# INTRODUCTION

*Imagine that you consume the information of this document in the year 2050. How will it enter you? Which devices are used for the transaction? What will your posture be while the information comes to you? How long will it take to get through the whole document? How will you hydrate yourself when you get thirsty while absorbing the information? How will you nurture yourself when you get hungry? Where will you be? Who will be around? How does your environment look like? What are the colours and textures you are surrounded with? Do you smell anything? How do you feel about this way of taking in information? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?*

The future can be a mysterious and intangible concept, but it can also be a space for imagination and empowerment. Better understanding the role of the future in what you see and do, can enhance our ability to navigate change. Unesco called it Futures Literacy: an evolving set of skills and experiences, mostly learned in collective action, that everyone can and should acquire.

Futures literacy is important for society as a whole, however within this project, we worked with humans in the age group of 13 to 30 years old.

We experienced firsthand how futures literacy equips young people with the skills, mindset, and agency to shape their own futures, and contribute to positive change for themselves and society. You become futures literate through collective intelligence processes in which participants learn together, come to understand their respective points of views, reconnect with the deep sources in their history, culture and life that shape their hopes and fears...

*If you want to read more about Futures Literacy, please check our publication '*<u>What is futures literacy and why is it important for young people?</u>*'.*

While the importance of Futures Literacy is more and more acknowledged, little of these kinds of practices cater to young people. Three organisations in different contexts – the Plurality University Network (France), BrusselAVenir (Belgium) and Youthwatch (Slovakia) – merged their respective expertises in order to develop learning activities intended to fill this gap. The European Union's Erasmus + grant programme supported the project.

*If you want to discover (and possibly use) the many methods we experimented with, download the '[Futures Literacy Toolkit](#)'.*

One of the approaches we experimented with, was to collectively create pieces of futures fiction. Creative images of alternative futures open up new possibilities, bring people together around new perspectives, and challenge dominant narratives about the future – especially when created by voices that we usually don't hear. They are useful tools for transformation, they trigger imagination and conversation, and they're also fun - which we believe is an important part of learning many things.

These activities, involving close to 200 teenagers and young adults from Slovakia and Belgium, also opened a window into how this generation thinks about its, and our future.

Here, we share some of the outcomes of the Futures Is Now project: what the young participants created and what that leads us to understand about their hopes, aspirations and worries; and also what we, the project organisers, learned from the whole process.

Please, take your exo-seat and fasten your safety shell.

Some serious time travel awaits you.

# PART 1: EIGHT STORIES FROM THE FUTURE

Here you will discover eight worlds, eight stories imagined by the participants of as many training sessions in Brussels, Paris and Poprad.

Click and discover

Brussels (Belgium)

The 20:40 Slessurb Show
(video)

TrackBX2020
(music)

File 2453-XDS, Hijrat Center
Compilation
(zine)

Samuel's Journey
(collage)

Paris (France)

Poprad (Slovakia)

Anais Healing Herself and the
Planet
(collage)

The Five Chosen
(collage)

Munity Is the Place, Mutiny Is the
Radio
(podcast)

How C75XYZ Came to Be
(video)
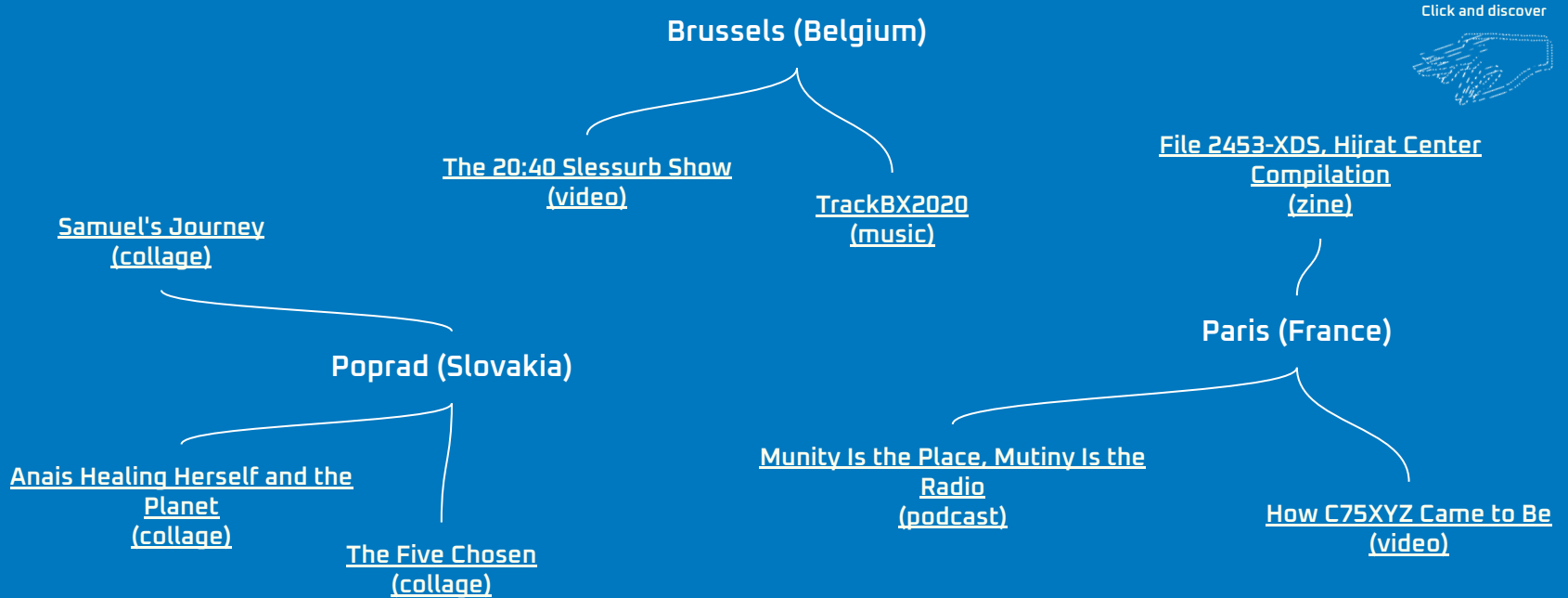
# 20:40 Slessurb Show



**Origin: Brussels. Media: Video.**

Link to the video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APS_tj-x73U

## How Brussels Became Slessurb

Slessurb, Brussels upside down, is a possible futures scenario of Brussels, resulting from overpowering technology and little control in the hands of people. Social isolation, dysfunctionality and apathy are the characteristics that describe the city and its inhabitants. Dependence on and addiction to digital tools have made Slessurbians in the analogue world socially and physically... let's say rather inept.

Slessurbians use whatever digital interface is available to be social. Fluid relationships have become the norm, and by combining the best of physical and digital worlds, new experiences are created. AI, augmented reality, wearables, and digital environments have transformed the way people meet, interact, love, and consume.

The overuse of technology has started deforming human bodies. There are people with one big finger or "butterfly hands" due to too much scrolling. Some people are able to speak only in motivational speech, while others always have a smiling face as if they are posing for a camera. Many can only see at a short distance, can not make eye contact and some almost cannot speak as they are more comfortable texting or gaming. Short attention span is the norm and you see frozen humans on streets when their GPS freezes.

Robots in various sizes and shapes are everywhere. There is no part of the city where you don't see screens. Due to a shortage of resources, Slessurbians have created organic computers and robots that can reproduce. These machines fill in the need for connection for many and bring Slessurbians real joy. Work is for machines, life is for humans. But without technological support, humans can't connect to each other anymore.
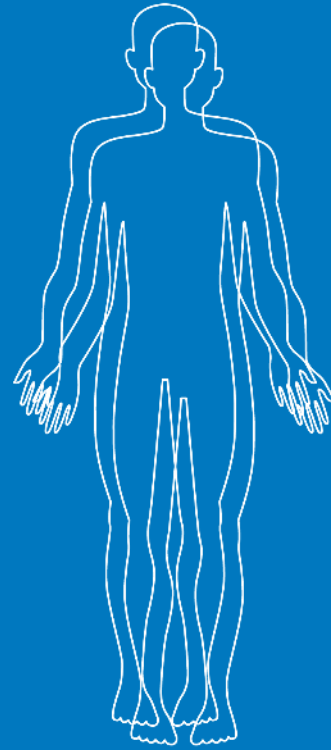
## The Slessurb Show

It's July 2040 when a TV-like show called "20:40 Slessurb Show" hacks all devices and broadcasts itself throughout the city. The show features a series of events and objects that move beyond the current societal dysfunctionalities and seeks new ways to meet, socialize, and bond. The show's purpose is to make people connect, break down barriers, and create a healthier multispecies habitat.

Made by and for citizens of Slessurb, the content is crowdsourced via blockchain technology, expressing what the hacktivist Slessurbians are about. The eco-conscious show is a collage of short fragments, adapted to the viewers' attention span. The show is multilingual, and inclusive, embracing a diversity of relational and functional states. Viewers can interact during the show, so it creates possibilities to connect with each other.

The fragments are diverse, from a cooking show recreating underground communal dining at times when agrifood has been taken over by 3D printers industries, to an advertisement for the Reality Rehabilitator, a device that rescues those lost in the metaverse and brings them back to reality. And let's not forget the dating show, reviving spontaneity in a world of algorithm-based matchmaking …

**Participants:** Mattia Petullà, Andrés Silva, Ilya Pringot, Lilia Raikhline, Annagrazia Graduato, Khushboo Balwani, Ellen Anthoni, Chloé Luchs, Romane Solé, Jafar Hejazi, Younes L'Mourabiti, Lina Manousogiannaki, Gustave Muhozi, Amine Haddaji, Justine Cappelle, Nandewa Turay, Vinicio Lucas, Mamadou Diallo, Luiza Botner, Flavie Torsiello, Tibo Vandeborre, Amine Bouarfa, Gabriela Hofman.

**Methodology and facilitation:** Ellen Anthoni, Khushboo Balwani, Chloé Luchs.

**Scenography:** Jan Rymenants.

**Editing & Post-production:** Mattia Petullà.

**Jingle music:** Dantel – Alexandros Lykouras.

**Music credits:** Sound Synthesis – Margarida Albino.

**Graphic Design:** Andrés Silva.

**Venue & technical support:** Zinnema

**Habibi Habibi animation footages:** Everything videogame by artist David OReilly.

# Themes explored in this video encompass:

- **(H)ac(k)tivism:** opportunities and challenges of drawing attention and influencing the behavior of people addicted to digital media.
- **Eco-friendly crowdsourced media:** media production with recycled and biodegradable materials, sustainable energy sources, and in an horizontal, collective way.
- **Physical and social deformations:** consequences of spending a lot of time in virtual reality or with digital devices, e.g. butterfly hands, eyesight and focus issues, etc.
- **Intrusive technology:** abuses of power and/or crimes related to psychographic data trade, hacking dreams and brains, marketing manipulation.
- **Food printing versus natural food production:** food as a tool for human connection as well as connection to nature.
- **Mental health issues related to digital overconsumption:** addiction, solitude, anxiety about the real world, alienation of real life and natural environments.
- **Migration and integration:** knowledge and skills brought by migrants (human or non-human, from this or other planets).
- **Encounter-facilitating technology:** the impact of algorithm-based dating, matching similarity instead of compatibility; connection with far away or passed away family members.
- **Internet culture:** part of cultural heritage, e.g. a meme museum.

# TrackBX2030



**Origin: Brussels. Media: Music.**

Link to the track:
https://soundcloud.com/user-463612703-993589435/trackbx2035-maintenant

| | |
|---|---:|
| Maintenant | Now |
| Soleil... | Sun... |
| | |
| Dans le brouillard | In the fog |
| Y'a comme soleil | It's like sunshine |
| Ma lune j'ai vu son oeil | My moon I its his eye |
| Nos yeux à nous, Bruxelles | Our eyes, Brussels |
| Non je ne sais plus parler | No I don't know how to speak anymore |
| | |
| Mes sentiments | My feelings |
| Le coeur est bien | The heart is good |
| Moi dans Bruxelles | Me in Brussels |
| Oui, moi je suis toxique | Yes, I am toxic |
| | |
| Mes sentiments | My feelings |
| Le coeur est bien, oui | The heart is good, yes |
| La brume dans les yeux | The mist in the eyes |
| Oui, moi je suis toxique | Yes, I am toxic |
| ... | ... |

En 2035, la musique a évolué

Ouais, c'est plus comme avant

Tout le monde sur son smartphone

Addict aux réseaux

J'suis dans le turfu

Multiculture

Ou plusieurs cultures

Y'a d'la texture

Architecture

On a tourné la page

Ouais c'est plus comme avant

Le futur c'est maintenant

Y'a tout de suite le présent

J'étais déjà en avance

J'étais déjà dans les temps

Dans les temps

J'étais déjà dans les temps

J'étais déjà dans les temps

Déjà dans les temps

Déjà dans les temps

Déjà dans les temps

Déjà dans les temps

…
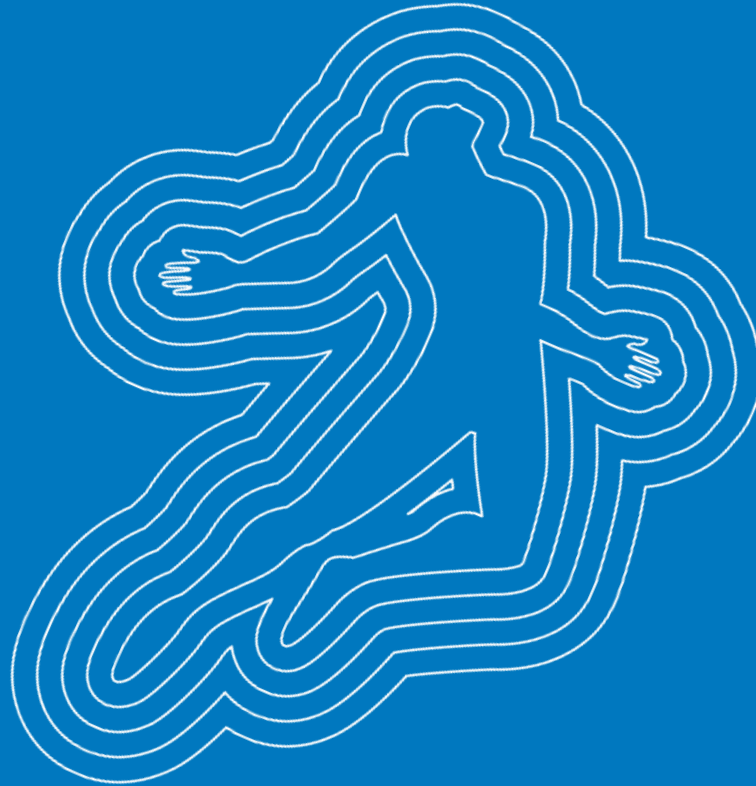
In 2035, music has evolved

Yeah, it's not like before

Everyone on their smartphone

Addict to networks

I'm in the future

Multiculture

Or several cultures

There is texture

Architecture

We turned the page

Yeah it's not like before

The future is now

The present is right now

I was already early

I was already on time

On time

I was already on time

I was already on time

Already on time

Already on time

Already on time

Already on time

…

# Brussels, Music Capital

2035. Brussels has always been a Mecca for music in Europe, and successive policies to democratize musical practices have helped to strengthen this status. Musical instruments are now everywhere in public spaces, similar to barbecues and sports equipment.

Faced with the omnipresence of technology and addiction to social networks, music has established itself as a means of healing and reconnection; on the one hand to the real world, on the other hand to other citizens. It has played a major role in changing our society.

One day, the people of Brussels began to meet on Sunday afternoons to play music, without any particular event pushing them to do so. This impromptu initiative very quickly became a tradition in the city. A century ago, they went to church; today, they go to the parks. While the practices change, the essence remains the same: connecting with each other, building bonds around a common practice. Some also come to these Sunday sessions to chat, organize barbecues, aperitifs and even dance. Instruments are also available for those who would like to try them out, even  without knowing how to play.

On weekends, in Brussels, stars of the metaverse come and jam in real life with ordinary mortals. Some musicians use electronic instruments while others focus on more traditional ones. We also often see people making instruments created from everyday items - their sound is unique! Singers transcend linguistic boundaries, languages and cultures blend together to form an auditory poetry specific to Brussels and its multiculturalism. Faced with this multilingualism, two camps are formed: those who prefer instant translation and those who prefer to be transported, choosing sound over understanding.

## Brussels, Music Capital

Sounds are most certainly the watchword of Brussels music in 2035. Styles have been surpassed, no single music can be confined to a particular genre. This can range from a mix of techno sounds and traditional music to experimenting with binaural beats. The idea of sharing has also adapted to technological considerations. More and more people are using data sharing services to promote themselves, to share ideas and music or even, sometimes, to try to seduce someone they like. The restrictions on internet use on weekends and the increase in musical practice have undeniably brought people closer together. Jamming helps to release energy, and nurtures an open-mindedness towards others. Many people find refuge and an outlet in musical practice. On top of the societal benefits, scientists have found a way to use the vibrations of the music to purify the air in Brussels.

## The Track

Technological and scientific progress has also improved the musical listening experience. 'Stemplayers' allow anyone to increase the sound of one of the instruments, or suppress that of another. Songs can be listened to with different "musical filters".

Within the city, many groups of young talented kids gather. The track that you hear here, is from one group of multi-species, multicultural and multilingual musicians that shortly after the recording went on a world tour.

**Creators:** Amine Bouarfa, Younes L'Mourabiti, Ryan Salu, Genza, Gus Itali, Juicyroyce, Ramses, Ritchie, Lexie, Nemia, Akbar Bigira, Ky Rayleigh, Juiceisdope, Moussko, Sunray_helena

**Facilitating artists:** Vinco.zone and Arthur Chambry.

**Inspirators:** Rrita Jashari, Jeunes Boss, Dance Divine, Mambele, Madcurse, SVDU, Volta.

**Methodology and facilitation:** Ellen Anthoni, Khushboo Balwani

**Partners:** Zinnema, Entree, Overkop and Dbroej.

**Themes explored in this track encompass:**

- **Multilingualism and slang:** mixing of cultural backgrounds leads to weird argot, but translating bots can help to find solutions.
- **Polarization versus connecting practices:** a longing to surpass identity politics and work towards more social cohesion, collective dreaming over individual identity struggles.
- **Technological and sustainable futures of music making:** mixing new technology with everyday objects or plants, considering scarce resources. Music or other skills to get out of social media addiction.
- **Decentralisation of art spreading:** music Commons.

# Munity Is the Place, Mutiny Is the Radio



**Origin: Paris. Media: Podcast.**

## Paris in 2050

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 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 their strongly enforced district values.

# Munity

This is how Munity emerged. Located in a former campus within what used to be the Latin Quarter, in the 2020's 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, they turned it into an island of resistance and experimentation: Munity.
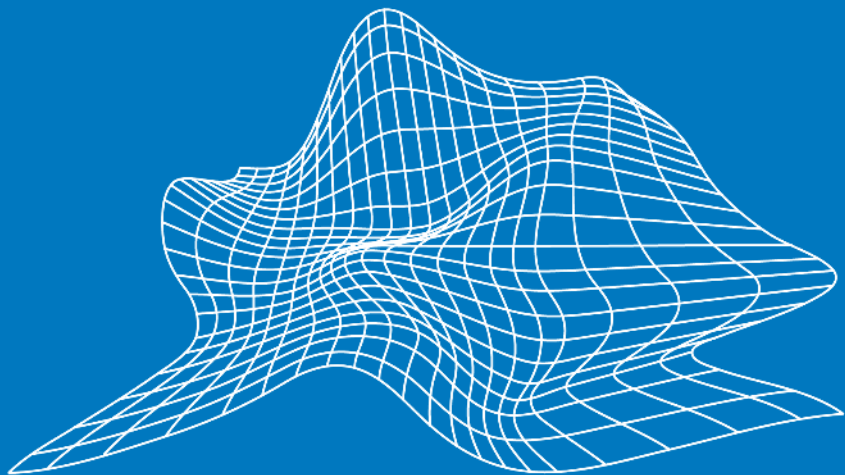
## The Mutiny Podcast

"Munity is the place, Mutiny is the radio". We are given one of Mutiny's broadcasts to listen – assuming electricity and wi-fi are available, which is not always the case. Young adults who converged there from various districts tell their stories.

After giving birth to six children, **Esmeralda**, pregnant once again, could no longer hide the pain of childbirth. Many of her friends had mysteriously disappeared for the same reason. So she took her horse and left her family which she loved, to raise her seventh child in Munity. But she misses her home.

**Emilie** was sitting on the steps of Montmartre, thinking of her next poem, when she saw fireworks bursting in the sky of Paris, down south. She was stunned: her district was where beauty was supposed to reside! So she went for the source, and never looked back.

**Eden** was unable to deal with emotions. She became homeless after one night, when she ran into a person lying on the old train tracks and screaming, screaming. Incapable of coping with such suffering, but also incapable of ignoring it, she went searching for a place where she could get help, and help others.
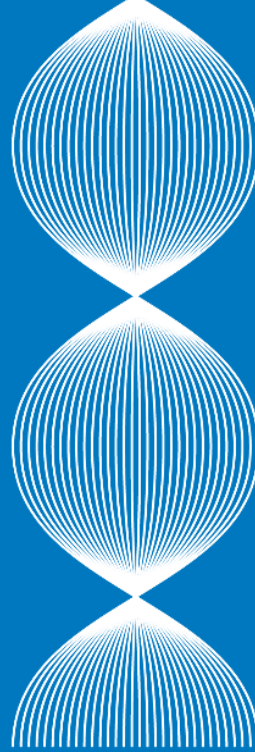
**Nylan** still adheres to his district's belief in logic. He was drawn to Munity when he met one of his friends who had been exiled from their district after failing his exams, and now manages Munity's solar panels. Nylan likes Munity, however he feels it should be better organized: less unproductive projects, more solutions based on data and science. He also brought his special playlist of sounds to deal with every overwhelming emotion, and is always willing to play it to whomever he meets.

**Sam** took the name after leaving his district which forbade names – likes to kick dogs, which did not go down well in his place of birth. He found Munity while following one dog. While Munity's occupants didn't condone dog-kicking either, Sam was amazed at finding a place where strong emotions and basic pleasures – eating, fucking – where valued. So he stuck around.

Esmeralda, Nylan Emilie, Sam and Eden are very different individuals, but they dream of a similar future: An open future where individuals can express themselves, where emotions are welcome and one is taught to deal with them rather than suppress them. Each in their own way, they see Munity as a place from which an alternative to the division of Paris will emerge.
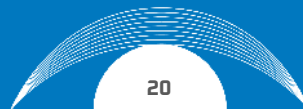
**Artists and podcast producers:** Ilona Cathelin and Yann Besson, [Les Muses de Paris](#).

**Methodology and facilitation:** Daniel Kaplan, Lina Manousogiannaki.

**Participants:** Noé Vekemans, Max Schwandtner, Marine Guebel, Nica Weyts, Finn Meňhart, Nikolas Steiner, Andrej Králik, Tamara Meňhartová.

## Themes explored in this podcast encompass:

- **Polarization and "identity politics":** the increasing difficulty to coexist with persons having different opinions and/or identifying with different communities.
- **Emotion control:** authorities fear emotions and conflicts above all things and try to suppress them.
- **Mental health issues related to the above:** dealing with emotions, with differences, with radicalization, with not knowing...
- **Segregated cities:** cities are divided into areas with totally different populations, rules, and culture. Cities are no longer integrators, "melting pots" for individuals with diverse origins.
- **Education:** a need to learn social and political (eg, debating, dealing with disagreements, etc.) on top of other skills.
- **The benefits of "third spaces":** as escape hatches from the constraints of societies, places where alternatives can be tested, etc.

# How C75XYZ Came To Be...



**Origin: Paris. Media: Video.**

Link to the video:
https://youtu.be/RzlfRrukq6g?si=GZAfC2FvG87rQCG7

## 2025-2060: a Short History

The movie is a documentary recounting the history of what happened between 2025 and 2050, that (in part) resulted in the creation of the C75XYZ Space in Paris.

It starts with a timeline:
**2025**: Unconditional income is officially introduced world-wide.
**2027**: Workaholism is recognized as a mental illness.
**2030**: Solar explosion.
**2031**: Increasing refugee crisis.
**2033**: An AI is created to manage the refugee crisis.
**2035**: The AI is ethically hacked.
**2037**: The French government falls down.
**2038**: Creation of small local self-sufficient communities.
**2040**: Food shortages lead people to shift to veganism.
**2043**: Air filters are installed in the C75XYZ's building due to the air pollution.
**2050**: C75XYZ is installed as one of the largest multicultural communities of Paris.

## The C75XYZ Place and Community

C75XYZ is a closed community living in a huge public building located in the heart of Paris. C stands for community, 75 for the neighborhood and XYZ for the ID number of the community.

In Paris 2050 C75XYZ is one of the biggest multicultural local communities of Paris. C75XYZ is located in an abandoned building of 25,000m2, at the heart of the French Capital, formerly known as the temporary occupation Césure, the Grand Workaholism Rehab, and became later one of the major refugee centers of the city. C75XYZ deals with the increasing repercussions of the environmental, economical and political crises of the present and past decades.

## The Video

C75XYZ' dwellers don't have children. Self sterilization is a golden rule of the community. Having children is rather a rarity anyway. However, this documentary captures the world through the eyes of one of them - Delta.

We understand that the individual responsible for the documentary discovered archived footage filmed by a child named Delta, who, while exploring the space, inadvertently captured top-secret conversations among adults and participated in peculiar rituals involving food, dance, and work. Furthermore, we grasp that tension pervaded the environment, exacerbated by food scarcity, which likely led to the development of peculiar beliefs.

Have you ever wondered what the Paris of 2050 would look like? Get ready... This reportage comes straight from the future and was made just for you.

# Themes explored in this video encompass:

- **Community:** the cohabitation of diverse individuals presents opportunities for resource sharing, but also challenges in establishing common ground and navigating unfamiliar beliefs.
- **Refugee crisis:** the integration of newcomers into a close-knit community proves complex and may foster division.
- **Biogenetics and genetic engineering:** the blending of human and non-human entities raises practical as well as ethical questions.
- **Birth and demographics:** with the influx of climate and political refugees, discussions about sterilization and population control emerge due to limited food resources.
- **Death:** innovations in body recycling for agricultural purposes suggest alternative approaches to sustainability - and dead bodies.
- **Time:** while the movie briefly explores questions of time, the format embodies it by presenting a structure that floats between periods of time.
- **Sober eating and fasting:** sharing scarce food resources.

# File - 2453 - XDS / The Hijrat Center Compilation

Link to the Zine:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tZCAO_kGp_roPnBTOjDmvFlofka2A4ht/view?usp=sharing
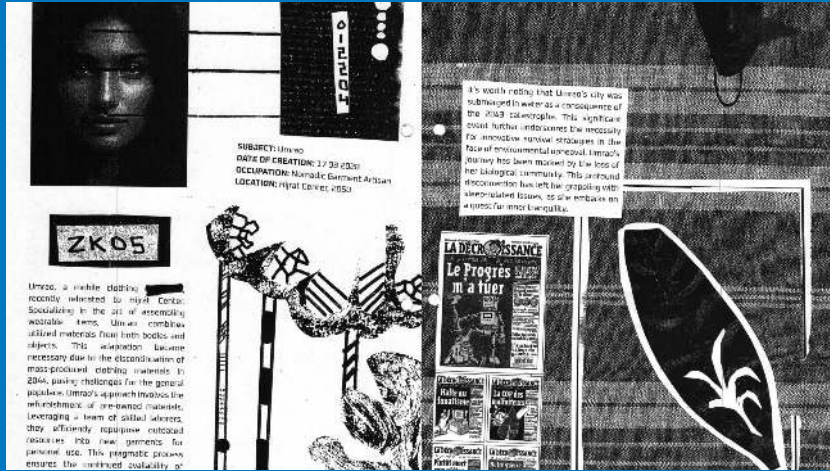
## Object: Classified file from the future

*"File - 2453 - XDS"*
*Classified data compilation from Hijrat center compiled: Spyder de*
*(AT V: 23.47)*
*Recipient : Unknown*

*Intricate images, enigmatic maps, elusive traces, digital sketches, and profound thoughts of nomads residing in Hijrat Center.*
*Hidden within these enigmatic files lies the clandestine secrets of an unknown world, a realm where shadows, dance and echo whispers. The Hijrat center holds more than meets the eye, a clandestine tapestry woven with the threads of the extraordinary and the unknown waiting to be unraveled."*

The content of this file contains information gathered by a mysterious "spider" that has been surveilling the Hijrat Center for some time now. We can suppose the "spider" is an AI, but no one can be certain about that.

# The Hijrat Center

The Hijrat Center operates in a 2050 world greatly affected by ecological catastrophes. The story assumes that we have not acted in time to become carbon neutral, resulting in the world coping with various climates such as floods, heat waves, earthquakes, etc., leading to unimaginable migration crises. Countries in the north are also facing challenging conditions, with the sun's intensity making outdoor activities difficult, pushing these countries to organize to adapt to the change and climate, for example, most people are conducting their activities indoors and during the evening, and to the amount of new migrants coming in every day. We also understand from the object and the story that borders are a thing of the past.

What was collected from the top-secret Hijrat file is fragmented, but written between the lines, we can put together that the Hijrat Center, originally created in Paris as a temporary rotation center for climate refugees, has developed a unique functional operating system. The center was established to provide a "home away from home," serving as a six-month acclimatization center for refugees to familiarize themselves with the local system and climate conditions necessary for survival, including agriculture, mobility, resources, and communication centers. The center is organized by sections, with places to sleep, to learn, and even a huge network of underground gardening, extending very far around the city.
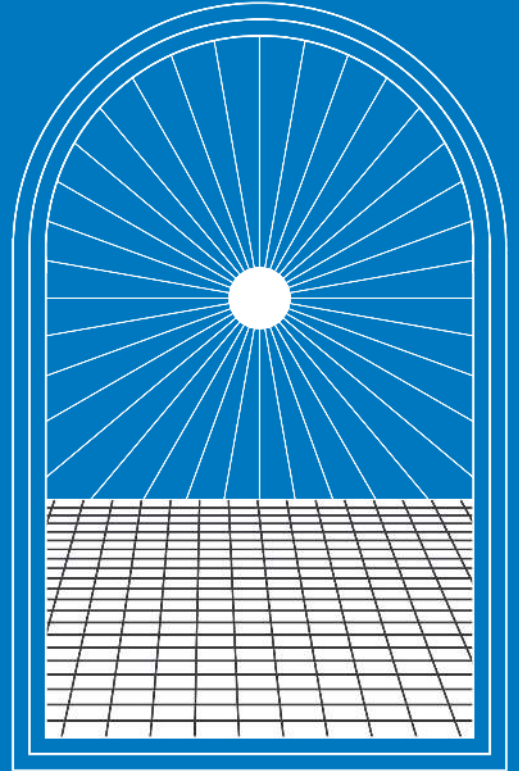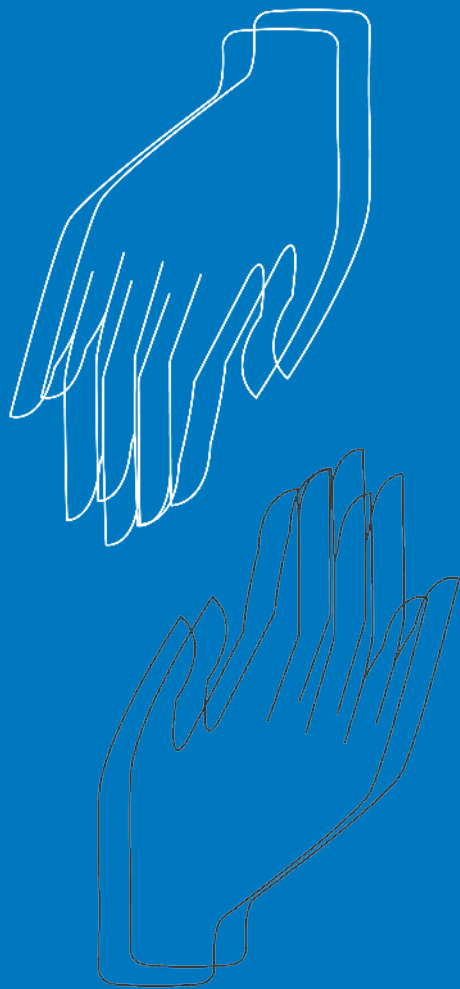
In the last few years, Hijrat has embraced this mission and realized that it has a lot to learn from the refugees passing through its center. That being in contact with all of these people who have lived and survived so many different dangers had a lot to say. Independent from the other centers around Europe, it has found an innovative way to document ancestral knowledge from different parts of the world on coping with extreme conditions (e.g., planting tomatoes and zucchini during full moons, drinking hot tea when the weather is hot, reading the sky for storms, etc.). Indeed, the center has implemented a mysterious wall, allowing people to express themselves in their own language and organizing it in important sections allowing the input to be used almost automatically. This method is aimed at facilitating knowledge transfer for the common cause of the center.

This innovation seems to be of great interest to someone, but who? The Hijrat center would be open to share its method with those who share similar values...

## Themes explored in this publication encompass:

- **Surveillance:** theollection of fragmented files suggests that technology (sensors, drones, AI...) may be involved.
- **Capacity Building:** an emphasis on transmission and validation of alternative forms of knowledge.
- **Ecology:** the importance of climate resilience and adaptation strategies for survival.
- **Geopolitics:** the importance of supporting and organizing spaces to accommodate a large number of refugees from the south.

# Samuel's Journey



**Origin: Poprad. Media: Collage.**

Link to the collage:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bfPcxvzbxI8q5O5ZDjEig6bi7KjzKrBu/view

## Poprad in 2040:
## What To Do With our Free Time?

In 2040, Poprad is a city of sharp contrasts.

Inside the houses there is a feeling of love, relaxation and peace. There is great emphasis on mental health among the people. The home environment promotes respect and well-being, laughter and joy are common, often supported by technology. Robots and AI that are an integral part of life. The topic of mental health is no longer taboo, and has become a normal part of healthcare.

Looking out the window, however, we see a different reality. The urban landscape is marked by chaos. People feel lonely. Depression and aggression prevail, contributing to an environment full of anxiety and closed-mindedness that hinders effective communication and understanding. The social structure shows signs of deep-rooted inequality.

People no longer have to go to work because technology does everything for them. Everyone receives an unconditional income from the age of 15 and therefore has lots of free time. However, many people do not know what to do with this time. Some people actively try to create new entertaining and cultural activities, others volunteer in social activities, but many just hang out and feel miserable.

The soundscape of Poprad is characterized by an eerie silence, occasionally interrupted by the crackle of a fire. Noticeably absent are any sounds that might suggest a cry for help, overshadowed by expressions of anger, suffering and frustration. Yet amidst the confusion, moments of humility and calm emerge, reflecting a sense of responsibility and the potential for change.

The air is tinged with the freshness of the High Tatras mountains, mingling with the soothing scents of morning, reminiscent of parents and good food, and occasionally the smell of rain. This sensory experience offers a reminder of the natural beauty that remains.

Transport in Poprad is a mixture of modern and traditional methods. Virtual world travel offers an escape from the problems of the city. The use of drones provides a practical way of securing the necessities while hiking, sailing are still used, especially to support mental health. Casual off-world travel suggests a futuristic vision that transcends current technological limits.

Overall, Poprad in 2040 is a city torn between the promise of modern conveniences and the challenges of its social environment.

# The Collage as an Artefact from 2040

In this context, collageing is a tool for self-discovery, a way for these young people to explore their emotions and start conversations about their future. The collage serves as a visual representation of Samuel's journey. Living in a society where their lives are controlled by technology, these young people are lost, searching for meaning and real connections. The collage expresses their struggles, their search for identity, a snapshot of their hopes, fears and their desire to break free from the virtual world that dominates their lives.

## SAMUEL'S JOURNEY

Samuel is a lonely 16-year-old boy. He lives by his rules, because as we know, in Poprad 2040 we receive money since the age of fifteen without needing to work. He doesn't go to school and prefers to spend money on computer games and live a virtual life. He knows nothing but robots and the virtual world...

Robots tell him what to do, where to go and how to organize his life. In real life, he has no friends.

Samuel discovers an older game on an old computer. He immerses himself in it. He finds himself in the forest with many traps, meets various creatures and cannot fight them alone. The game offers him the possibility to add more players, so he decides to use this opportunity and thus meets many new virtual players, with whom he becomes friends during the game.

"This is so great. Thank you so much for saving my life. You're a great friend and I'm glad I got to know you in this game."

While playing, Samuel hears a robotic voice: "Stop it, turn it off, time for evening hygiene and sleep. Turn it off! Now!" He takes off his glasses and sees a robot next to him, who repeats its orders over and over again.

He slowly discovers that he does not enjoy this life. He realizes that he is missing a real person, outside of virtual reality, with whom he can experience what he finds in the game. He feels useless and wants to change that.
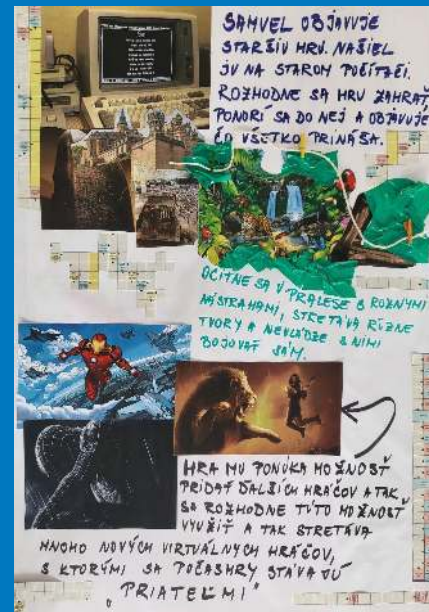
Samuel starts looking for communities, organizes and mobilizes other young people. He realizes that he doesn't understand people in the real world. And so he again enters virtual reality and invites his peers to the abandoned building of the Youth Center.

Samuel doesn't know what he will do. He doesn't know how to spend his free time. But he knows that he will meet his peers and so they can start their real adventures. And we know that he will meet one person. It will be Pascal...

**Methodology and facilitation:** Alexandra Kurišová, Lilia Raikhline.

**Participants:** Bianka Suchovská, Samuel Hutník, Andrea Petrusová, Ingrid Lindemanová.
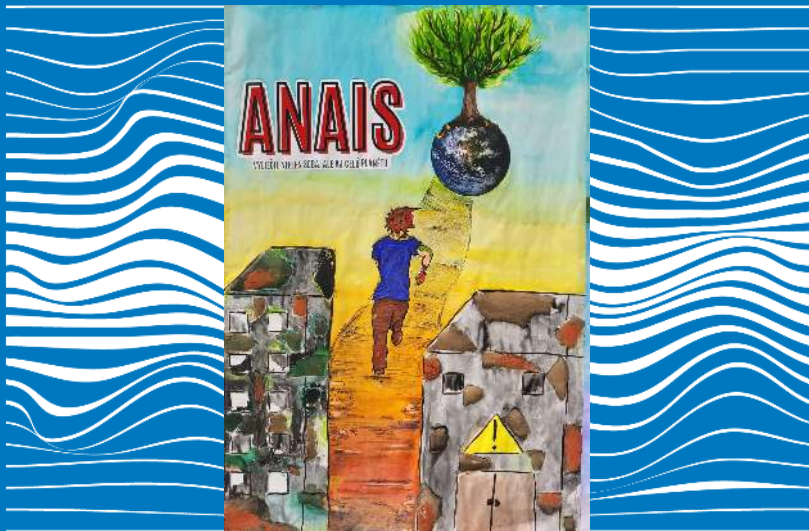
# Themes explored in this collage encompass:

- **End of work:** work is mostly digitized and automated, everyone receives an unconditional income and few decide to continue going to work.
- **Redefinition of leisure:** lack of organized offers, lack of autonomous ability to define or choose one's own activities, inability to structure one's leisure time. Leisure is mainly organised by robots that are part of households.
- **Intrinsic motivation:** the lack of extrinsic motivation to work or study also affects people's intrinsic motivation to do something.
- **Social connections:** online and offline, virtual media and their rules structure the world of teenagers.
- **Loneliness:** feeling alone, missing the physical presence of other persons, and longing for deep relationships and understanding.
- **Mental health:** a focus on people's mental health, facilitated by technology, but sometimes artificially created and achieved.

# Anais

Link to the collage:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QlULr_fLc-ou8wutNXl_e_g1b9RluPtP/view?usp=sharing
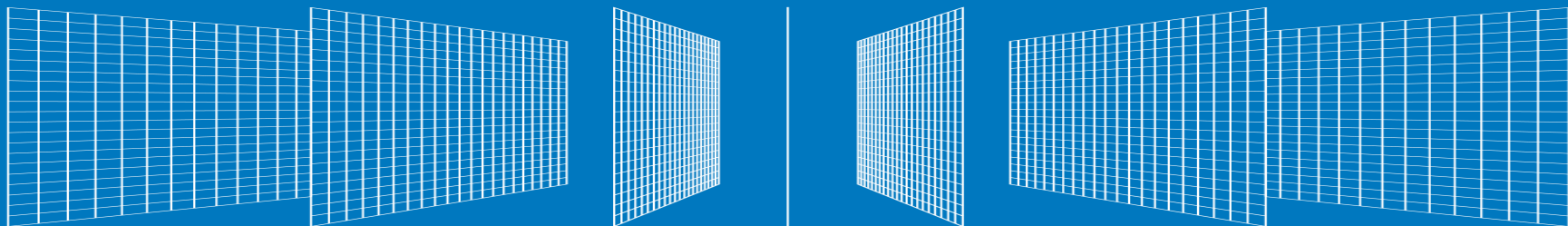
## Poprad in 2040: Heat!

In 2040, the city of Poprad is frequently struck by extreme heat. The hottest periods regularly exceed 40 degrees Celsius and last for several consecutive days. For many, this results in deteriorating health, particularly affecting the elderly and children, as their bodies generally have less efficient temperature regulation. More intense and prolonged droughts, accompanied by severe but brief storms, increased health risk. Storms overwhelm drainage systems, causing flooding and leading to water contamination. Contaminants from sewage, chemicals, and waste seep into water sources, increasing the spread of different diseases. Prolonged, frequent droughts reduced the availability of clean water, leading to the use of polluted or stagnant water sources, which also spread disease.

As if the burden of unbearable heat weren't enough, a new mutant virus emerges in Slovakia, targeting those who must remain isolated at home.

Looking out the window, you can see a desolate landscape marked by abandoned cars and dilapidated buildings. The harsh sun and pervasive dryness contribute to a sense of despair, while the occasional rainbow offers a fleeting glimpse of hope. Signs of animal extinction and the general absence of people underline the severity of the environmental crisis.

Inside, the sounds of everyday life mingle with the hum of security systems and the buzz of mobile phones, contrasting with the pervasive darkness and the drawn blinds and curtains that shut out the outside world.

## The collage

The collage tells the story of young Alfi, who, infected with the virus, is isolated at home and devising a plan to save himself, humanity, and the planet.

# ANAIS: Healed not just himself but the entire planet



**Prologue**

Drawn blinds. It's dry and desolate. The air is filled with the stench of decay, sweat, and burnt smells. Around is silence, with no sign of life. Trees are whipped by the wind as a storm approaches.
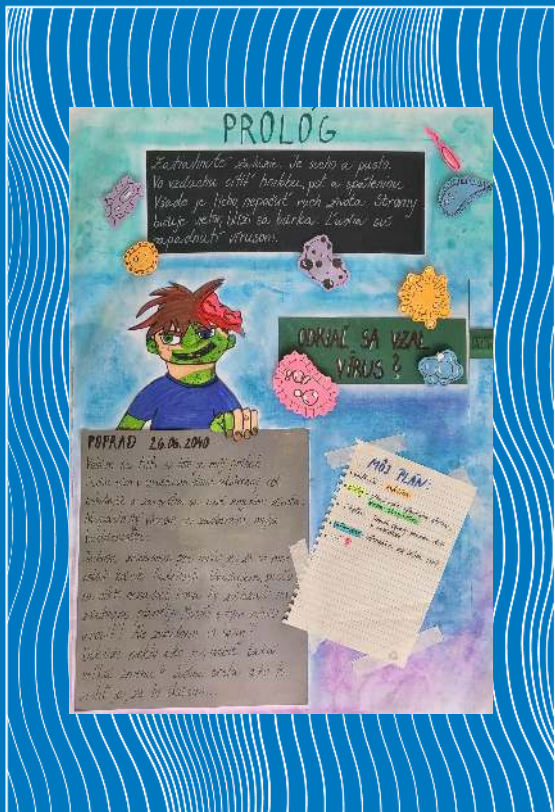
Because of poor hygiene practices, an increased risk of contamination of drinking water, and the death of animals, bacteria spread, and the population was attacked by a virus.

**Poprad, 26.06.2040**

My name is Alfi, and this is my story. I sit alone in an abandoned house, isolated from others. As I struggle with the virus, I think about my future. The only hope I have is that a small part of humanity remains within me. I wonder why no one has stepped up to save the planet. I need to do something about it! But can I do it alone? Can someone like me make such a big change? The only way to find out is to try…

**My plan:**

I don't think I can do it alone. I need to find other people who can help me: a biologist for a vaccine, and ecologist to restore the ecosystem and the sources of drinking water, a teacher to spread environmental awareness through children, and an influencer to spread it through the online world.

**Zurich, Research Facility, 01.07.2040**

After several days of searching for information, I finally arrived at the location. The only scientist in the lab was Prof. RNDr. Janka Kacrvinárová. I rely on her expertise and medical contacts. I ask uncertainly: "Are you the only hope for human beings? Will you help me?"

VACCINATION IS IN PROGRESS. WE ARE SAVING HUMAN LIVES. IT'S TIME TO START CARING ABOUT OUR PLANET.

**Copenhagen, Extreme Ecology Institute, 01.04.2043**

I came to consult on how to bring life back to the world. I heard that this ecologist has extensive knowledge in tree planting, drinking water quality, and ecosystem restoration, so we believe we can restore life to our planet together.

**Online World, 18.02.2044**

I reached out to the world-renowned influencer Karin to promote and spread "green awareness" in the virtual world.

**What about the children?**

I haven't forgotten the School. Teachers, using their pedagogical skills, are now teaching a new subject called FuturEco. It has become very popular and is also incorporated into leisure activities at community centers. Young people are more interested in environmental issues and are increasingly organizing events focused on saving the planet.

**Methodology and facilitation:** Alexandra Kurišová, Lilia Raikhline.

**Participants:** Bruno Rocco Šabla, Janka Kacviňárová, Karina Pitoňáková, Laura Bankošová, Lenka Kacviňárová, Alexandra Frkáňová.
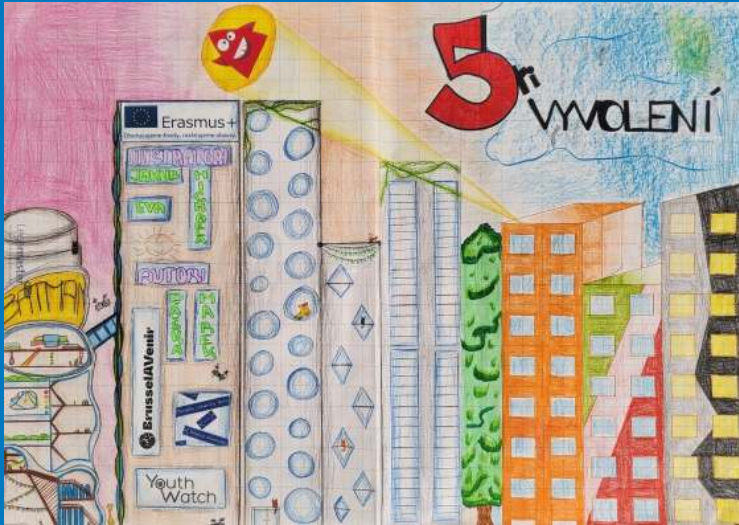
# Themes explored in this collage encompass:

- **The Environmental Crisis:** Alfi's mission to Save the Planet highlights the broader theme of the environmental crisis and the urgent need for recovery and reconstruction.
- **Isolation and loneliness:** a future in which loneliness and abandonment are common, people are disconnected, struggling with physical and emotional isolation.
- **Scientific and Technological Solutions:** a future in which scientific and medical advances are key to solving global problems.
- **Ecological restoration:** a future focus on sustainability and repairing damaged natural systems.
- **New diseases:** ecological crises associated with food shortages, poor sanitation as well as global connectivity can spread diseases and bring new unrecognized pandemics.
- **Educational reform:** the need to educate future generations about environmental issues and promoting sustainable practices.
- **Influence of digital media:** the role of digital media in shaping public perceptions and mobilizing action on environmental issues.
- **Hope and personal agency:** the belief that one person or group of people can make a significant difference. It also points to an optimistic scenario in which change is possible.

# Five Chosen



**Origin: Poprad. Media: Collage.**

Link to the collage:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BQMqD8VY2TnJUS-IeMDPxgZ-YyxgNSbQ/view?usp=sharing

## Poprad in 2040:
## Tech Everywhere!

In the year 2040, Poprad has transformed into a city where technology dominates every aspect of life. Homes, once filled with warmth and connection, now resonate with a profound sense of loneliness. Robots have taken over nearly every task, leaving humans with little sense of purpose. The people of Poprad grapple with mental health issues. Suicide has quietly become an epidemic, as many find it hard to cope with the emptiness of an automated existence.

Looking out the window, the city presents an unsettling blend of progress and despair. Unconventional buildings rise high, their clean lines stark against a backdrop of abandoned houses and empty streets. Electric cars glide silently along, adding to the lifeless atmosphere that permeates the city. LED billboards flash incessantly, promoting dreams that feel increasingly out of reach for the average person. Beneath the surface, chaos and poverty simmer as society remains sharply divided.

Nature has retreated, with once lush greenery now sparse and struggling to survive. The air itself feels heavy with gloom, and the deserted streets amplify the sense of isolation. The sounds of Poprad in 2040 are a stark contrast to the past. The once familiar noise of cars has diminished, replaced by the constant hum of drones zipping through the sky. Protests and murmurs of discontent ripple through the population, their voices blending with rumors that spread like wildfire. The presence of animals is rare. Occasionally, this silence is broken by distant cries or the mechanical sounds of robots, a cold reminder of the city's automated heart.

The air in Poprad has also changed, carrying the unmistakable scent of artificiality. The familiar scents of the past have all but vanished, replaced by a sterile, uniform air that feels the same no matter where you are in the city.

Jetpacks allow for swift travel through the skies.Massive pipelines connect different parts of the city, offering a unique mode of transport through large tubes. Motorcycles and electric scooters race along metro lines, while autonomous planes buzz overhead. For those with the means, teleportation has become a reality.

Poprad in 2040 is a city of contrasts—technologically advanced yet emotionally barren, a place where progress has come at the cost of humanity.
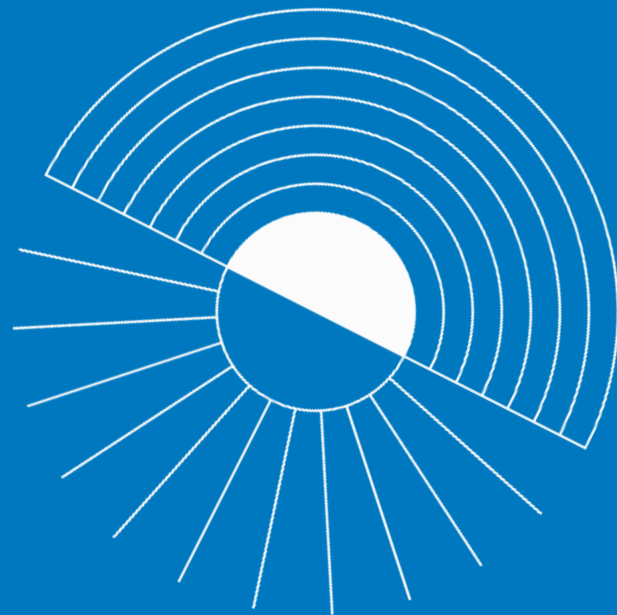
# The Collage: Poprad 2060

The collage tells the story of Daisy, who lives in the year 2060. It's a time when age no longer holds significant value due to widespread genetic modifications and mutations. Daisy's narrative captures memories of how the world functioned in the year 2000 and how it has changed over time. Daisy and her group can be described as influential activists who, through community organizing, managed to reverse the efforts of a small elite that aimed to transform humans into machines for economic gain.

Whether they were local activists, influencing only the inhabitants of Poprad, or whether they brought about global change remains unclear. What we do know, however, is that they succeeded in restoring meaning to people's lives, even in a fully automated society.

The determination of these activists does not end in 2060, as the residents of Poprad face a new challenge. Perhaps by recalling the past, Daisy found the courage she needed to face the future.
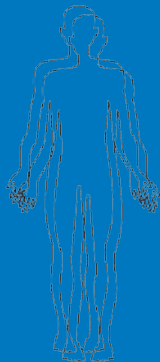
**Building Manager of youth center in Poprad 2040**
Pascal
Age: 52
*"I've never stopped coming to this building, even though I don't have to anymore. Everything has changed—people no longer work, and the place is crowded, but nobody interacts. Many workers have left, so I'm often alone. I keep working, but it feels pointless. There's no responsibility, no boundaries, and people just come and go. Older people come here out of boredom, and my job has been replaced by robots, so I mostly do unnecessary tasks. With unconditional income, people don't need to be here, and the experts have left to pursue other things. It all feels chaotic, and I'm unsure how to find purpose."*

**Young rapper from Poprad 2040**
FaKey
Age: 22
*"Born in 2018, I survived COVID and battled long-term symptoms until 2040. Now, I've become a rappeuse to raise awareness about social inequalities and discrimination. Growing up in isolation due to my illness, I now crave connection and am eager to share my voice. My parents, restaurant owners, embraced a holistic lifestyle that helped me recover, inspiring their underground restaurant. At 14, I discovered Tupac and LowKey, sparking my passion for using rap as a platform for political activism. I believe rap, with its powerful words and rhythm, is the most sincere way to express political views in today's world."*

# FIVE CHOSEN
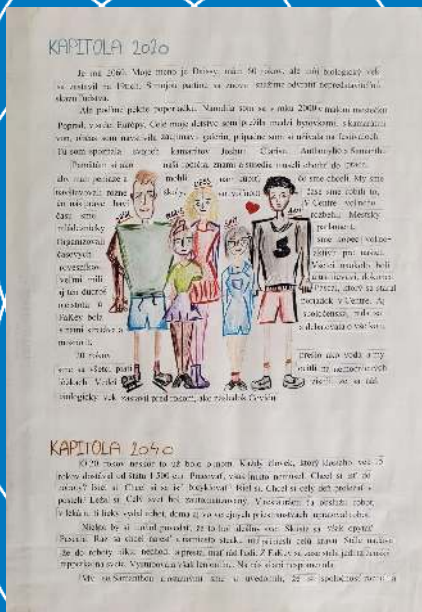


**Chapter 1:**

2020 It's the year 2060. My name is Daisy, I'm 60 years old, but my biological age stopped at 19. My friends and I are once again trying to prevent unimaginable devastation to humanity.

But let's start from the beginning. I was born in 2000 in the small town of Poprad, in the heart of Europe. I spent my entire childhood among apartment buildings, playing outside with friends, sometimes visiting interesting galleries, or enjoying festivals. This is where I met my friends Joshua, Clarissa, Anthony, and Samantha.

Our parents, acquaintances, and neighbors had to work to earn money and buy us what we wanted. We attended various schools and did whatever interested us in our free time. We started a city Youth Parliament at the Youth Center, organizing a range of leisure activities for our peers. Everyone around us was very kind and cheerful, even grumpy Pascal, who took care of cleanliness and order at the center. Even FaKey was sociable, enjoying meeting with us and discussing anything and everything. Twenty years passed like water, and all five of us found ourselves in hospital beds. Scientists confirmed that our biological age had stopped a year ago as a result of COVID.

Twenty years later, things were different. Every person who reached the age of 15 received 1,500 euros from the state.,Noone was forced to work. If you wanted to go to work, you could. If you wanted to go cycling, you could. If you wanted to spend the whole day lying in bed, you did. The whole world was automated. In restaurants, robots served you; in pharmacies, robots dispensed your medication; at home and in public spaces, robots did the cleaning. Some might say it was an ideal world. But try asking Pascal! One time he wanted a meal, and instead of a steak, they brought him an entire cow. He constantly complained that no one worked anymore and grew to dislike people. FaKey became the only female rapper in the world but only performed online. She didn't even remember us.

Samantha, the others, and I realized that society had split into three groups. There were people like us who loved to work even when it wasn't necessary, and who advised others on how to spend their free time. We founded various leisure clubs and brought people together into communities. Then there were those who struggled with feeling socially useless since they no longer had to work. Their mental health was very poor. And finally, there were those who could work but didn't want to and did absolutely nothing. Anthony called them "leeches."

Our goal was to get the world "back on track" and help improve it.

### Chapter 3: 2060

It's the end of 2060. The world has once again changed beyond recognition. Even though we managed to overcome many of the problems that emerged over the last 20 years, we stand on the brink of another civil war.

This time, however, we won't be fighting against the wealthy elite. Our opponent has become an AI, which has started doing whatever it wants. It influences people, pushing them to turn against each other. But we are prepared for this challenge and will certainly overcome it. For your sake.

**Methodology and facilitation:** Alexandra Kurišová, Lilia Raikhline.

**Participants:** Jakub Bendík, Eva Kacviňárová, Michaela Štolcová, Marek Lindeman, Darya Liutkevich.

## Themes explored in this collage encompass:

- **Technological automation and robotization:** by 2040, the world has become highly automated, with robots handling most tasks, from restaurant service to cleaning. This technological advancement leads to significant societal changes and raises questions about the value and meaningfulness of human work and existence in such a world.
- **Societal division:** separate tribes, potential social tensions and inequalities in future society.
- **Mental health and social purpose:** mental health emerges as a key issue, especially for those who feel socially useless due to the replacement of their work by automation.
- **Ethical and moral challenges:** the halting of biological aging introduces questions about biotechnology and the ethical implications of such interventions.
- **Polarization between the rich and the poor:** despite the existence of universal income, some individuals seek personal financial gain at the expense of others through biotechnological modifications, highlighting growing social divides.
- **Artificial intelligence (AI) as a threat:** the portrayal of AI as a potential threat reflects ongoing concerns about its future development and impact on society.
- **Social and economic changes:** the introduction of a basic income for all brings about radical societal changes.
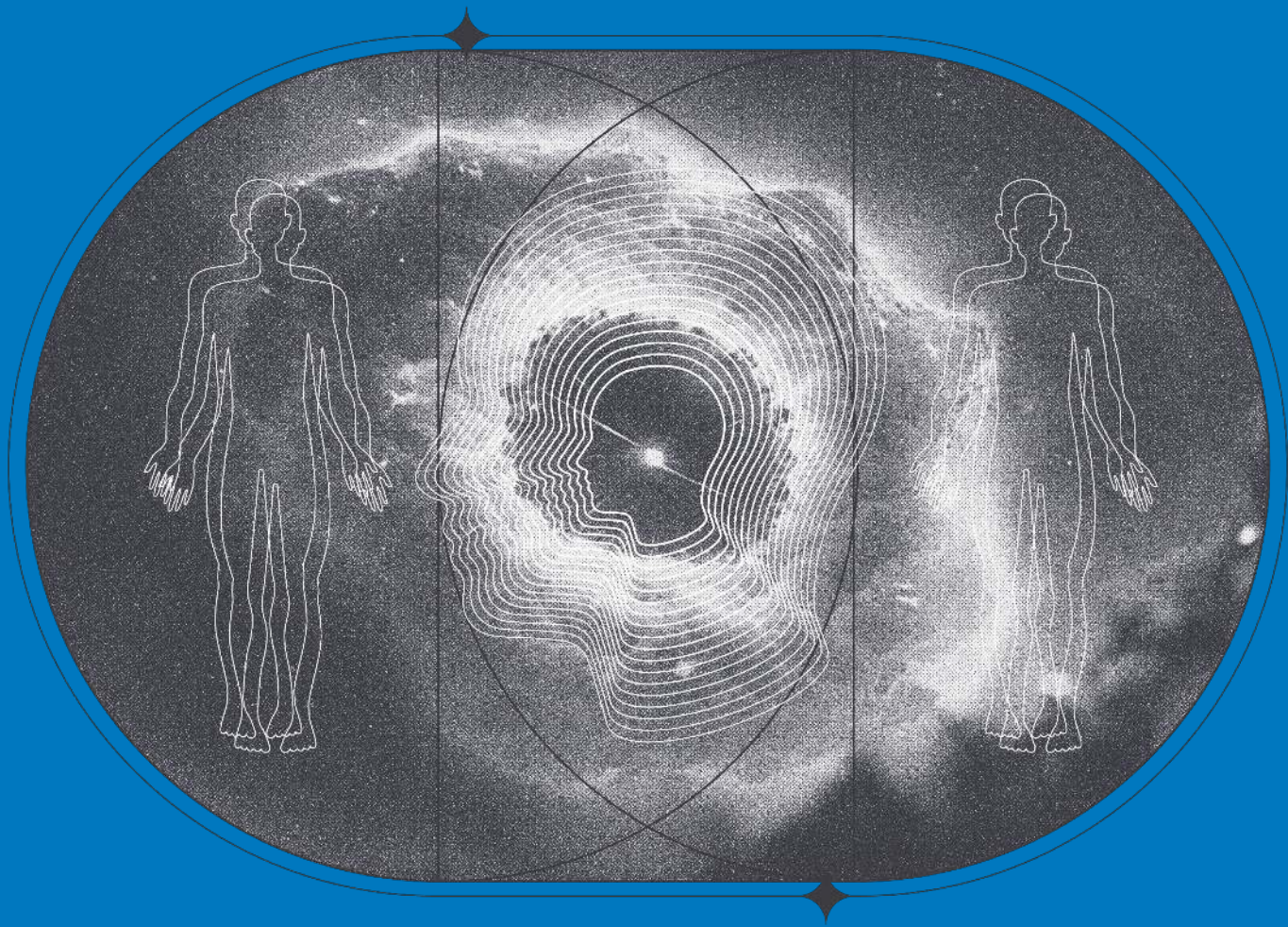
# PART 2: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

During the course of the project, we have learned a lot. Here we share what we took away:

- From the stories themselves, about what they see, hope for, and worry about when thinking about the world to come, the one where they will spend their adult life.
- And from our collective practice, about how Futures Literacy comes to young participants, what it does to them, and how to help youth workers and educators start their own Futures Literacy activities.
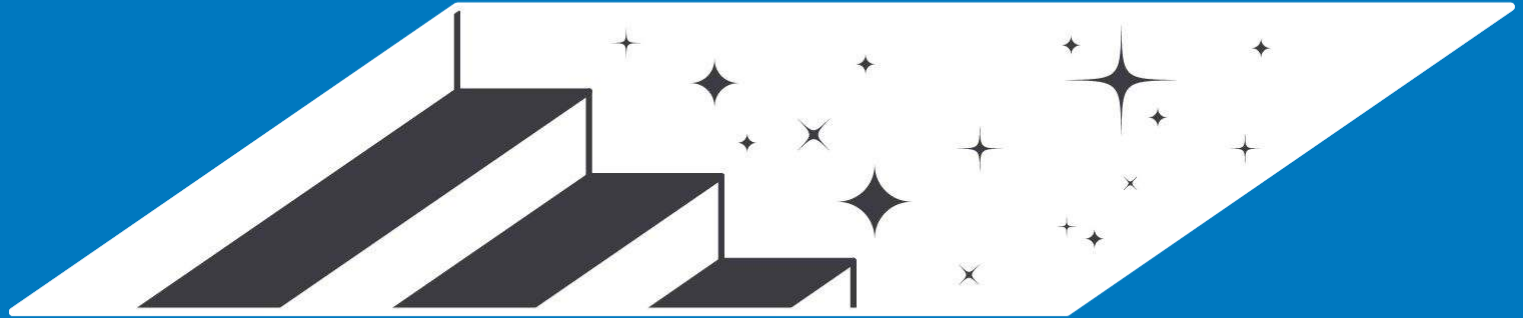
# What the Stories Tell Us

What can we learn from the stories about the future that our young participants created during the 10 training sessions that took place? What do they reveal about their thoughts, fears, hopes, and concerns?

To begin with, many of the young people we worked with aren't accustomed to thinking about the future. No one has ever taught them how to do so; there's no subject in schools that encourages them to imagine what their future might look like. Together, they don't often discuss what they fear about the future or what they aspire to, even though these topics are highly relevant to them.

## Five Key Topics

From our experience, many of them hold basic ideas about the future that are shaped by dominant narratives they encounter in the media, books, and films. It's no surprise, then, that for many, the first things that come to mind when thinking about the future are the climate crisis and technology. These themes appear in nearly all the stories co-created with young people.

**Environmental crises, ecological restoration, and the urgent need for sustainability** are recurring themes, reflecting growing concerns about the planet's future, the necessity for action and, if we believe the stories, the reality of inaction.

The rise of **digitization, automation, AI and autonomous machines** (aka robots) also frequently appears, with a focus on how these technologies will affect the labor market, social structures, and individual purpose. As robots take over more tasks, young people question the role of human work and its significance in a highly automated world.

Our observations also reveal that many young people initially view the future (at least the future in general, sometimes not their personal futures) in a rather dystopian, negative light, leading them to feel uncertain and sometimes fearful. However, (i) a significant part of our young participants – with strong variations from training to training – have a more positive outlook on the future, and (ii) in our experience, the results with older audiences are not very different.

Our young participants place significant emphasis on **mental health**. Mental health challenges are a constant concern in their stories, particularly regarding emotional regulation, loneliness, digital overconsumption and/or bullying, and the loss of purpose due to automation. This often connects to a broader theme of losing deep and meaningful relationships.

The theme of **surveillance**, especially through AI and intrusive technologies, also surfaces frequently. Stories highlight concerns about data collection, manipulation, and the potential use of technology for social control or psychographic data trading (hence privacy). However, young people do not want such control over their lives and, in their imagined futures, are prepared to resist a world dominated by artificial intelligence and other digital control mechanisms.

While society already feels the effects of increasing **polarization**, this theme also appears frequently in their future stories. These narratives discuss the growing divide between social, economic, and cultural groups. Whether it's polarization due to identity politics, societal inequality, or the disparity between the rich and poor, the challenge of coexistence and understanding others emerges as a significant issue. At the same time, there is a strong desire, if not a necessity, to coexist despite these differences. This is evident in stories that feature refugees, where individuals are forced to leave their homes due to environmental challenges. Despite their differences, these characters are united by a common desire to confront difficult situations together and find new ways to survive.
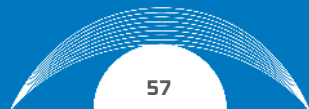
# What we Learned from Futures Literacy Practices with Young Participants (and perhaps others)

As part of the The Future is Now project, we organized ten educational workshops lasting two or more days, with nearly 200 participants from Slovakia and Belgium. The participants came from diverse age groups and social backgrounds and, in the case of Belgium, were not exclusively nationals. Based on our observations during the workshops, including how participants reacted and engaged, as well as our meetings and evaluations, trainings in Futures literacy revealed a lot of valuable insights.



## Generating Hope Through Action

What we also find significant through our experience with futures literacy and co-creating stories of different futures is that young people do see hope. Triggered (at least in part) by the futures literacy activities, they begin to realize that the future doesn't have to be entirely dystopian, and to recognize the important role they have in shaping it. Often for the first time, they are also considering what they can do about it — whether individually or collectively.

A unique theme that stands out is the emphasis on personal agency and the belief that individual or collective action can drive significant change, offering a more optimistic view of societal transformation. Hope does not come from a passive belief in a positive future, it emerges from the participants' realization that, in a generally more difficult future, they can together be forces of change.

# Understanding What Participants Really Learn

The approach and methods applied in the training sessions contrasts sharply with traditional learning methods, which often involve short, disconnected time sequences, passive information reception, and test-taking rather than active participation. In Futures Literacy trainings, the focus shifts towards encouraging personal opinion, imagination, and experiential learning through collective efforts.

Futures Literacy is not just about the future. It involves a set of skills that participants continually develop and refine, encompassing various dimensions such as imagination, communication, collaborative work, and creative problem-solving.

- **Imagination** allows participants to envision multiple possible futures and explore diverse scenarios, which broadens their perspectives and develops their ability for innovative thinking.
- **Effective communication** skills enable them to articulate ideas clearly and engage in meaningful dialogue, enhancing their ability to share insights and collaborate with others.
- **Collaborative work** emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collective effort, encouraging participants to leverage the strengths of diverse viewpoints and expertise to achieve common goals.
- **Creative problem-solving** involves approaching challenges with originality and flexibility, applying novel solutions to complex issues.



Additionally, as we will see below, participants also learn skills related to creative media, such as creative writing, sound, video, acting, etc. As participants advance in these areas, they not only enhance their individual competencies but also contribute to a more dynamic and forward-thinking approach to addressing future challenges.  We firmly believe that developing Futures Literacy is inseparable from these other skills and attitudes.

# Choosing and Framing the Topics

There is no such thing as "the future", there are futures (plural) of something, someone, someplace, at a specific time horizon. How to frame a training activity in this regard?

- **Select topics that resonate with the participants.** Young people, in particular, tend to be drawn to themes related to relationships, mental health, environmental issues, and technology. Subjects like education, politics, and urban spaces can also capture their interest. By paying attention to what topics matter to them, we ensure that the selected topics have the potential to inspire or empower participants, sparking a genuine curiosity to explore them further.
- **Avoid ambiguity:** certain topics can be either too broad ("future of Slovakia") or too abstract/ambiguous ("future of societal discourse"), making it challenging to facilitate meaningful conversations. In Futures Literacy processes, we often introduce increasing layers of complexity. However, if a topic is overly broad, ambiguous, or abstract from the start, participants may struggle to find common ground, causing confusion and disengagement.
- **Let participants reframe the topic** during the process. In a Futures Literacy training, there is generally no requirement to produce something which should be actionable by a "client" or an institution. Therefore, even if you framed the session's initial topic well, you should let participants "inhabit" it, infuse it with their meanings, and sometimes evolve with. As an example, a session initially focused on Education ended up focusing on Mental Health, both at school and elsewhere. Reframing an issue suggested by others is in itself part of the "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. ) that Futures Literacy aims to instill.

# Creating the Right Environment for Collective Thinking, Learning, and Creation

In Futures Literacy exercises, the active involvement of young participants is an essential component. However, this is not always easy. Many young people are not used to being asked for their opinion; the exercise may feel too abstract or remote; it can feel intimidating if too much complexity and/or external knowledge is added from the start, or boring if participants feel they are here to reproduce practices rather than provide their unique input.



- **Take time:** first-time attendees may not be accustomed to thinking in these innovative ways, as they are often used to more traditional or conventional approaches. Initially, the concepts and methods presented might seem unfamiliar or challenging. However, with each subsequent session, their understanding progressively deepens. The more time participants spend engaging in these sessions, the more they begin to absorb and internalize the concepts. This deeper involvement allows them to move beyond surface-level understanding and integrate the ideas into their own thinking and practices. As they participate in discussions, activities, and reflective exercises, they develop a nuanced grasp of the topic, which influences their perspectives and behaviors. If time is a scarce resource, do not hesitate to organize regular short(ish) sessions.

- **Provide a safe environment for participants:** an environment where everyone can express themselves, even if they each have wildly different ideas about the future (and the present). Bringing complex or challenging themes (or both) is fine; just make sure the environment is safe, inclusive, and diverse, allowing participants to feel comfortable and confident in expressing their thoughts, taking risks, even making mistakes. With the right atmosphere, youngsters are more likely to engage deeply and navigate complexities effectively. Facilitators play a key role in cultivating this environment by offering constructive feedback, celebrating efforts, promoting an open dialogue and by guiding participants through the entire process. This may sometimes extend to "stepping down" from the facilitator's position of authority to also acts as a co-creator.
- **Trust the participants:** even young participants may know more than you think about a variety of topics, and if they don't, they may be capable of looking for the information they need. They are generally capable of articulating and discussing complex issues. They know what matters to them. This does not mean that they do not need your guidance (in searching and sorting through information and disinformation, in resolving differences, in formulating ideas, etc.), but that Futures Literacy is, in our experience, best learned in a horizontal, collective way, rather than a top-down way.

- **Understand the different ways in which participants relate to the future**, and to the exercises you lead them through. Indeed, making one's "anticipatory assumptions" - and accepting that there are no "right" or "wrong" assumptions - is the first step in the Futures Literacy journey! Some participants will be used to projecting into the future, although it might be for different reasons: some may be politically engaged, while others may be avid science fiction fans. Some participants may be guided by their intuitions or hopes, while others prefer scientifically backed facts and rational arguments. Some may have no difficulty imagining change, while others have a hard time believing that anything can change in the future. Some may readily believe that the future can be shaped by human activity, while others might be skeptical of it, or believe more in destiny... None of these attitudes are right or wrong: use these differences to the group's advantage (example: the more rational can look for data while the most imaginative draw scenarios and the skeptics challenge them), while leaving space for all to change their posture during the session.

- **Collective creation and role-playing are powerful tools for all of the above:** in imagining stories and impersonating roles, young people don't just talk about the future but "live it". Simply sitting down and talking in a workshop is not very interesting for many; however, when art and the creation of a tangible creative outcome are involved, it helps blend skill development with future thinking. It also allows the group to create something together, something they can bring to life, complete together, feel proud of, and even present. In that, fiction is not the opposite of serious thinking. It can incorporate prior research; it can help challenge conventions and prejudices; it can open up unthought possibilities that can then be researched with other means; it can incorporate complexity, which is a key element of Futures Literacy and will be present via the group's diversity of cultures, knowledge and abilities, interests, beliefs, etc.
- **Strive to produce an end-result that makes participants proud:** working on a concrete final product that can be proudly shown to others (from parents to friends to teachers, to local decision-makers, etc.) gives the whole group a direction and positively impacts group cohesion. Using a creative format and medium (written story, comic, video, audio, theatre, etc.) can motivate participants to engage in the adventure (see below on the choice of the media).
- **Plan time for reflexivity based on the collective creation:** whether within the group itself, or when the content is shared with a wider audience, use the group's media creation as a way to foster meaningful discussions: What surprised us? What did we learn, or unlearn? What ideas are in the story? What ideas are not? Could other futures have been imagined? What, in these stories, is desirable or not (and does everybody feel the same about what is and isn't desirable? - see below)? Possible or not (same question)? What does it make participants, or the audience, wish to dig deeper into, or to try out?

# Choosing the Right Media

In our Futures Literacy training sessions, participants were tasked with imagining stories happening in the future and shaping them into a form that could be shared with others, via a specific format: in our case, written stories, collages, podcast, zine, song, video.

No media is out of scope, but the choice of media and format has a big impact on the process and on the outcome, differently for participants, facilitators and audience. They can be both a motivation for participants who would otherwise not engage in futures discussions, as well as a distraction for the conversations we would like to have.

**The choice of media depends on several parameters:**

- **The time available:** writing or theater improvisation works for a short session, while video may need more steps and therefore more time;
- **Existing skills within or around the group**, which can work both as a constraint, and as a facilitator of the group's dynamics. As an example, while video is a popular medium for a young audience, the technical requirements are plenty, more skills, tools and time is needed than for a collage. On the other hand, video gives space for, and invites collaboration between, participants with different skills and interests – acting, scenography, costume, filming, sound, editing,…

- **Levels of abstraction and form of content delivery:** some formats directly convey easy to understand stories (e.g., podcasts), others may require more explanations around the creation (e.g., music, visual arts);
- **Post-production:** a nice outcome that participants can share with friends and family enthuses them, and it helps to spread the futures images. However, while the content can be created in a few days (sometimes a few hours), making it attractive for people that weren't present in the workshop, most of the time needs post-production - sometimes relatively simple (tidying up written stories), sometimes more demanding (editing the video).
- **Financial and material requirements:** When it comes to video, the material and financial requirements are significantly higher compared to something like a podcast. Participants need to consider even the smallest details and depict them, which is an advantage as it helps to illustrate future stories more vividly, but it also requires more time, material resources, and consequently, more funding. When making your choice, take these variables into account.

# Getting Over the Tired Utopia vs. Dystopia Debate



In our experience, we found that, while theoretically relevant, the classic distinction between probable and desirable futures did not prove very helpful in practice - especially during the early stages of the work.

- **Making the difference between "probable" and "desirable" is not as easy as it seems**, especially when thinking about the future where complexity and uncertainty make it more difficult to untangle knowledge, beliefs, and values. When talking about a post-growth future, is it because we "objectively" think that the environment will force this future on us (probable"), or because we feel it will reconnect us to deeper sources of meaning and satisfaction ("desirable")? When refusing such a future, is it because we believe that technology will provide a way out of the environmental crises ("possible"), or because it feels too dark to even contemplate ("undesirable")?... In our experience, these differences became more easy to discuss after the group creation than before.

- **Don't ask participants to produce "positive futures":** there is a strong pressure to generate positive images of the future. It is based on two assumptions that have not been verified in our experience: first, that when left alone, people will tell overly dark ("dystopic") stories; second, that dark images of the future breed despair and anomy. What we found in practice was that when given freedom, participants mostly told stories in which, in a world where life is generally more difficult than today (not an unreasonable assumption), the protagonists were able to carve out spaces for change, solidarity and hope.
- **People will, and should, disagree on what is a desirable future.** Discussing desirable futures is in fact the essence of what politics is about. There is no reason why young people should agree about them more than their elders! The best can expect from the group effort can be to create images of the future where different values can cohabit, and in the reflexive phase at the end, to allow participants to debate their respective views of what is and isn't desirable in a constructive way. Whereas, when the constraint to tell positive futures weighs too heavily, participants will often oblige by producing bland stories where things magically go right, with no trade-off nor major difficulties, removing most of the complexity that is such a central concept of Futures Literacy.
- **It is more interesting, and more difficult, to help participants move away from the "tropes" coming out of the entertainment industry.** Young participants have all been exposed to movies, TV series, video games, novels and comics full of fancy technologies, savior heroes, "Big Brother" or Terminator-like technologies, etc. This is where an open co-creation process, mostly directed by the needs to produce a good (shareable) story and media production, can help: by giving space to the imagination of all participants, by letting characters and stories unfold in unexpected ways, by leaving space for fun, etc.
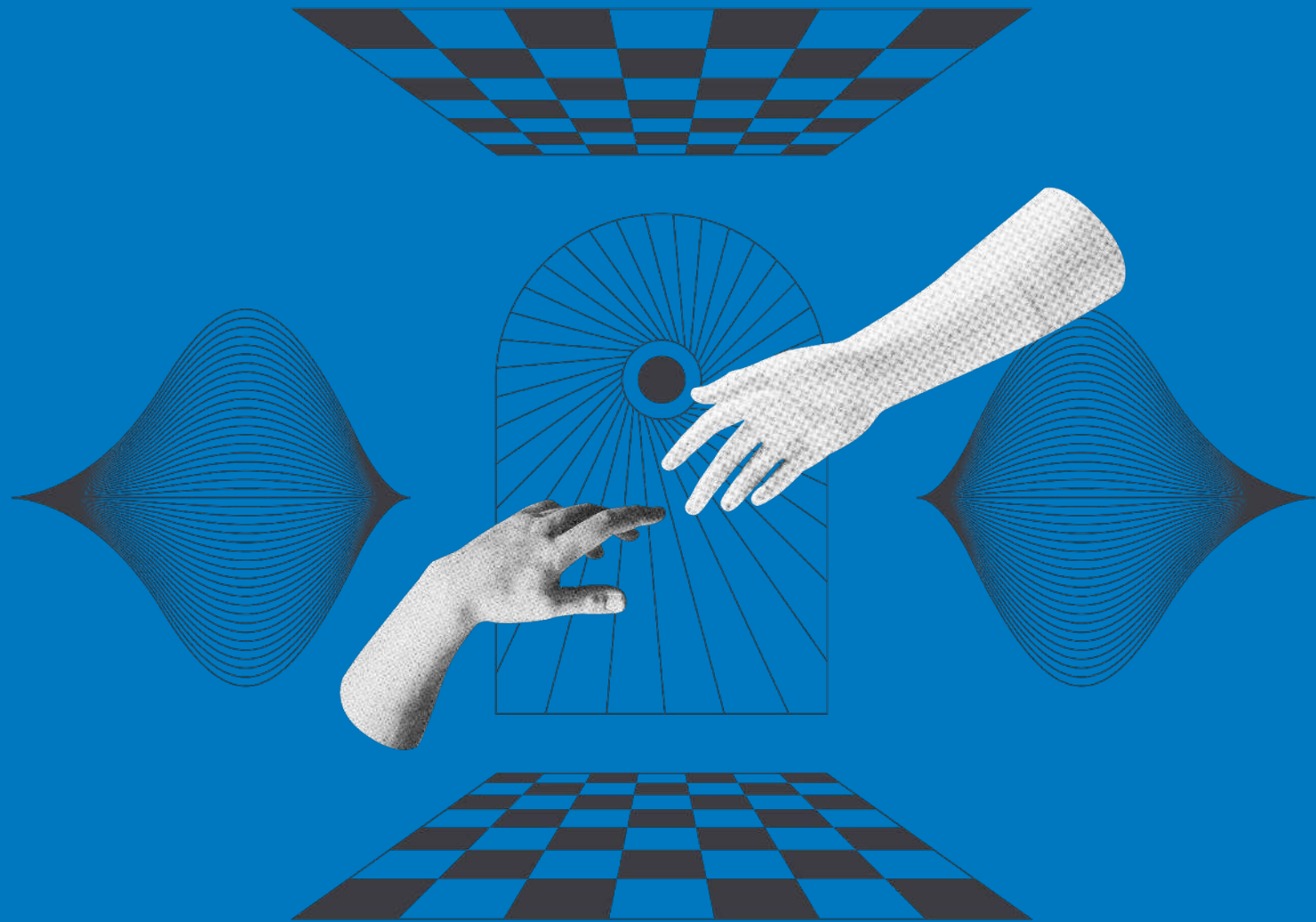
# PART 3: NOW WHAT?

True to the project's ethos, we have tried to imagine the futures of the project itself. However, it would not have been consistent with our approach to tell a single story. We therefore asked all the project's main coordinators to write a story of a future that the "Future Is Now" project had somehow changed - preferably in the first person, like a story in which they are personally engaged.

We share this as an invitation to all readers to think of Futures Literacy as an invitation to continuously imagine and reimagine new and alternative possibilities.

Click and discover

Chloé Luchs-Tassé

Alexandra Kurišová

Khushboo Balwani

Soňa Turanová

Ellen Anthoni

Alena Tomanová

Daniel Kaplan

Click and discover

Lilia Raikhline

# Alena Tomanová's Future

*Organization: Youthwatch*

**August 27, 2050**

Today, I'm on AR! I'm proud of my former participants, with whom I experimented with futures literacy in Slovakia almost 30 years ago. A few of them were so captivated by it that they studied Futures Studies abroad, and some continued experimenting with the future in practice. They developed a program that now has 120,000 viewers and engages over 50,000 people. I remember when the talk show "Under the Lamp" first aired, addressing societal issues. It was so different from the usual political debates we used to watch. Philosophical discussions started entering everyday households. They've not only brought philosophical discussions into the mainstream but also future-oriented ones, collecting innovative ideas and perspectives that help us envision tomorrow in new ways.

How the world, time, and technology have progressed! Some of the youngsters I worked with are now adults, and they created the "Blueprint for the Future" show. I'm so grateful to them. It's fantastic that today's viewers are not just passive recipients but can actively participate, co-creating the future through the method of crowdsourcing Future Scenarios. The show allows viewers to contribute ideas for possible future scenarios. Using AR technology, viewers can visualize these ideas in their own home environments, interacting with these elements in real-time.
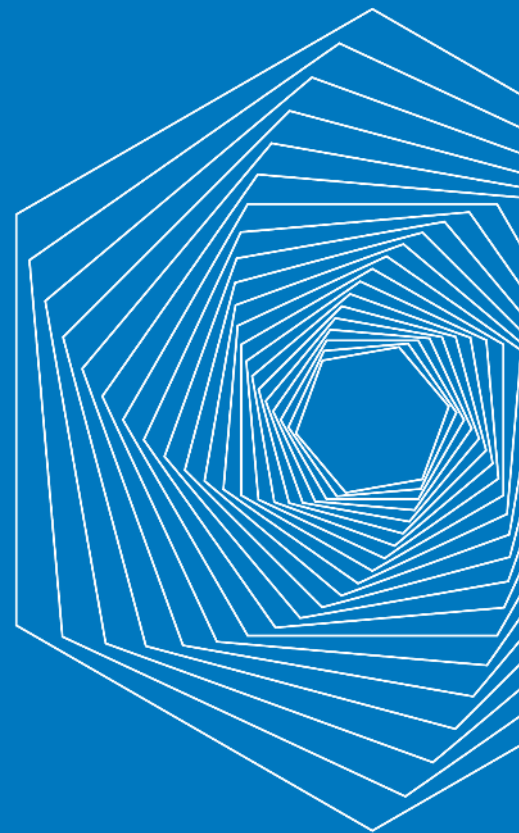
Hmmm, I need to hurry up and create a suitable digital outfit since I've been invited today. I'm still wondering why I was called to debate the topic *"What if education were tailored to the genetic predispositions of individuals?"* Why didn't they invite someone younger with a fresh perspective instead?

The mantra of the day is:
Don't be annoyed by stupid ideas from educAItion.
Don't get pissed off by AI.
Don't get pissed off by AI ideas.

Anyway, I'm very curious to see what today's collaborative imagination from others involved will bring to the topic.
Thanks, self-reflective diary, that's enough for today.

*End of recording.*

# Daniel Kaplan's Future

*Organization: Plurality University Network*

**Futures Literacy Test**
Duration: 3 hours.
Individual (no interaction between pupils, either on- or offline).
Choose between:
- Essay: Benefits and limitations of scenario methodologies in futures studies
- Thematic: Imagine and justify 3 scenarios for the future of education in Slovakia.
- Professional: Write a trend report for a Korean cosmetics firm.

- Pfff. Futures Literacy is sooooooo hard and boring!

- I know! And so useless.

- Right. Things never happen as planned, anyway.

- And there are so few jobs in futures studies, so why do we need this? We'd be better off doing biotech, or game design, or permaculture.

\*
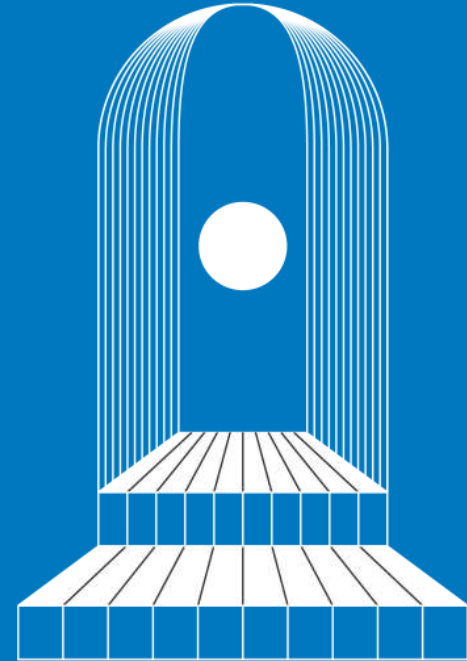
I feel responsible. I was so proud in the mid-2020s, when I saw that the movement initiated by the Future Is Now project, as well as a few other similar initiatives, led to the rapid spread of Futures Literacy in education, as well as a real "Futures fad" everywhere. Suddenly, every country wanted their Ministry of the Future, every company laid out its Future Vista, and again, every school had their Futures Literacy curriculum. What we didn't foresee – hah! – was how this movement would immediately be captured by professional futurists. They created an absurdly heavy curriculum for schools, requiring more and more hours and teachers that had to be taken out from other disciplines – and resulting in high failure rates on the part of students. They populated the ministries and other specialized offices. They monopolized the field of futures. So the result was the opposite of what we had hoped. The future was, more than ever, a thing for specialists and gurus.

Therefore, in 2045, we – Alena, Ellen, Lilia, Sona, Alexandra, Khushboo, Chloé, myself (duly pumped up with neurostimulators), and a few younger others, had to take on the mantle again. We called the project: The Future FOR ALL Is Now. The goal: to remove the chokehold specialists had on Futures Literacy and turn it into what it should always have been, a capability that is accessible to all and useful in their daily life, in their learning journeys, for collective debate and decision, etc.

Experimenting with a small network of innovative schools, we dismantled the Futures courses and put futures in every other discipline: history (with uchronia), geography (mapping future effects of climate change, for example), literature (incorporating SF into reading requirements), math (predictive models, probabilities), economics (anticipation & risks), natural science (systems thinking), etc. Instead of being a discipline, Futures Literacy became a way of dealing with multidisciplinarity, complexity, uncertainty – and disagreements; a way of learning that yielded both disciplinary knowledge (in order to write uchronia, you must understand history), and skills for research, cooperation, debate, imagination, problem-solving, etc. The results were so overwhelmingly positive that the new movement spread rapidly in Europe's education systems. By 2050, hardly any education system had kept its separate Futures Literacy curricula. Those thousands of teachers who had been diverted from their discipline of choice in order to teach futures could get back to what they knew best and just teach it differently, with some "futures inside". They, and the kids, loved it.

We tried to do the same to the Ministries of the Future. We wanted to dismantle them so that every ministry, and every department within them, had to become Futures literate. Here, we had mixed results. In some countries, it worked and civil servants of all specialties realized a "Futures angle" added so much meaning to their daily work. In others, the resistance was just too strong: the Ministry of the Future was perhaps the last of all ministries whose competency was unchallenged by civil society – probably because nobody understood what they were doing, but none the same, that was a good place to be as an autistic politician or civil servant, and they did not let go.

I really believe that this time, we did move close to our initial goal. Also, it was cool to gather the dream team again after all these years. Maybe what we did will have its own unintended consequences. However, I won't be around to deal with them the next time...
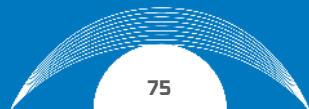
# Lilia Raikhline's Future

*Organization: BrusselAvenir*
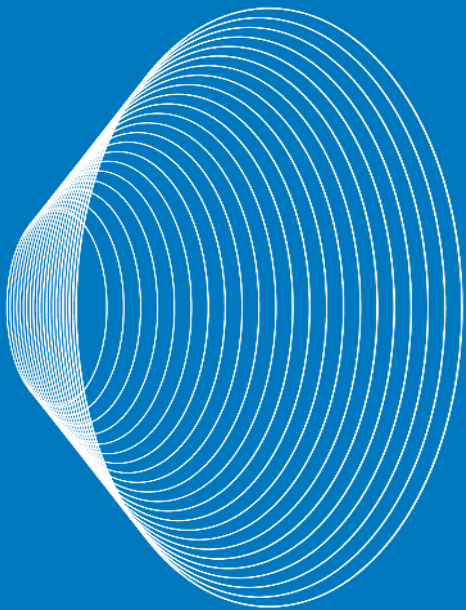
**August 20, 2050.**

I'm back in Brussels from a long journey with my triplets and my wife.  Like every time I arrive at Central Station after a long journey, I cry when I see the big stairs again. I cry too easily. Then... I take a look around and notice that it's empty and that all the station walls have been repainted white. Strange... I leave the station, look up at the sky, and realize that it too... has been painted white...

I don't recognize Brussels anymore. There are flying white BMWs, flying white drones, flying white flags.  The Carrefour opposite the station has closed. It's now called Turfour, and sells white food packed in metal cages, with a special butterfly-shaped one for white bananas. All the homeless people of the neighborhood are gone. Most of the buildings have been destroyed and replaced with white buildings that reach up to the sky. The streets are empty and... white.  I exchange a quick confused look with my partner.
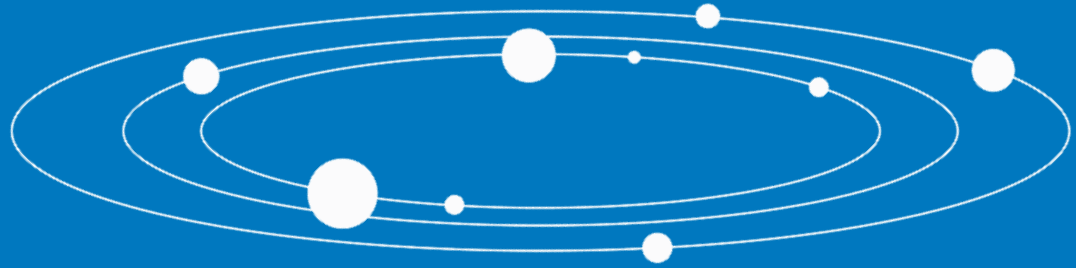
I don't have a second to lose, I've got to figure out what's going on. I leave my partner and triplets on the street and kiss them goodbye, tell them that I'll be back soon and hurry. I run to the old bike parking lot but it has disappeared. And as there are no buses, trams and metros anymore, I'm forced to take an eVehicle. A white flying Bolt slows down in front of me. The door opens: there's a white robot chauffeur, and a white smell. I'm heading to Schuman. The white robot looks at me suspiciously but takes the order. I arrive dripping wet in front of Khushboo's building. I ring the doorbell once, twice, thrice. Until she opens the door. I rush up the stairs (because I'm still too scared of elevators), and discover Khushboo at the door. She is surprised to see me.

I ask her where Ellen is and what's going on in Brussels. She tells me that Ellen has long since become a potato seller in the south of France, and that she's about to leave BruTur to join her. BruTur? But what about Brussels? Khushboo, glancing left and right in fear, lets me in. She explains that a new politician had come on the scene who, in the last elections, had promised to create a Brussels of the future. She had discovered the Future is Now project, and had contacted Ellen and Khushboo in the hope of collaborating in the creation of a Brussels of the future. Khushboo was intrigued by this vision and agreed to meet her, but soon realized that she carried a very closed vision of the future, and was not open to promoting the diversity of discourse that the Future Literacy promotes. Khushboo had hoped that she wouldn't win the elections, but here she is, four years in power and she's turned Brussels into some sort of Slessurb...

# Ellen Anthoni's Future

*Organization: BrusselAvenir*

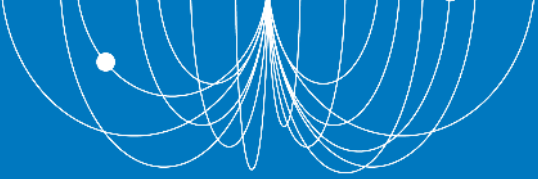**Sunday, 4 of April 2050, 2PM, 45 degrees, the French countryside.**

I'm printing a meal for my 12-year old, for whom I can't cook because of their 28 different allergies. Suddenly I get transported back to the first time I thought of food printers, working on the 2040 Slessurb Show.

Those were the days! It was one of those stories that we created in the Future is Now, the project in which we merged fields and practices with YouthWatch and Plurality University. Our dreams and ambitions were high these days.

It wasn't easy in that era to gather young people. The youth houses were empty after covid. Many kids were at home, depressed, scrolling on TikTok, one of the first Chinese social media platforms that hijacked a whole generation's mind. We had to lure them into making music, video, radio, to get their attention, and make them think about the future. Our meticulously prepared workshops always ended as messy chaotic processes. Sharing the stories was the cherry on the pie. The participants were so proud to show their friends and family their work. And with the Shitshow 2065 we even won the Brussels podcast award. Our stories became conversation starters in schools, in debates, on online platforms, or even to collectives that responded to the 20:40 Slessurb Show with 'Wohs Brussels 04:02'. After years of hard work, we finally got invited by the King, a childish dream of Khushboo and I.
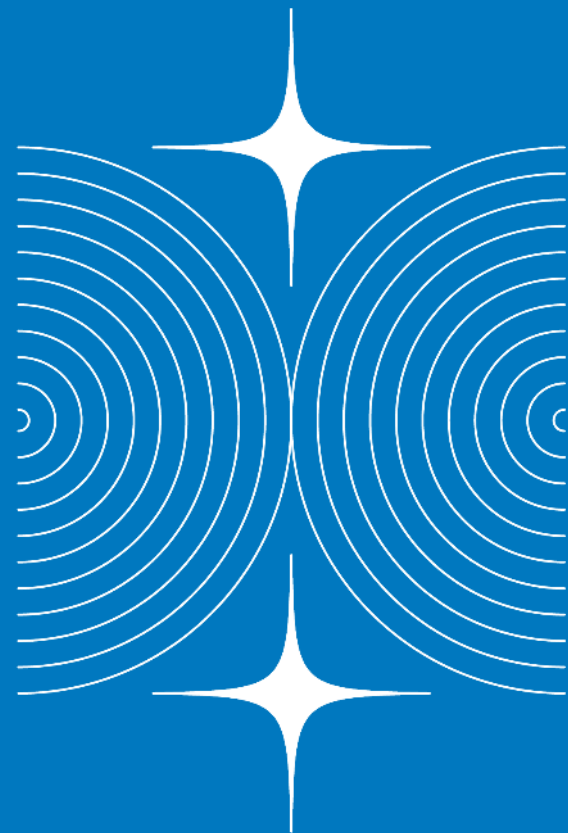
And oh... we were so happy to see that many other organisations started doing futures practices. It was in the air. But what was predicted and feared by many of us, happened. Futures thinking became the new design thinking. And then futures fiction became the new futures thinking. Just like Elon Musk swore to the *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (A novel and BBC radio comedy by Douglas Adams (1978))*, every political party and social movement had their own Science Fiction Bible – some creepier than others – that would guide them in taking decisions and planning their strategies. It was interesting for comparative analysis, but most people didn't get further than understanding what their own bubble was about.

Insane budgets were spent on direct neural media consumption, that members of the political movements signed up for, when the risks of this kind of brain manipulation wasn't known yet. New party members would be written into the stories and get a personalized AI driven narrative, based on their health, mood and environment at the moment of consuming the media. In gatherings of the movements there would be interactive holographic performances, where you could shoot at the ears of deepfake versions of political opponents, a trend that long survived Donald Trump himself. Futures fiction experiences had reached unprecedented levels of detail and complexity, from hyper-realistic simulations to complex, adaptive narratives. And while there were many initiatives, with good intentions, unfortunately most of them became mass manipulation tools for political gain.

For years we tried to create awareness around the use of futures fiction, and we developed methods and practices to decolonize the futures. But honestly, what did we reach with it.

'I am not hungry, mapa. My body itches again.'

'Do you prefer an infuse?'

'Yes.'

I put their infuse and go to my sewing desk. The storm of last Friday ruined the left side of our yurt, so I am repairing the sides for the third time this year.

Handwork became a necessary practice to process my thoughts. Sometimes I'm sad to see how big money organisations took over the futures fiction practice. But I've moved on. And the good thing is that it made a plethora of sustainable solutions available. With the Synthescope, our futures fiction scanner, we filter out the regenerative solutions for earth and society out of all the stories that we can scrape, we gather collectives around them and put them into practice. Many of our team are former participants of our futures fiction team. Dreamers that got hooked on the collective creation, and became friends for life.

# Soňa Turanová's Future

**26.11.2050, Dolný Ohaj, Cottage N.45**

A bright ray of sunlight gently touches my eyelids as I sit up in bed. The house feels so peaceful now that the last of the singers left around 2 a.m. I'm still deeply moved by the thought that so many beautiful souls from around the world remembered my birthday. I stretch my back, close my eyes, and let my mind drift back to the moment when everyone sang to me. Jay did such an incredible job organizing it all without me knowing. Some guests, I longed to hug, but my arms touched only air as their holographic personas smiled at me. Adam, still refusing to give in to technology, only called briefly. Mom, after her data breach scare, flew in herself, unwilling to risk another tech failure.

After the group singing, people had booked different time slots to spend one-on-one time with me. As someone who used to avoid birthday parties, celebrating my 55th this way, with such a diverse and loving group, felt incredibly special. Slowly, I open my eyes, letting them adjust to the bright light, and slip my feet into my roller-skate shoes. Eyes closed again, I let the shoes glide me to the kitchen. My fingers circle around the touch-screen menu as I select the "hangover mix." The machine whirs to life, preparing my personalized herbal tea, and I watch as hot water pours into the cup. I glance out the small kitchen window, where my goats, Róza and Šani, happily graze near the chicken house.

"Ugh, I should clean that," I think to myself. A quick double-tap on the palm, and I watch as the roof of the chicken house lifts and robotic arms begin their cleaning routine. I lean forward, directing the roller-skate shoes to carry me out to the porch, expertly avoiding the remnants of last night's celebration. Once on the porch, I settle into the rocking chair—a gift from Jay ten years ago. It has become the ultimate symbol of comfort for me. I kick off my shoes, lean back, and let the chair cradle me. Breathing deeply, I take in the beauty of life after half a century.
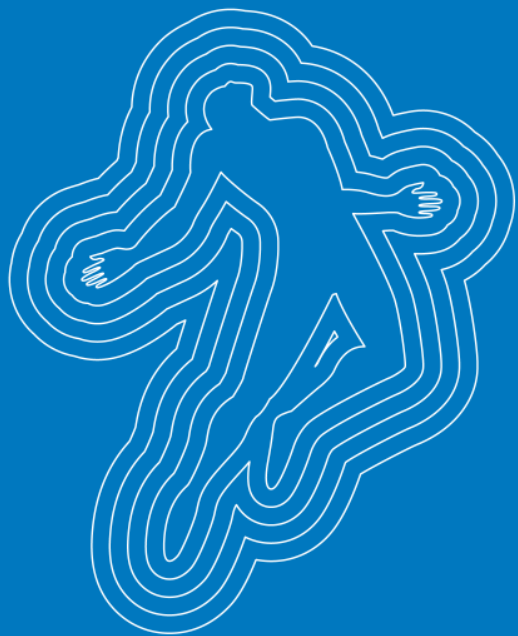
I open my palm, scanning the birthday messages I hadn't had time to read. There are hundreds—old classmates from universities I never finished, colleagues, participants from training sessions, even a few ex-boyfriends. I read each message carefully, and my eyes well up with tears. I am so blessed. SO BLESSED. As I move from platform to platform, only one notification remains unread—my mailbox. I didn't check it yesterday. I wanted to stay away from emails for the day. When I finally tap the app, a list of messages appears—birthday wishes, promotions, conference invitations, reports... then one stands out: "Greetings from 2024."

I pause, then slowly tap the subject line. A retro-looking design starts loading on my palm. It feels warm as if struggling under the weight of this forgotten data. "Dear Me," it begins. Oh my god. I freeze. This can't be real.

My hangover vanishes as I recognize the words. It's a letter I wrote at the end of a futures literacy workshop in 2024. My preparation for that session had been far from ideal. I think it was Tatiana's idea to have the participants write a letter to their future selves. We all wrote down our hopes, our fears, our visions of the future. A boy, Miško, suggested we find an online time capsule service, and we sent those letters off into the digital abyss.

And now, twenty-five years later, here it is.

I can still picture us, sprawled on the carpet at ElfHub, typing out our dreams. My eyes dart across the lines, filling with tears again as I read the words of my younger self. I wished for a future where technology wouldn't isolate us but help us. I prayed that the nature around us wouldn't turn to dust. I even described myself living in a cottage with two goats—I laugh at how specific that was—and chickens. I imagined having a husband and still being surrounded by people in their physical bodies, only relying on holograms for those I couldn't see otherwise. I hoped for shared bikes rather than flying cars, and that society would become more democratic and connected, despite the trends at the time suggesting otherwise.

I rush through the text the first time, eager to reach the end. Then, I read it slowly, carefully, letting the vision of my younger self sink in. When I finish, I stare at my palm, the lines blurring with tears. It all came true. I shake my head in disbelief. All of it. I sit there, rocked by the weight of what the letter represents.

Futures literacy wasn't about predicting the future—it was about imagining it. Shaping it. In those workshops, we didn't just passively wonder what might be; we actively created pathways for the future we wanted. The seeds we planted in 2024 have blossomed into my present reality, and I'm living proof that the future is what we dare to envision. The power of imagining our futures is real, and it's woven into the fabric of my life.

I lean back in my chair, gazing at the world I helped create, and I smile.

# Alexandra Kurišová's Future

*Organization: Youthwatch*

It is the year 2050. I'm looking through a small round window as we are approaching the planet Earth. I recall how, at the end of the project "The Future is Now" in 2024, I promised myself that I would travel the entire world. I never imagined that it wouldn't be just planet Earth.

In my hands, I hold a holographic invitation to something extraordinary: a Congress on Futures Literacy. A topic that, in Slovakia in 2024 - the world was still divided to countries -, was still in its early stages. Now it has become a key element of global thinking and planning.

Approaching Earth's atmosphere, I am thinking about the times in 2021 when we eagerly explored and discussed this topic. It was a new and exciting idea with the potential to change how we view the future. Back then, in Slovakia, we were just translating the first terms, searching for the right words to explain concepts that were foreign and unfamiliar to many. The future, for many of us, was intangible, something we often took for granted and frequently ignored.

As I pass through the atmosphere and my ship nears the landing platform in one of the new eco-cities, Earth is a completely different place than when I left it. Technology and nature have finally united in harmony here. Large cities, which once dominated the skyline, are now vertical gardens where life intertwines with sustainability. Energy sources are renewable, and technologies that once required big amounts of energy now operate with minimal impact on the planet. People have learned to think long-term. Futures Literacy is no longer just a theory but a foundation of education, planning, and daily life. Children learn from an early age not only how to read and write but also how to analyze various future scenarios and prepare for them. This approach has changed the way humanity solves problems. Because of it, we have avoided many crises that could have otherwise seriously threatened Earth and humanity.

I step into the congress hall, an architectural phenomenon, a combination of art, nature, and technology. Here, I meet people from all over the world who are experts in Futures Literacy, as well as representatives from planets we've only recently discovered and settled. The discussions at the congress are fascinating. They explore how Futures Literacy has evolved from a concept meant for academia and a few enthusiasts into a global tool that influences politics, economics, ecology, and social relationships. It is not simply about forecasting trends, but about actively creating various futures and preparing for them. As the congress progresses, I realize that I am witnessing something of immense significance. Futures Literacy is no longer just a way to view the future but a way to shape it. We have learned that the future is not something that simply happens, but something we can actively influence. In 2024, we were just beginning to grasp this power, but now, 26 years later, it is our greatest asset.
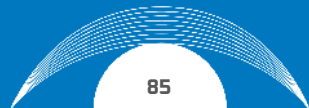
Life in 2050 is not perfect, but it is the result of conscious decision-making and collective effort. We have learned that if we want to create a better world, we must approach the future with an open mind, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt to change. This allowed us not only to survive but to thrive on a planet that is once again full of life and hope.

And so, when I look back to 2024, I see the seed of everything we have achieved. I see how crucial it was to start talking about Futures Literacy and how this seed has grown into a tree that now shelters and guides us into the coming decades.

*Back to the other stories*
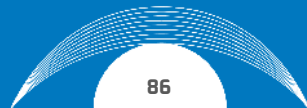
# Chloé Luchs' Future

I walk through the door, and the smell of garlic and rapini hits me. A is probably on cooking duty. I try to head to our quarters as quickly as possible to avoid bumping into anyone after this horrible day. Especially not the new family who just moved in—they're adorable, but I'm really not in the mood for small talk in broken English. Okay, I'm a bitch, so what?

Today was hard. On the 365th day of the "People Against World Government for the Planet's Ecocides" trial, it feels like we're just going in circles. The sense of honor I felt two years ago, when the International Movement announced they were putting together such a big case against the 20 most polluting enterprises, as well as the governments that chose to support them, is slowly giving way to a feeling of utter powerlessness.

I take my shoes off and fall backward into bed, my head is buzzing. I need a drink.  Last week, the trial started gaining a bad type of attention after AllRound Energy was convicted and held responsible for cleaning "100% of the Pacific Ocean from plastic, waste, and any other non-ecological elements that can be a nuisance to any existing life form," with the obligation to "concentrate all task forces on organizing this mission," and of course, "a team of court-assigned 'highly qualified' scientists as well as state-assigned observers to verify, through monthly analysis, the work force as well as the content of the water"—and many other planet related obligation. Many of our multimillionaire leaders got scared…Epsilone Mush decided to invest a lot of energy into making this case look fake online. We are now disappearing from every media and losing against the next case, People against ExCon, for the company being "responsible for removing any sign of pesticides from the planet and developing new organic agricultural innovation this same year, 2050"…   I'm not even sure public opinion is with us anymore, even with all the horrors most of them witnessed and lived last year: earthquakes, fires, droughts, floods… We humans, really, are a stupid species with the memories of goldfish. Even crows learn from events more than us….
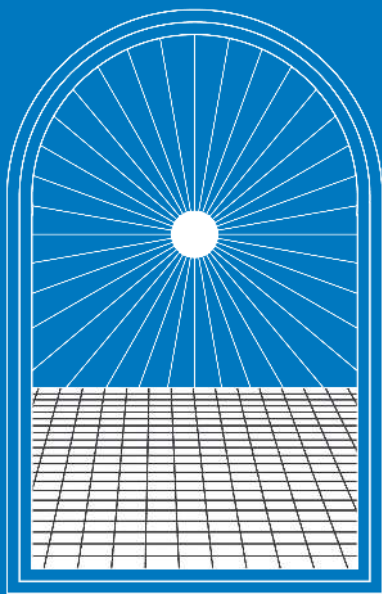
My phone beeps. I received a message from an unknown number on my encrypted app:

"Hey, we've been following what you guys are doing, and we just wanted to say that our organization is with you. We will do everything in our power to make sure this trial goes through and that all of the convicted parties are held accountable. Stay strong. CFPP."

The CFPP (Collective for a Planet Free from Pollution) is a very well-organized, growing international movement made up of hackers, activists, thinkers, citizens, etc. Pretty much all humans who want to restore the planet into a livable ecosystem. They are known for using all types of methods—conventional, unconventional, legal, and illegal—to bring down any activities that are not planet-friendly - at any cost.

"By the way, you might not remember me or us, but we took part in the Futures Literacy training that happened in France many years ago. The group stayed in touch, and we have been working on building this network for the last 25 years. We follow what you are doing, and we stand with you. Cheers."

I sit back up and put my shoes back on.

*Back to the other stories*

# Khushboo Balwani's Future

*Organization: BrusselAvenir*

9 November 2050, Psiloritis, Crete 9:30am

I arrive in front of the gigantic statue of the old hu(man) of Crete. The top of the statue is crafted of gold, silver and bronze, it shines and stands strong. The weight of this promising sculpture is borne by one foot, the right one, that is made of terracotta and is slowly cracking and decaying with tears. I realise my eyes are wet too. Isn't the mythical figure a metaphor for the state of the world today?

While climbing the peak early this morning, I witnessed the ravages of the climate crisis. Wildfires that are a regular occurrence, have turned our forests into a graveyard. The electricity grids are failing in Europe and blackouts have become part of our lives. I suddenly cannot help but recall the disarray of July 2041, when the Internet infrastructure drowned in saltwater and the rare earth minerals needed to maintain the physical web became inaccessible. Unsurprisingly this caused widespread fear, disappearance of everyday reference points and confusion. Finally it was a collapse of not just ecological but also human systems.

I was hoping to practise some silence today, but my brain cannot stop thinking. How will I win the challenge of staying quiet in the 'FuturesStrike'game? The game has the popularity of Pokemon. A Human and a Spirit are two players in the game. The Human has to capture the Spirit and transport it to a given destination. On the way, there are several speculative prompts about futures. The Spirit starts narrating a futures story, concluding with a question. The Human is required to listen, not interrupt, not ask any questions or give any answers. Sounds easy, right? But only 7 people have won in the past 2 years since its conception. Kalki, my daughter, is one of them and the rest 6 are also of her generation. Well, they are good at fighting the virus of opinions. My generation and the following one lost that battle.

Some claim that the game was developed as a response to the commercialisation of futures. From participatory futures to the corporate colonisation of futures narratives, imagining futures became a trend and a battle of opinions around imagination. I wonder if we weren't a tiny bit responsible for it.

Unknowingly, my hand goes in my pocket and touches my phone. The phone says "Hello, you are on a retreat of 3 days of silence. Are you sure you want me to wake up? Your family, friends and colleagues will get to know". My willpower is ruined anyway with all the rumination in my brain since this morning. I reply to the phone "Please wake up in the incognito voice mode only." A flow of messages starts beeping, ready to be played:

**Mom:** Khushboo, what are you up to? Is it today or tomorrow your birthday? This morning at the Shiva temple I finally saw my bhavishyavani (prophecy) written on the grass. Only I could see it, but when I asked Hema to read it, she couldn't see anything. I told you the other day but you didn't believe me. Slowly, everyone is receiving prophecies from gods in different temples. Can you come to India? Sooner the better...

**A photo memory:** photo taken on 19 December 2025 in Brussels Belgium, somewhere close to Saint Catherine square. There is Ellen, Lilia, Ilya and you in this photo. The background wall is a space blue colour with a 'Back to the Future' logo on it. You all are laughing in this photo. "Pause!" I ask the phone. Instantly I knew it was the day of the launch of 'Maison de BrusselAVenir'.
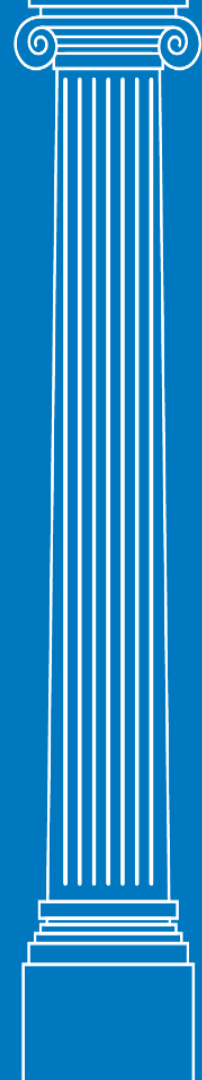
What a day it was. After completing the Future is Now project, Ellen and I knew Futures as a field had to be physically present somewhere in the city. In the following three years the space became a popular hotspot for Brusseleirs to hang out, to talk about futures, to experience immersive exhibitions where people were transported to the worlds of 2050, 2060, once we even made a voyage to the year 2108. For the first time, we actually managed to host a diverse (age, gender, cultures, class..) audience under the same roof and imagine plural futures. More than anything else, we brought fun and laughter back to our everyday lives.  Lilia and Ilya, the young folks who crossed our paths thanks to the Erasmus + project 'Future is Now' played an important part in the conception and running of the space. Later on, when the extreme right got elected in the 2029 elections, the funding for the space stopped. However Ilya and Lilia continued the mission and opened a virtual space of "La Maison de BrusselAVenir", thanks to the highest funded crowdfunding campaign of Belgium. Ellen and I retired that year, well not fully from work but from BrusselAVenir. The virtual space became very popular and somewhat addictive, more popular than the social media platform Tik-Tok, something that we were not necessarily proud of.

Dev: Ma, happy birthday! I miss you, our child was born this morning at 4:07am. You have no idea how thrilled I'm that they share their birthday with you and they even look like you, haha! Can't wait to see you in 3 days for their naming ceremony. I love you.

I look up at the clear blue sky and start smiling with immense joy. I cannot help but wonder how Dev used 'they' for their newborn. Now, gender attribution is something that happens later in a child's life, they choose and of course it can change and it stays fluid..

An email: Your talk 'Unschooling as a way forward' has one million views today.

I ask the phone to pause to remember the past. Raising children in the 2030s became very scary. The education system didn't make any sense with the times we were living in. In 2031, when Dev was 11 years old and Kalki 8, I felt they were being pushed to become like tools - perfect and polished. With information being everywhere and often misunderstood as knowledge, everything became banal. A real crisis of authenticity. More than ever, children were having a hard time making any mistakes. It was scary to see what a faithless society we were becoming. We chose unschooling as a way and we were lucky to be able to do it here in Crete. However, is that a real substitute for the education system? I have my doubts. Maybe that is a reflection for a sequential talk.

I start to feel restless around my wrist and realise it is because of the watch I'm wearing. For the first time ever I am wearing a watch. Recently I felt I was losing the sense of time, something I was never good at anyway. And it is already 11am! I need to be at Labyrinth in 10 minutes. Labyrinth, a socio-mythic-spiritual collective, emerged five years ago from a meeting circle around faith. Some rumours on the island say we are reviving an ancient religion, others say an Indian cult is taking over...  Well, cannot blame them, we are numerous and mysterious. We meet, we reflect, we do oral storytelling around futures, we learn how to care and plant trees on birthdays. I have chosen a fig tree for my birthday.

# CONCLUSION

Collectively creating futures fiction appeared to be an interesting way to bring futures literacy to young people. The combination of playful imagination, collective creation, and critical thinking, while envisioning and exploring possible futures, was surprisingly enthusing for the participants. It helped to train the participants' "Futures Literacy muscles", it created a space for deep thought and discussion about societal issues, and it resulted in stories that can be the starting point for more imagination and conversation. It isn't only an enthusing learning activity for young people, it also contributes to making the voices of young people heard, and contributes to diversifying the images of the future in our society.

*"This experience reinforced my belief in not relying on specific future scenarios. The training highlighted that anything can happen, and circumstances can change rapidly. As a result, I focus on the present and strive to behave in a way that positively influences the future to the best of my ability."* **— Training Participant, Paris, France**

*"Thinking about the future more and with other people has made me reflect on how little our generation has been taught to do this. We grew up "after the end of history" and have simply been told there is no future for us. It was interesting and hopeful to speak with people and find new perspectives together."* **— Training Participant, Paris, France**

"I enjoyed reflecting and listening to others to understand what we consider the most important topic for the future. We had the opportunity to hear scenarios with a potentially positive outcome for the future, which gave us hope that such a result is indeed possible."
**— Training Participant, Bratislava, Slovakia**

"Futures Literacy training has motivated me to continue my work. I observed how young people think about the future and the different visions and scenarios we have. I'm not afraid to think about the future, nor to continue with activities using the future. Young people are amazing, and I am grateful that we reflected on the future together." **— Training Participant, Poprad, Slovakia**
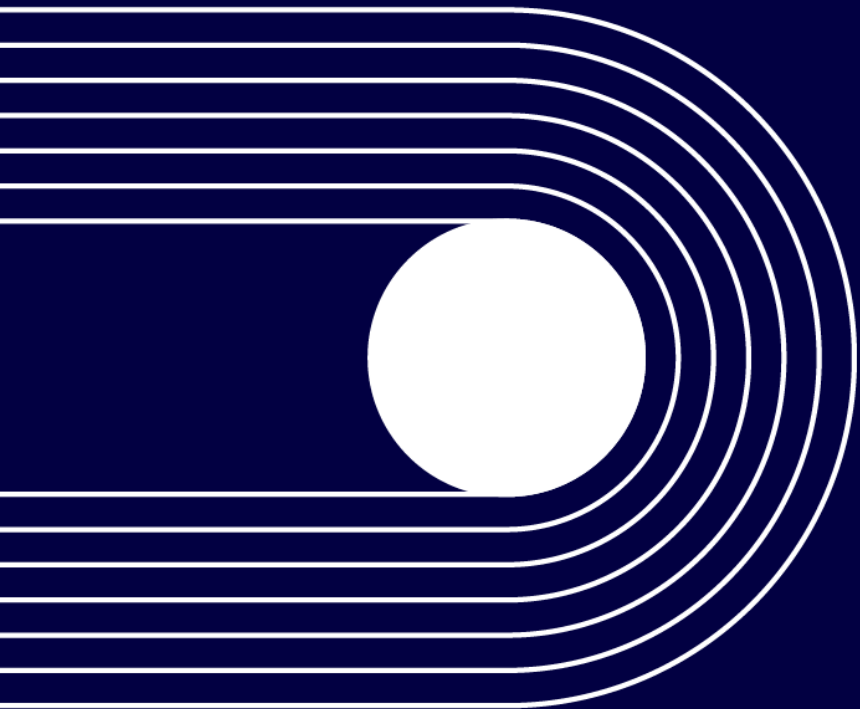
"It was the first time ever that I imagined myself so concretely in the future. It helps to better understand where I want to go."
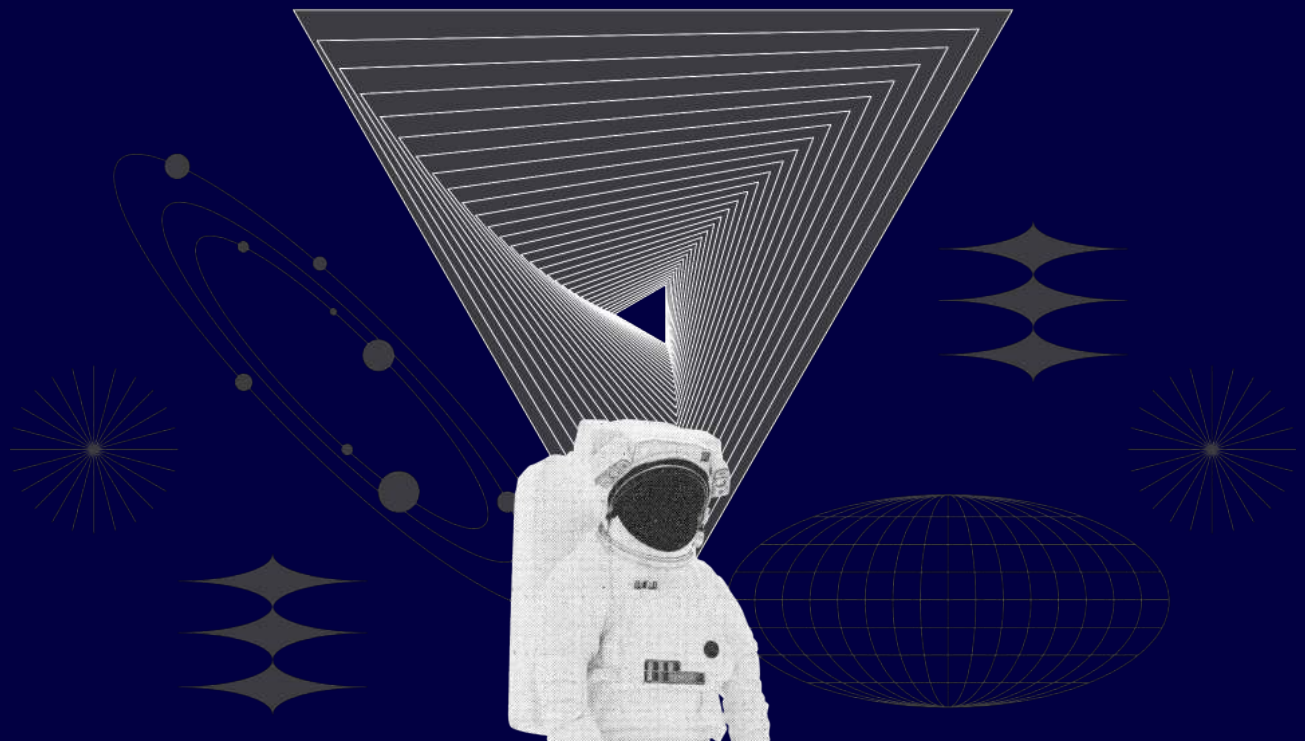**— Training Participant, Brussels, Belgium**

"Thinking about the future of Brussels, changed my relationship with her. I am more hopeful now, and feel more affection for the city."
**— Training Participant, Brussels, Belgium**