., and that are likely to have significant long-term impacts. The trend's existence is relatively established (there is little uncertainty on its nature), however, its impacts may be very uncertain. They are also called "drivers". (source: **Institute For The Future ↗**)

### Uncertainty

Uncertainty refers to a state of limited knowledge where it is impossible to exactly describe the existing state, a future outcome, or more than one possible outcome. Accepting, and dealing with uncertainty, is fundamental to Futures Literacy, since the future can not be known. Different uses of the future have different links to uncertainty: strategic foresight aims at reducing it, risk analyses try to quantify it, whereas methods (such as creative foresight) that try to imagine alternative, transformative futures, may increase it.

# APPENDIX 2:
# TEMPLATES AND TOOLS

# The Foresight Radar
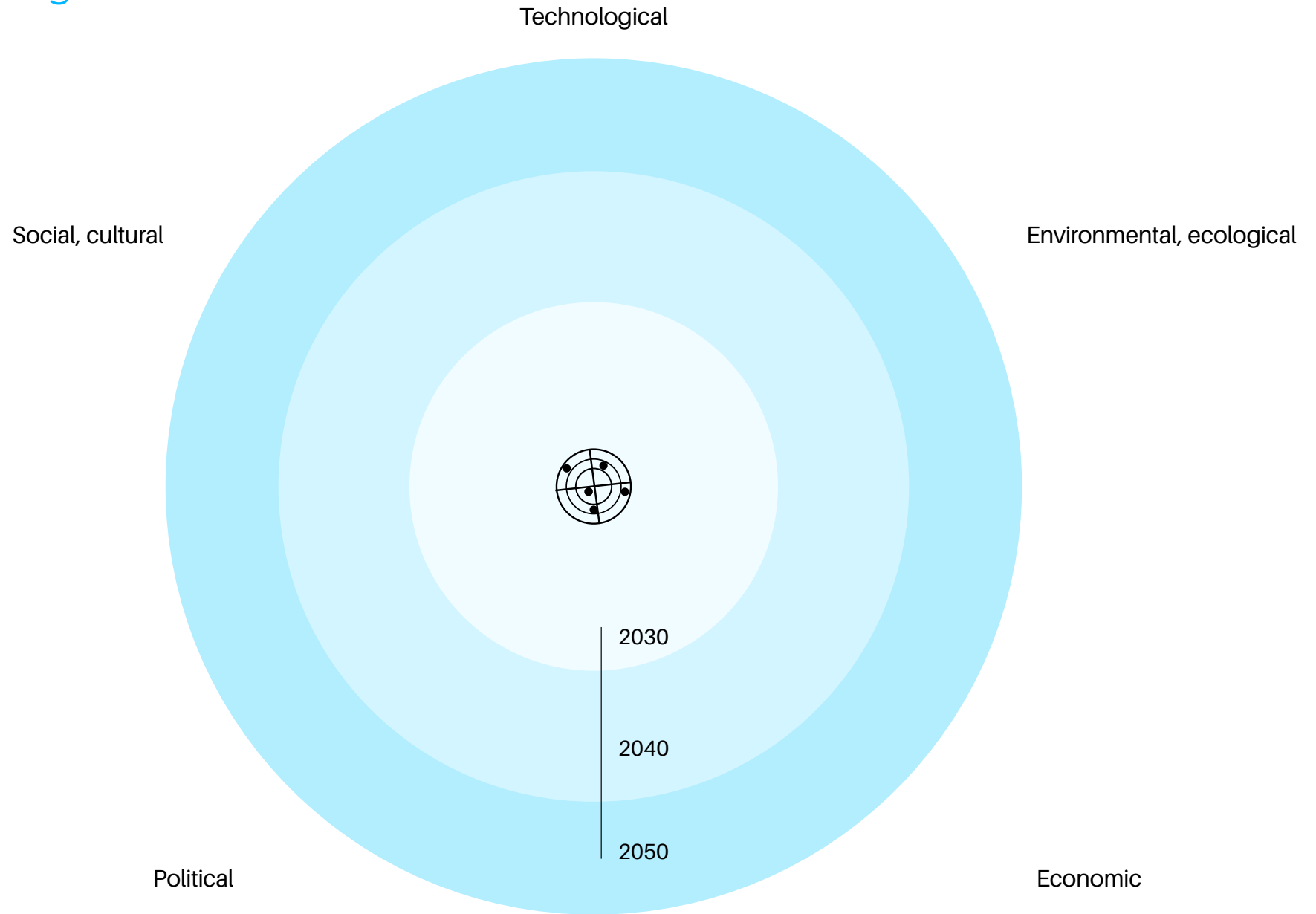
Technological

Social, cultural

Environmental, ecological

2030

2040

2050

Political

Economic

# Template: Documenting a trend or weak signal

Factor of change: <e.g. "Aging population">

## Is it a Trend or a Weak Signal? Why?

## Describe the trend or weak signal:

## Provide sources and supporting data:

## Describe the potential impacts on our topic:

## Describe the controversies about this trend or weak signal:

# Horizon Scanning: Rating "Factors of Change" (page 25)
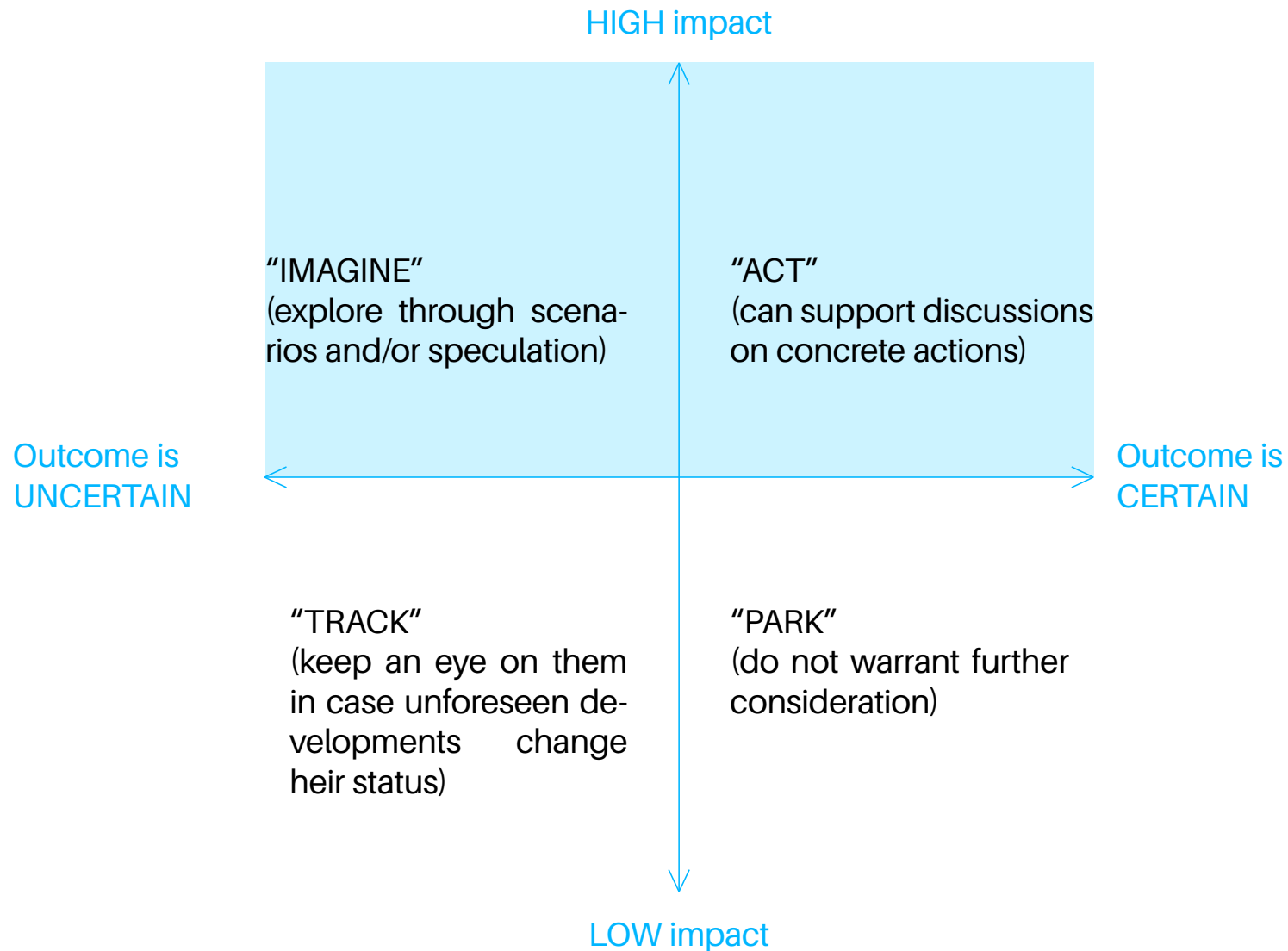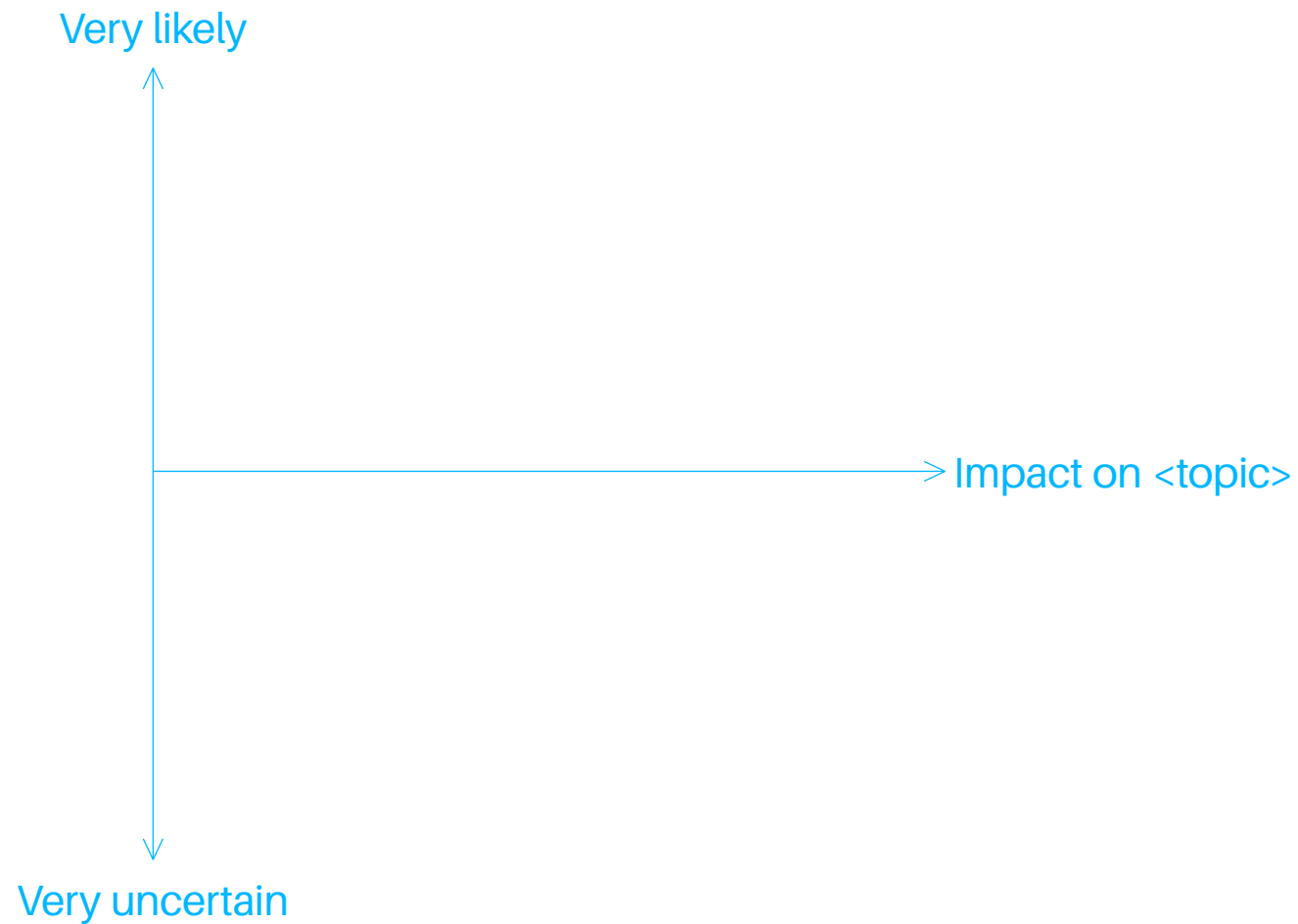
HIGH impact

"IMAGINE"
(explore through scenarios and/or speculation)

"ACT"
(can support discussions on concrete actions)

Outcome is
UNCERTAIN

Outcome is
CERTAIN

"TRACK"
(keep an eye on them in case unforeseen developments change heir status)

"PARK"
(do not warrant further consideration)

LOW impact

# Rating the "Factors of Change" Cards

Very likely

Impact on <topic>

Very uncertain

# Highlighting the Differences Between Present and Imagined Future

What is NEW, that didn't exist before?

What is GONE, that doesn't exist anymore?

What is fundamentally DIFFERENT?

Political

Economic

Social / Cultural

Technological

Ecological

# The Worldbuilding Grid

|  | Political | Economic | Social | Technical | Environmental | ... | ... |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Community / Organization |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Society |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# A simple timeline

*Triggers: "It began with.."*          *"What followed was…"*          *"The tipping point was…"*          *A crisis*

2024                    2030                                        2040                    2050
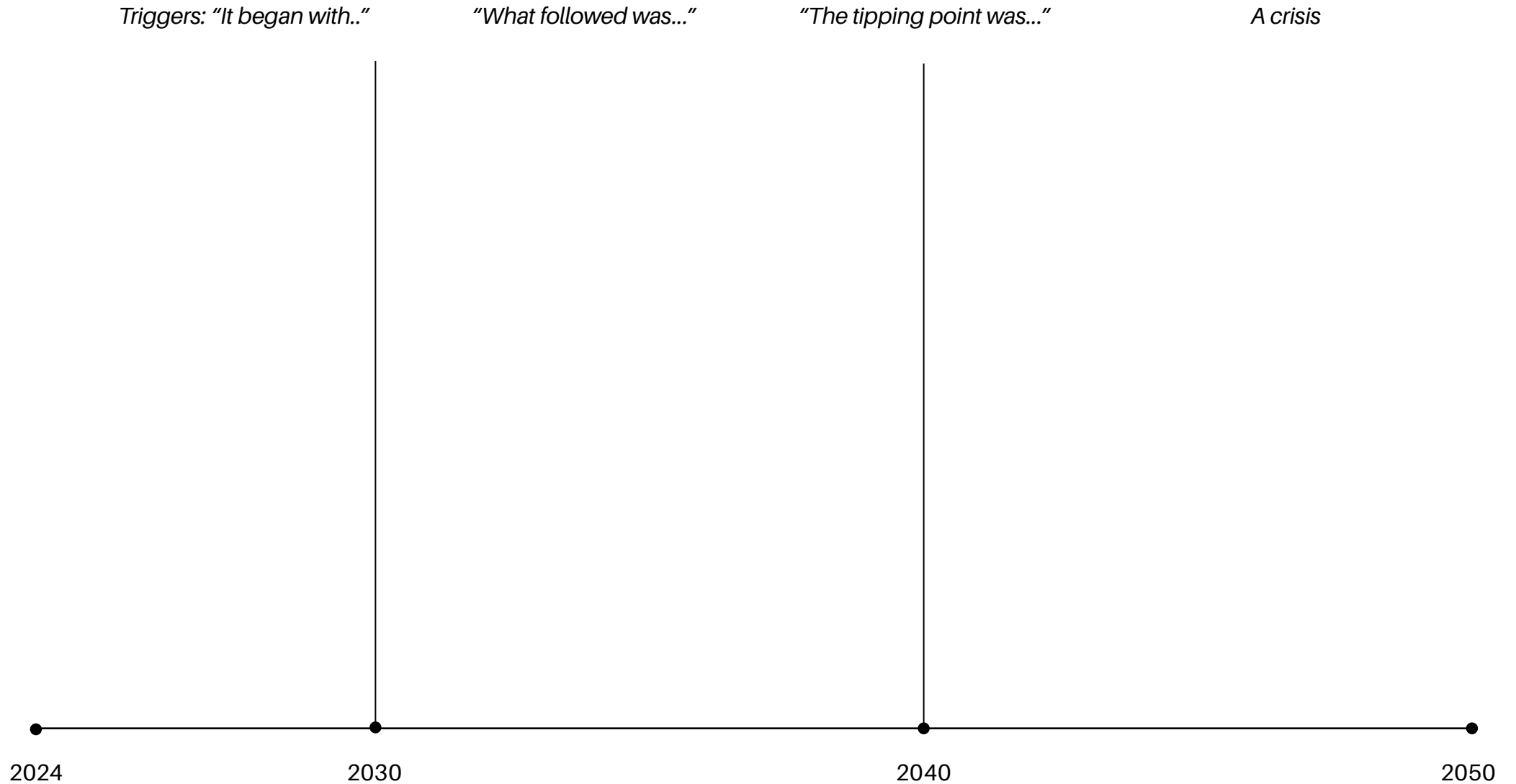
# APPENDIX 3:
# GENERIC FACTORS
# OF CHANGE
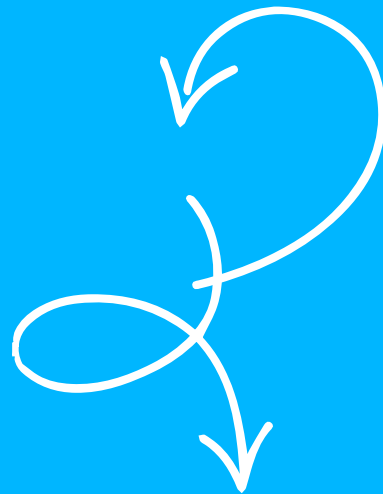
From: Plurality University Network, **"Scenarios and Narratives for the 21st Century"** ↗

## 1. Trends

### Factors of change/Trend

#### PLANETARY BOUNDARIES OVERSHOOT

Rise of average temperatures (est. +2.5°C in 2050), loss of biodiversity, overuse of sweet water… Several boundaries that are the condition for the biosphere's stability have been passed. Their consequences will be felt in 2040 regardless of our action, however our action determines how much worse they can get.

### Factors of change/Trend

#### JOBS POLARIZATION

Job markets become polarized between high-qualification, high-paid jobs and low-pay, low-security jobs, while the share of "intermediary" decreases. Digital technology and A.I. push the boundaries of automation and could lead to massive job losses and/or re-allocation. International competition puts pressure on wages and contributes to polarization and inequalities.

### Factors of change/Trend

#### AUTHORITARIANISM ON THE RISE

Coups, "illiberal" governments and attacks on the rule of law in old democracies, decline in trust towards democratic institutions, nationalism… For the last two decades, democracy in the world has declined and authoritarianism – in many different forms – gained.

### Factors of change/Trend

#### RISING INEQUALITIES

After decreasing during the XXth century, inequalities within countries are rising again. The richest get much richer, the poorest a little less poor, while middle-class income is stagnating or decreasing. Gender inequalities are also proving persistent. Climate change is expected to increase inequalities even more, both within and among countries.

*Factors of change/Trend*

### DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

World population should reach about 10 billion in 2100 and then plateau or decline. Population in the "West" and most of East Asia will age and decrease, while India will plateau around 2080 and Africa will keep rising.

Migrations will continue to rise, causing both cultural evolutions and tensions.

*Factors of change/Trend*

### TECHNOLOGICAL "HYPERCHOICE"

A situation of "hyper choice" created by the convergence and rapid progress of "info [digital, AI], nano [materials], bio, cogno [cognitive/behavioral sciences]"...with myriads of applications in all sectors. Hence, on one side, a kind of hubris, emphasizing the potential of technologies to "solve humankind's problems" as well as end humanity ("existential risks"); and on the other side, a deeper critique or "progress" and "techno-solutionism", advocating new, ex ante control on technological innovation.

*Factors of change/Trend*

### A FINANCIALIZED ECONOMY

Between 1980 and 2020, international trade has grown twice as fast as GDP, and financial transactions 9 times as fast. A mostly unregulated "financialization" orients listed corporations towards short-term profits, increases systemic risks, fragilizes national governments, and increases inequalities.

*Factors of change/Trend*

### AN ENERGY SWITCH?

Renewable energies (solar, wind, etc.) become cheaper than fossil fuel-based ones (in the current geopolitical context). Nuclear (fission) power continues meeting resistance and tries to evolve (small modular reactors). The road to hydrogen technologies, and even more to nuclear fusion, is still long.

From microgrids to smart grids, the management of more diverse energy systems is both a challenge and an opportunity.

## 2. Weak Signals

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

GENDER IN FLUX

Feminism, LGBTIQ+ pride, intersection with other "minority" movements... And backlash against "wokism" / "western decadence".

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

ALTERNATIVE EXCHANGE MECHANISMS

Crypto-currencies; search for alternatives to $ and € dominance; Local currencies; Informal economies; Sharing economy; Criminal economies...

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS

Protection of biodiversity; Attention to animal well-being; Veganism; Vegetarian and synthetic alternatives to meat and dairy; Biomimicry; Rewilding; Legal rights to natural entities...

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

TOWARDS A NEW HUMAN SPECIES?

Artificial reproduction; Gene selection & editing; Cloning; Human enhancement (cognitive, physical); Brain-computer interfaces; Body-machine hybridization...

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

## MAJOR REGIONAL CONFLICTS

Competition between old and new superpowers; Nationalisms and authoritarianisms; Unsolved territorial issues; Militarization of terrorist and criminal organizations;  Disputes over access to water and other scarce resources… And dwindling influence of institutionalized international bodies and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

## RE-LOCALIZATION

Push for re-industrialization in Western countries (sovereignty; jobs; ecology); New protectionism; Valorization of local communities in the face of climate events (and possibly higher costs of mobility); Rising xenophobia…

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*
TECH GOES OUT OF HAND?

Generative and "super A.I.s"; Neuroscience; Genetic engineering and synthetic biology; Geo-engineering… From unintended (sorcerer's apprentice) to intended (manipulation, warfare) effects.

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

## POST-TRUTH, POST-TRUST

Citizen journalism and whistle-blowing; Declining trust in institutions, media, science, etc.; Political polarization; Social media "filter bubbles"; Deliberate manipulation of cognitive biases; Deep fakes…

*Factors of change/Weak Signal*

## TECHNO-ETHICS

Synthetic offspring with engineered inheritable somatic cells;  Personal biosynthetizers with 3D organic and mineral printing for food and  personalized therapeutics; Progress towards Artificial General Intelligence… All come with their own, specialized ethics committees and charters. Are these real answers or smokescreens?

# APPENDIX 4:
# "ENERGIZER" ACTIVITIES

The following is a list of short activities to energize groups, support creativity, open the minds of participants, look at things from a different perspective. All of them have been tested successfully with young participants. Use them at the beginning of the day, or when the group comes back from lunch, or when you feel it needs a new shot of energy!

### 1. Opening hours

Participants are in small groups.

1st round assignment: "Imagine you have your own bar. What are its opening hours?" (they answer, for example, "Monday - Friday from 7 to 9 and weekends.."). 2nd round: "Describe the opening hours without using numbers" (e.g. "from sunrise to sunset on monday to friday, close when people are at work"...").

3rdd round: "Describe the opening hours without using days and parts of the day (eg. "On the day people rest, from sunset to sunrise").

As we add constraints, the participants have to search for more and more imaginative solutions.

### 2. 9 dots:

Connect all of the dots using four lines or fewer without lifting the pen.

This activity is one of the staple exercises that require creativity. The nine-dot problem literally requires us to think outside the box in order to solve it...

### 3. 30 circles:

Give each participant one of the 30 Circles worksheets and something to write with. Ask them to turn as many of the circles as possible into a recognizable object in 3 minutes. You can give the example of a sun or a smiling face, but give no other instructions.

This activity is designed to encourage creative confidence. It is a great activity to start a brainstorming session, or a session to solve a complex problem.
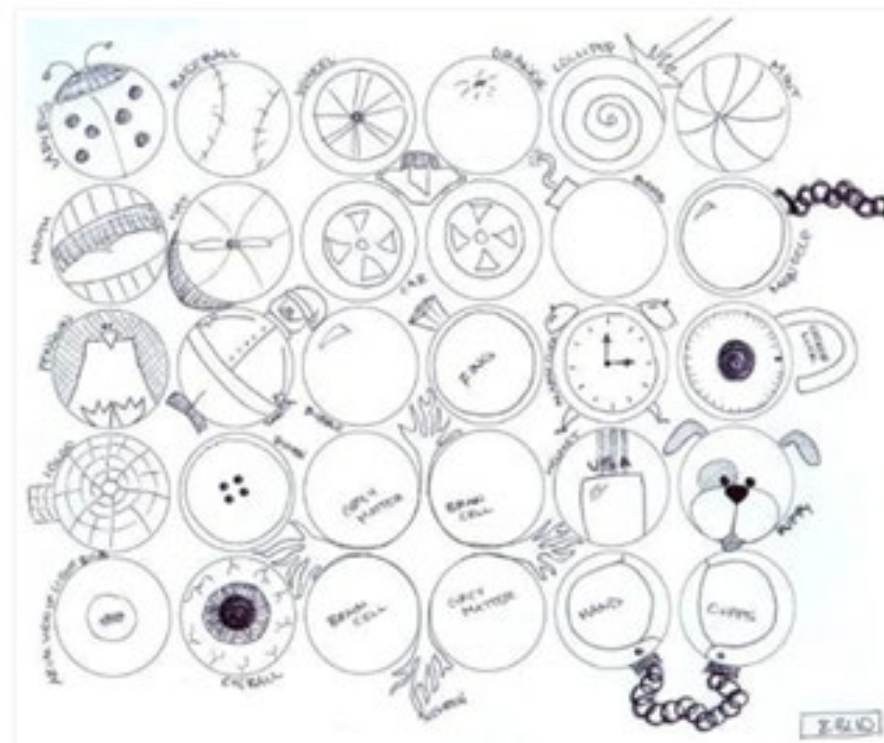
### 4.  Rope

The participants are in a circle. A long enough rope is thrown in the middle. One by one, in any order, the participants enter the circle and turn the rope into something else. Without words, with the help of acting, they will show what the rope evokes for them (e.g. jumping over it, a snake, a microphone to sing in, spaghetti noodles, a belt,...)

### 5.  Story cubes

A game using special dice, where your imagination has no limits. Roll the cubes, make a story!
**https://www.storycubes.com/en/** ↗

### 6.  What is this?

Participants are in smaller groups. Give them any interesting objects of daily use: a garlic press, a bottle opener, anything we find interesting. The task of the participants is to come up with as many real or non-real uses of this object as possible in the specified time.

### 7.  Imagination workout

Give your brain a workout and create a picture out of the lines. There are no rules.
**https://ase.dover-nj.org/ourpages/auto/2020/3/17/42537714/ImaginationWorkoutCreativityTestDrawingSubArtLessonPlanDoodleWorksheet.pdf** ↗

# APPENDIX 5:
# CASE STUDIES

# CASE STUDY #1: BRATISLAVA FUTURES LITERACY TRAINING (OCTOBER 15-16, 2022)

## Context

The training took place on December 21-22, 2022. The date suited the participants (university students had an exam period and therefore they did not go to school, high school students already had some days off or more free schedule in school). The date also suited trainers, so we decided to risk this date and try how it will be with participation.

This training was the second of three FL trainings organized in Slovakia. It took place in Bratislava. Since it was winter we had no outdoor activities. For the future, we would consider adding some outdoor activity, as two days in a meeting room with such a topic can easily get tiring for the participants.

15 participants between the ages of 17 and 24 took part in the training. The participants of the training were mostly from the network of trendspotters (young people who work with YW on trend research). Some of the participants had taken part in the first Futures Literacy training, which took place in June 2022, and were therefore already familiar with the topic. Some hadn't, and this difference had to be taken into accounts when preparing the methodology.

## Objectives

The aim of this activity is to ensure that young Trendspotters in Brussels and Slovakia become "future literate". That means they have moved their ability to think about the future from the unconscious to the conscious state, and are able: to use collective intelligence and structured imagination to discuss futures;. to pPerceive complexity and uncertainty more as resources than as problems; and t. They will be able to imagine a different future, as well as some steps that will lead them to them.

Action learning is actually learning by doing. Practice gives the learner an opportunity to test theory in the real world. Participants develop skills through involvement in the problem. The action learning method enables participants to identify problems, propose a possible solution, test this solution in a real situation and evaluate the consequences. This method transforms participants from recipients of information into problem solvers. Action learning uses multiple learning principles (e.g. motivation, active participation, strengthening of the association, prioritization tasks). The workshops (trainings) will focus on:

1. Understanding and questioning our implicit assumptions about the future.
2. Discovering different ways of "using the future" and understanding the concept of "drivers of change" in imagining different futures.
3. Improving the ability to collectively use structured imagination to imagine different futures and their backcast to the present.
4. Understanding of participatory approaches to create experiential futures (stories about the future).

## Preparation

The preparation of methodology took place on several levels.

1. Reflection of previous training and incorporation of comments and work with methodology
2. Communication of lecturers and methodologists from the YW organization
3. Communication at the international level with project partners (set up goals, expectations, necessary outputs for the project, what must be observed, what not to forget in general, what we need for the project and our further performances in the project)
4. Meeting of the trainers, proposal and preparation of the first draft by them
5. Meeting of the YW methodological team, commenting on the methodology and implementation of comments by trainers
6. Communication with partners and incorporating comments on the methodology from them
7. Finalization of the methodology by trainers and the YW methodological team

## Program

We worked for two days. The program is attached below.

| Day one | | Day two | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8:30 – 10:00 | arrival and accommodation | 8:30 – 9:00 | Breakfast |
| 10:00 – 11:00 | Introduction | 9:00 – 9:30 | Morning introduction |
| 11:00 – 13:00 | "Tuning in", Trend and future statements, Writing claims | 9:30 – 12:45 | Agents of change |
| 13:00 – 14:30 | Lunch | 12:45 – 14:00 | Lunch |
| 14:30 – 16:00 | Working session | 14:00 – 15:00 | Me in the story of a change |
| 16:00 – 16:30 | Break | 15:00 – 15:30 | Break |
| 16:30 – 19:00 | Clustering and voting, Probable and desirable future, Robust future | 15:30 - 16:30 | Letter to myself |
| 19:00 – 20:00 | Dinner | 16:30 - 17:00 | Evaluation |

*Breaks during the working sessions were given based on the needs of the participants and the group

The detailed methodology, program, comments, material can be accessed **here** ↗.

On the first day the first hour, from 10:00 to 11:00 AM, was dedicated to introductions. Participants were introduced to the structure of the training program, the trainers outlined the rules, ensuring everyone understood and accepted them. Participants shared their names and backgrounds and we follow with energizers and icebreakers. This initial interaction set the stage for a dynamic group environment, one that was both welcoming and engaging, laying the groundwork for a positive training atmosphere.

By 11:00 AM participants presented their homework, diving into a trend named "Good, Bad, and Debate." Small groups were formed, each diving into discussions, sharing their findings and learning from one another. This collaborative effort not only reinforced their understanding but also prepared them to go deeper into the day's topics. In the activity, we used the "world café" method.

### Homework

Before the training itself, the participants were divided into groups of 4 people, in which they find out from the elderly:
- How did they discuss?
- How did they express their disapproval/disagreement?
- How did they form your opinion on things?
- Who were the opinion makers (any influencers) of their time?
- What were the taboo topics that were not opened?
- What were the values they followed?

At 11:45 AM, participants continue with a session on "Trend and Future Statements." Here, participants explored a particular trend, discussing its relevance and impact on their lives. They were encouraged to look forward, to speculate on the trajectory of this trend, and to formulate statements about its future direction. The room buzzed with creative ideas as everyone contributed their perspectives.

The final session before lunch, from 12:40 to 1:00 PM, focused on writing claims. Participants now had the chance to connect their understanding of past and present trends to future possibilities. They wrote down statements, drawing from their discussions, to describe the potential consequences of these trends. This exercise not only solidified their understanding but also empowered them to think critically about the future.

The trainers had spent the break by creating clusters from the morning's statements, and now it was time to present these clusters to the group. The participants were introduced to the concept of clustering, learning how to group similar ideas together and choose the most important ones based on their newfound knowledge.

Everyone gathered around, clustering their thoughts collectively. This collaborative effort continued by a voting session where participants identified and prioritized the statements they seemed the most significant.

With the statements selected, the group transitioned into the "Probable and Desirable Future" exercise. This activity began by dividing the participants into two parallel groups.

In the "Desirable Futures" group, a technique involving relaxation and guided visualization was used. Participants were gently instructed to sit comfortably, close their eyes, and listen to the facilitator's voice. Through a slow countdown, they were transported to Slovakia in the year 2048. Meanwhile, the "Probable Futures" group worked on crafting scenarios for a book set in 2040, envisioning the likely realities, habits, and actions of people in that future world. Each group then presented their findings to the other, ensuring that all participants knew both perspectives despite only participating in one process.

Participants move to ranking and selecting statements about the future. Participants debated and voted on the scenarios they considered both likely to happen and desirable, identifying what they called a "Robust Future." Activity as described in methodology from PU, page 20 was used.

In the final activity, the participants came together to bring their vision of a robust future to life through creative picture. They painted their collective vision on a large piece of paper, enjoying the process of artistic expression. Those who preferred to observe and discuss were welcome to do so, this artwork not only served as a representation of their shared vision but also provided a space for discussions.



On the second day, we started with "The future of social debate in Slovakia in 2048, which is worth fighting for"

In the plenary, we recalled the first day of training, the Robust future we had chosen and together we looked at our artistic creation from the previous night. Surprisingly, despite the fact that the work was not visually at a high level, the thought processes behind the creation were very interesting and the participants brought interesting ideas to the debate.

We continued with group work. The participants were assigned to a group of 4 people, in which they then spent the whole morning till lunch. In the first part, the group compared the present with our robust future, concretely naming what was added, what disappeared, what changed and what remained the same.

In the second part, they named the process, how the society got to the robust future, what started the change and what was the turning point. The third part, the fun part, was free time for the participants with a creative moment, where the participants had to capture the drawn story from the present to the Robust future using any method and present it. All of them chose video.

After lunch, we moved to a more individual level. First, the participants drew their avatar with some basic information about themselves in the future, then we used the timeline and placed our avatars on it, answering questions about whether we contributed to the fulfillment of the robust future and how satisfied we feel in it.

In the last part participants worked independently and summarized in written form the findings from the morning (what happens in the future, how we got there, where I see myself in the future) and how they feel about it. Some wrote entire pages, some made shorter notes. We shared in two smaller groups. At the end we wrote a short message - encouragement to ourselves for the future.

Training finished by evaluation.

### Feedback from participants

At the end of the training, we reflected and evaluated. There were many superlatives about Futures Literacy as a topic. Three people said that during the training they realized what they wanted to do in life. That was a big wow. Training was described as empowering, and how interesting and important it is to think about and discuss such complex topics. Our topic seemed difficult and confusing. Participants would generally appreciate some factual input from us or from invited guests (for example, according to the data, how will parts of society look like in the future according to experts) or find out what to do with the new findings.

We met some of the participants 4 months later during the last, third FL training. The difference between the participants was visible, but even those who did not attend the previous trainings were able to understand and tune in quickly and get into the topic. The participants who experienced the previous training reacted more comprehensively, they looked at things more holistically.

## Do's and don't

Do's   · Work with homework, the participants connected be-
         fore the training, jump in to the topic before, it saves
         time on training
       · Assignments must be well thought out and explicitly
         communicated
       · Work with a simpler main topic - we had a very abstract
         one (the future of social discussion), and within it they
         chose another abstract subtopic (decline of IQ), which
         also indicated a negative trend
       · Pay attention to the division of groups, it must be di-
         vided deliberately name by name, because too many
         deep people in one group will significantly reduce the
         group's result
       · Be sure that participants understand everything
       · Give more time for playful and lively moments, the crea-
         tive part was evaluated as a highlight by the participants

Dont's   Do not overwhelm participants, topic is not easy, take
         enough time for every activity

## Conclusion and challenges

We drew three very positive conclusions from the training:
· Giving participants an exercise to work on before the training started
  worked surprisingly well. Not only it prepared the participants for the
  topic, it also connected well the participants with each other which
  led to significant improvement of the group dynamic from the begin-
  ning, it also saved us time on the training itself.

· Another thing we tested and turned out perfect was the creative
  space in the exercise"Agents of change". Originally we did not intend
  to give participants room for performing their outcomes in a creative
  way, but since the previous exercises were mentally draining and were
  slowing down the group dynamics, we decided to take this way. Gi-
  ving participants room to express their ideas differently than just talking
  or writing worked perfectly. participants enjoyed themselves and came
  with outcomes much more thought through then we ever expected.

· Third strongly positive element from this training was working from
  an existing trend. The topic debated during this training came from
  mapped current trend. For homework, participants mapped the his-
  tory of this trend and on the first day of training we dedicated a whole
  block to the present the current trend. This differed from previous
  training but was interesting and functioning. Participants were able
  to add their thoughts and examples when debating how the trend
  looks at the present moment, which drew participants nicely in the
  conversations and made them more involved and motivated for the
  following parts.

On the other hand, what turned out to be rather challenging was the
chosen topic. Talking for two days about the future of Social Discussion
in Slovakia 2048 was from beginning abstract to work with, and at each
phase became even more difficult to grasp. With few modifications from
the original plan we handled the topic well, but for the future would re-
commend to go with a more straightforward theme.

This training definitely confirmed Future Literacy is being helpful and
useful competency to strengthen. Participants dipped their fingers
into topics they had never discussed before; they had to verbalize their
thoughts and try to understand perspectives of others; had to zoom in
and out from different angles and had to follow on abstract thoughts,
and they also had to work with different information and approach them
critically. All of those are extremely helpful opportunities for a youth to
experience, as they broaden their world view, strengthen their resilience,
boost their critical thinking and allow their creativity to take a lead.

# CASE STUDY #2: BRUSSELS FUTURES LITERACY TRAINING (OCTOBER 15-16, 2022)

## Context

From October 15 to October 16, in Brussels, BrusselAVenir organised a workshop for 20 Brusselèirs between 20 and 30 years old, as part of the "Future is Now" project, an initiative supported by Erasmus Plus. It was co-facilitated by Plurality University. The event took place in Zinnema, a cultural house for amateur arts, where BrusselAVenir was artist in residence during the whole year. The group was diverse in languages, nationalities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One third of the group already knew BrusselAVenir and had an idea about what to expect.

## Objectives

The goal of the training was to introduce the participants to futures thinking, and experiment with ways to do this in a fun way. The theme was young people and relationships in Brussels in 2035, and the idea was to develop a vision around that theme. We also aimed to develop the base for a futures fiction we would make in a next workshop, and engage the participants in taking up a role in the longer process of making a futures fiction.

## Preparation

Since we were looking for participants that would be interested in co-creating a futures fiction with us, we planned more arts-based methods. Most of the preparation was done by BrusselAVenir. Plurality University advised on how to bring in the topic of futures of relationships and technology, without pushing the exercise too much into a certain direction. We prepared different exercises, and made a provisional planning, but agreed to let the workshop flow, and decide in the moment what to do. We knew beforehand where to buy lunch, but always asked the food preferences during the workshop. We bought snacks and drinks.

We planned the design of the room (where to hang the program, where to do the worldbuilding exercise), we prepared the meditation, the scenario we started from, a background music playlist, and we gathered some stationery.

## Programme

We didn't need a lot of material for the workshop. Paper, markers, tape and markers to write on the mirror. We share the timetable, but in reality, things went a bit different.

| TIME | SATURDAY 15 OCTOBER | TIME | SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ACTIVITY | | ACTIVITY |
| 9:30 - 10:00 | Arrival, sign documents | 9:30 - 10:00 | Arrival |
| 10:00 - 11:00 | Futures Fragments on cities in 2035 | 10:00 - 10:30 | link the enactments of different groups into one narrative |
| 11:00 - 11:30 | Polak game | 10:30 - 11:30 | Plenary discussion to listen to links made by different groups |
| 11:30 - 11:45 | Break | 11:30 - 11:45 | Break |
| 11:45 - 12:15 | Project presentations | 11:45 - 12:15 | Groups working on further building the content on the scenes |
| 12:15 - 13:00 | Setting 2035 | 12:15 - 13:15 | Improvising the scenes - focussing on characters |
| 13:00 - 13:45 | Lunch | 13:15 - 14:15 | Lunch |
| 13:45 - 15:00 | Worldbuilding | 14:15 - 14:45 | Synopsis writing |
| 15:00 - 15:15 | Meditation on scenes | 14:45 - 15:00 | Characters, artefacts, context |
| 15:15 - 15:45 | Writing / Drawing the scenes | 15:00 - 15:15 | Meditation on scenes |
| 15:45 - 16:15 | Sharing of scenes / reflections | 17:00 - 17:30 | Polak game |
| 16:15 - 16:45 | Interweave and enact scenes | 17:30-18:00 | Closing and next steps |
| 16:45 - 17:45 | Enacting the interweaved scenes in small groups | | |
| 17:45 - 18:00 | Wrap-up / reflection round / practicalities for the next day | | |

Day 1, 10AM-1PM: We started with getting to know each other by letting everyone in the group share the Future Fragments they had brought [FL Toolbox #1.1]. This exercise allows the facilitators to grasp to which extent participants are familiar with futures or futures fiction. We also did the Polak Game to trigger the conversation on futures [FL Toolbox #1.2]. We presented both of our organisations, and how we relate to futures. We explained the project and our plan to make a futures fiction. We shared a futures scenario that we had prepared, as a conversation starter on futures of relationships and technology in Brussels in 2035.

1PM-3PM: After lunch, we continued the group conversation on relationships in 2035. Collectively we tried to reformulate the scenario we wanted to work on. We didn't fully rewrite the **scenario** the way the facilitators had done as a preparation for the workshop , but we reformulated the title of the scenario we wanted to work around.

3PM-6PM: After a little break, we split the group up in 7 small groups. We unveiled the **worldbuilding** columns that we had prepared on the mirror, and that was covered under curtains. For the worldbuilding exercise [FL Toolbox #3.2], the seven groups each discussed two of the seven worldbuilding domains (political, economic, philosophical, environmental, scientific/technical, artistic, social) of Brussels in 2035 in our scenario 'Brussels in 2035, where alternatives for social relations are being invented'. Ideas were put on post-its, or directly written on the worldbuilding wall, and this is how the scenario got more detail and little stories on people and institutions. We ended in a circle, shared what impacted us the most during the day, and agreed on what would happen the next day.

Day 2, 10AM-1PM: In the morning we sensed a hangover vibe in the room. Hosting workshops for young people during a weekend, where they go 'home' at night, has an impact on the focus in the room. We asked one of the participants who is a dancer to lead a movement/meditation exercise. The end of the exercise smoothly went over in a **mental time travel** exercise [FL Toolbox #3.2] to Brussels in 2035. Based on the discussions of the previous day, we asked them to imagine a scene in Brussels in 2035, and then detail it. Afterwards we asked them to draw it and explain their drawing and vision to the rest of the group. The visions were very different, some very spacy, some very grounded.

3PM-6PM: In the afternoon, we first discussed how the different scenes could be interwoven. We put them together in little groups, to further develop the different scenes. Then we asked to **role-play characters from the futures** within the scenes, or details from the scene . We did an individual writing session in which we wrote little creative futures **scenarios.** The worldbuilding wall was still there, and they could go there to get more inspiration. Then we shared our stories, and did another attempt to weave things together. We ended with a sharing circle, in which we reflected on our relationship with the future.
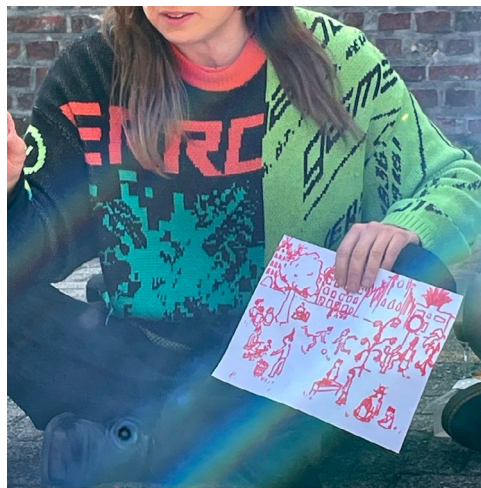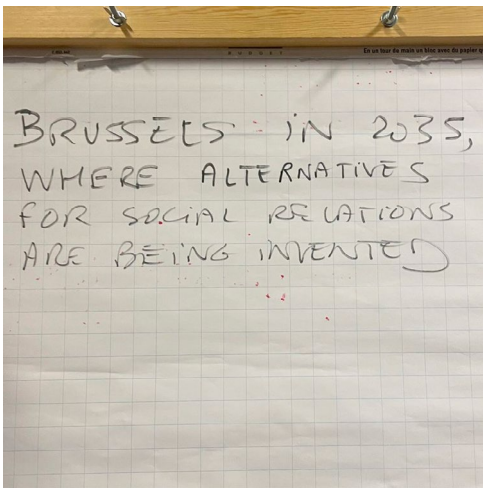
## Feedback from participants

We gathered with some of the participants again, one month after the event, and did a debrief. They were generally positive about the experience. Some of the participants shared that they struggled with the initial intention to work around optimist futures scenarios. Others expressed confusion about creating freely while working around a serious topic like futures. Many expressed gratitude for challenging their thinking in general, and their thinking about the future and the city they live in more specifically. Some mentioned it made them more hopeful.

### Do's and don't

Do's:
- Physical exercises to get into the body are very effective to bring focus and let creative juices flow.
- Meditating on visions of the future is a fun activity and leads to fresh insights.
- Balancing out group activities with individual processes has a positive impact on the energy in the room
- See your prepared program as a toolbox, be agile with the planning and adapt to what the group needs
- The balance between directiveness and leaving space for input from the group is especially challenging in a group with artistic profiles.
- Telling the participants that the workshop is part of a bigger project of creating futures fiction, enthuses them. Many of them would not enroll for a futures literacy training, but they were very eager to contribute to a process of creating futures fiction on the city of Brussels.
- With a challenging group of 20 people, it was a blessing to be with 4 experienced facilitators, who could take turns.
- Doing a training in a theatre black box gives it a creative vibe.
- Make it a collective happening. If there are ideas from participants to facilitate an exercise, let them.

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Don'ts:
- Try to not make exceptions for people that leave early or arrive late, and look for a context that engages people to be there from beginning to end of the workshop
- Sometimes democratic decision making takes too long, and participants expect you to take the lead, even if it is about the core of the exercise and you want them all to agree on it.
- Don't focus too much on the exact right formulation of the title of the scenario. It takes time to collectively do that, and can lower the energy level when it lasts too long

## Conclusion

The participants of the workshop were very critical and required us to be very attentive and agile as facilitators. They were also very enthusiastic though, and both facilitators and participants enjoyed the process and were surprised with the outcomes. In the group there were more mature and more artistic profiles than we usually have, and it was interesting to see how excited they were about the future as a space for imagination, and a collective process to come to interesting results. It was beautiful to experience how they got inspired by each other throughout the process and how we managed to come with a group of very opinionated people to a common vision.

While futures literacy can sound like a boring endeavour, we experienced firsthand that it can be a practice that is fun. It has the potential to enthuse young people about futures, the city and society they live in, and provoke them to listen to opposing opinions.

# CASE STUDY #3: INTERNATIONAL FUTURES LITERACY TRAINING (PARIS, OCTOBER 13-15, 2024)

## Context

From October 13 to October 15, in Paris, Plurality University was pleased to welcome 20 young participants (18-24 years old) from Belgium and Slovakia as part of the "Future is Now" project, an initiative supported by Erasmus Plus.

Over the course of three days, we had the opportunity to host youth with diverse backgrounds and realities, guiding them in experimenting with futures and collaboratively creating a piece of art. The aim was to produce something the participants would take pride in and would be eager to showcase back in their respective homes.

## Objectives

The overall objective of this workshop differed from the workshops conducted in either Brussels or Bratislava, as both groups of participants were entering unknown territory (Paris, France). For many of the participants, it was their first time here. Therefore, the focus became broader and multiple such as ensuring that participants experienced intercultural interactions and meaningful exchanges; making sure they understood the territory in which they were situated,; and experimenting with Futures Literacy to create an artistic format: Video, Film, Podcast.

The goal assigned to the participants was to work on the future of Paris in 2050 (which is where they were visiting) and, more specifically, the future of the building in which we were located in 2050 (the formus Sorbonne Nouvelle university campus, which is currently used as an independent community center, called *Césure*, where artists and non-profits share the space). Three artists we selected to guide as many groups, each composed of seven young participants with no specific artistic background, in creating a common and collective art piece related to the explored subject.

## Preparation

Between facilitators, we developed an approach during several two-hour preparation periods, endeavouring to ensure the methodology was adapted to the context, time, and participants involved in the workshop. The preparation work also made sure to combine the knowledge and experience of our three organizations.

As financial support for these workshops is always a little sparse, as organizing nonprofits, we became responsible of identifying our allies and people we would be able to work with for a small amounts or exchange in services: namely reaching out to people from our respective teams to organize the logistics, looking in to use the spaces we had a our disposal to conduct the workshops as well as share the meals in, identifying solidary accommodation, and identifying colleagues and collaborators within the space we would be working from to act as guests in our methodology.

## Program

For this three-day workshop, we required a variety of materials since we were working with three different mediums. Fortunately, the artists were responsible for bringing their own materials (given the specificity of video, publication (fanzine), and podcast formats), leaving us responsible for the ideation materials. This included post-it boards, post-its, pens and pencils, colored crayons, scissors, and glue.

Below is a brief timetable outlining the activities for the first day.

Day 1, 10AM-12PM: The day began with an introduction to the objectives and an overview of how the three days would unfold, followed by various ice-breaking activities. Given that we were working with youth from two different countries, aged between 17-24, these activities also helped us understand the individuals within the group and their dynamics. One particularly useful activity for introducing the topic was the Polak game [FL Training Material #1.1].

Before diving into our world-building exercise, we provided participants with a guidebook containing the schedule and methodology for the three days. We also divided the groups, mixing participants from Slovakia and Brussels based on the artistic medium they preferred to work with.

### CHARACTERS

Think of someone who has a relationship with this building in 2050 and describe him or her on this card. You can use the word cloud as inspiration to think outside the box! The questions are there to help you, and you can modify or add anything you like: other characteristics, a drawing of your face or silhouette... Everything is open!

Name: ..............................................
Gender: ..............................................
Age: ..............................................
Principal activity: ..............................................
Relation to
this space: ..............................................
..............................................

Were you born in the same place as your parents? Where do you live, in the country, in the city? Did you grow up where you live now? Who do you live with? What makes you special? Tell us about something unique about you. How do people describe you? What's important to you? Do you have anything you particularly like? Hobbies, passions? A belief you hold dear?

*Old augmented human artist Activist Dyslexia influencer robot Female 13 years old Child Rwandan blue eyes Tree shy Teenager non-binary Refugee Apprentice undocumented disabled*

One page from the participants' guidebook

The remainder of the morning was dedicated to subgroup discussions on the "Traces of the future" [FL Training Material #1.3] that we had asked participants to prepare.

12PM - 2PM: After lunch, we proceeded to build our scenario. Each group had the same starting scenario about the city (and about the space), but different ruptures (significant changes that would make the world radically different in the future, such as climate, demography, technology, geopolitics etc). We encouraged participants to brainstorm: what would happen if this scenario met this rupture?

This exercise was meant to start framing the topic in a larger way: how does the world function in 2050, and more specifically, how does Paris function in 2050? We zoomed into the city in a more personal way, in a world building exercise helped by the following questions: What do people eat ? Where are people going ? How are they getting there ? Where do people live ? What can we see from our windows? What do you hear ? What is written in the newspaper? And created a map of all of their different answers.

For the second half of the afternoon, to anchor participants in the building's space, they were sent out to meet with characters from the futures (a chalkboard, an AI, The Mayor, a Scientist, a Migrant) – who were allies, artists, and nonprofit organizations from Césure that had agreed to play the game – walk through the hallways, knock on their doors, and interact with them. The groups came back with as many ideas as confusing thoughts from these encounters.

At the end of the day, each group had to present the story they had developed: the context of the world in 2050, the situation of Paris in this context, and what this space (currently known as Cesure) was known for in 2050: how it had changed, important milestones throughout time that shaped its role, information that they heard from some of the characters, and so on.

In order to share with the other groups, it became useful to create a linear narrative, which is why we chose a timeline. It was in our opinion very important to allocate time to the preparation as it helped the group make sense of all the ideas that were collected during the day, in deciding to include some elements and naturally putting aside others. It was a way of collectively making sense of the various puzzle pieces of the story that was being built.

As day 2 and 3 were our creative production days with the artists, it is complicated to retrace the methodology used. The one thing we made sure to repeat on day 2 and 3 are the energizers and ice-breakers every morning, making sure that everybody would land together in the space and also a discussion time to tell the story of the world they would have to translate creatively.



Worldbuilding in progress

## Feedback from participants

At the end of every day, we would make sure to allow enough time (at least 30 minutes to 1 hour) for a feedback session in order to ask participants how the day had been, the challenges they met, what they had discovered in relation to futures, etc. At the end of the third day and before the showcase of the production produced, we went through the closing Polak Game, in order to understand how the participant's point of view and relation to the future had changed post-workshop.

We had also prepared a series of questions and allowed the participants some individual time to fill in the answers at the end of the day, before presenting them to the group. Lastly, a month later, we sent the participants a survey in order to find out more about how they had lived the event, the status of their relationship to the future and if the workshop had changed anything in the way they viewed the world or take action in it. Although the general outcome was that the experience was a very positive one, some answers varied quite significantly. The learning points varied between co-creating with others, connecting the dots via futures literacy, communicating, as well as learning a new artistic language or medium. The main issue was the lack of time, including that of free time to take advantage of the city. As for how the workshop changed their view of the future, answers ranged from anxiety (which didn't prevent the participants to underline the importance of projecting themselves) to empowerment (individual or collective), to a more conscious engagement with the present.

## Do's and don't

### Do's:
· Spend time collectively developing methodologies, ensuring all facilitators are aligned.
· Develop a methodology that considers the space visited by participants, avoiding feelings of displacement for attendees from various parts of the world.
· Identify allies present in the space to engage in the methodology.
· Utilize the future as a common ground to build connections between different cultures.
· Collaborate with artists experienced in working with diverse audiences to structure creative workshops, easing the facilitation process and creating content participants take pride in.

### Don'ts:
· Avoid overloading the working days with excessive activities.
· Limit individual moments; continuous group work for three days can be exhausting.
· Allocate additional time for participants to explore the city they are visiting.
· Reflect chronologically on what worked well and what needed extra attention, considering aspects such as structure, information, adaptability, etc.

## In conclusion

As a team, we generally feel very proud of what we were able to accomplish during the workshop, especially with the limited resources we had at our disposal. Being passionate about the work we were doing helped us develop a meaningful methodology, as every person in the group was eager and invested in the process.

We would definitely recommend using futures workshops with youth, as it is a productive way to cultivate new perspectives about the world they are part of. It helps them develop and expand their thoughts and understand how to position themselves in the world. I believe it is also essential for these types of workshops to remain attentive and flexible to the different needs and constraints expressed by the group, while still adhering to a solid methodology. We would also recommend looking into a creative vehicle as it not only acts as a motivational tool to attract participants, it is a great way to conceptualize, format and make tangible ideas.

Futures literacy is a collective endeavor, but it should also be approached with a spirit of exploration and enjoyment.