

D1.2 Compendium of participatory foresight methods for planning the 15-minute city

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1. Executive summary

Exploring Participatory Foresight: Youth, Proximity Cities, and Urban Futures

This document introduces the concept of participatory foresight, a collaborative approach to imagining and shaping future scenarios, and explores its relevance to contemporary urban planning. By linking participatory foresight with the emerging idea of the proximity city, a model of urban living that prioritizes local access and community connections, it highlights the importance of including youth voices in the design of future urban environments.

This text, in the form of an accessible compendium oriented towards urban government authorities, aims to provide an accessible entry point to these interconnected ideas, encouraging reflection on how inclusive, forward-thinking planning can lead to more liveable, equitable cities.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the compendium

Considering the increasing uncertainty and volatility of social, environmental, political, and economic drivers that influence how cities are planned and experienced, the present compendium aims to provide a practitioner-level entry into the world of the future of cities. For this purpose, the concepts of participatory foresight and proximity city are mobilized.

1.2. Context

In this document, both concepts are defined, and their relationship is understood as follows:

Participatory foresight is an approach that engages diverse stakeholders, such as local civil society, city administration, businesses, in the process of envisioning and shaping future scenarios. By incorporating a wide range of perspectives, it fosters collaborative decision-making and empowers people to actively contribute to shaping the future of the space they live in, and in consequence, their own life. In the context of proximity cities, participatory foresight plays a crucial role in ensuring that urban spaces are designed to be more sustainable, liveable, and, particularly, inclusive.

This approach allows individuals and organizations to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, rather than merely reacting to them. By identifying emerging trends and potential disruptions early, foresight supports better decision-making, risk management, and strategic planning. It empowers proactive responses, helping to shape preferred outcomes and avoid undesirable surprises in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world.

In a proximity city, residents can meet most of their daily needs, work, education, healthcare, recreation, within a short walk, public transport, or bike ride from their homes. Participatory foresight helps by facilitating the co-creation of urban planning strategies that reflect the needs and desires of the community. It allows for a shared vision that integrates social, environmental, and economic factors, ensuring that the transition to proximity cities is inclusive, equitable, and resilient to future challenges. Through this participatory process, cities can design more adaptive and human-centred urban environments.

Given the focus of the CONIFER research project to youth participation, the present compendium not only provides examples and case studies of participatory foresight with young citizens and NGOs but equally advances recommendations on future participatory initiatives.

1.3. Goals of this compendium

Clarify and explore the application of the participatory foresight concept in the context of proximity cities.

Inform how participatory foresight can be used to involve young people in the construction of future scenarios for proximity cities.

1.4. Methodology

The present compendium adopts the following methodology:

- Systematic review of existing research on participatory foresight and proximity city concepts;
- Identification and analysis of best practices in proximity city planning and youth-oriented participatory foresight processes;
- Stakeholder mapping through policy analysis, expert consultation, and participatory engagement (through document analysis and interviews).

2. Participatory foresight

2.1. What is participatory foresight?

Participatory foresight is a collaborative, inclusive process of exploring and shaping possible futures. Unlike traditional foresight, which often relies on experts and technocratic models, participatory foresight invites a wide range of people, including citizens of various age groups, civil society initiatives, and stakeholders to engage in thinking about long[i]. It combines tools such as scenario building, visioning, trend analysis, and creative storytelling with dialogue, co-creation, and collective decision-making. The aim is not just to predict the future, but to democratise the way we plan it, ensuring that diverse voices are heard, and that strategies reflect the real hopes, concerns, and needs of the people most affected by them.

2.2. Why involve children and young people?

Young people are not just the future of society, they are active agents in the present with the ability to shape the world they will inherit[ii]. Their perspectives, creativity, and innovative thinking are crucial in building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities[iii]. Young people are particularly adept at imagining and embracing technological advancements, new forms of social engagement, and sustainable practices, making them ideal contributors to the foresight process[iv].

The use of participatory foresight to engage young people in shaping the future of proximity cities holds several key benefits:

- **Innovation and creativity:** young people have more digital literacy, thus their increased capacity to access information, thus bringing fresh perspectives and a high level of creativity, which can lead to innovative solutions that might not emerge through traditional planning methods.
- **Social inclusion:** Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to decisions that impact their ability to enjoy the city, thus, involving young people in planning processes ensures that the voices of younger generations are heard and considered in shaping the future. Thus, contributing to the dimension of intergenerational justice of long-term strategies. This leads to cities that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all inhabitants, of all ages.
- **Community engagement:** Participatory foresight fosters a sense of community and ownership, as young participants feel that they have a direct role in shaping their environment, from the perspective of young citizens, with specific needs and

preferences. This strengthens the social fabric and intergenerational adequacy of proximity cities.

- **Sustainability and resilience:** young people are particularly attuned to environmental and social challenges, and their involvement can help build cities that are more sustainable and resilient in the face of future crises.

In the context of proximity cities, young people can contribute to answer key questions such as:

- How can we design cities that are environmentally sustainable and resilient to future challenges like climate change?
- What digital tools and platforms can enhance collaboration and create a sense of community in proximity cities?
- How can proximity cities foster social inclusion, equality, and access to opportunities for all members of society?

2.3. Relevance to 15-Minute city planning and mobility

Proximity cities are urban areas designed so that people can access most of their daily needs, like schools, parks, shops, healthcare, and jobs, within a short walk or bike ride from their homes. The 15-minute city is one popular model of this idea, aiming to create more sustainable, inclusive, and liveable neighbourhoods by reducing the need for long commutes and car dependency, thus encouraging local life.

This approach to urban planning values closeness over distance, prioritizing human-scale living and putting people, not cars, at the centre of city design. It supports healthier lifestyles, more vibrant communities, and a smaller environmental footprint[v].

In this context, participatory foresight plays a key role. It involves engaging citizens, including young people, in imagining and co-creating possible futures for their cities. Instead of relying solely on experts, participatory foresight brings diverse voices into planning processes, helping communities explore what kind of future they want and how to get there.

Through creative methods like workshops, storytelling, model-making, or digital tools, people can share their needs, hopes, and ideas. This inclusive approach ensures that proximity cities reflect the values and realities of those who live in them, while increasing acceptance for change among residents and encouraging long-term thinking and resilience in the face of change.

3. Concepts and methodologies

3.1. Concepts

The concepts used in participatory foresight stem from its origins in the futures studies scholarship. Here is a list of the most common concepts:

3.1.1. Concepts that contribute to the delimitation of the foresight process

The concepts of futures, anticipation, futures literacy and VUCA serve as the core of the future studies scholarship[vi], providing the boundaries and description of the context where the foresight process takes place:

Futures (Plural)

The use of the plural "futures" reflects the idea that the future is not fixed — there are multiple possible, probable, and preferable futures. This pluralism encourages open-minded thinking and exploration of different scenarios.

Anticipation

The act of looking ahead and preparing for future developments. In futures thinking, it refers not just to prediction, but to proactive engagement with what might come.

Futures literacy

The capacity to understand, interpret, and use the future in thinking and action. Coined by UNESCO in 2012[vii], it emphasises empowering people to imagine and shape their futures more effectively.

VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity)

A framework to describe the challenging nature of the modern world. Futures thinking helps people to navigate VUCA conditions with greater flexibility and preparedness.

3.1.2. Operational concepts

While the following concepts represent the operational dimension of the foresight process, serving as categorical designations to events or characteristics that are identified during the foresight process.

Drivers of Change

Key forces shaping the future, such as technology, demographics, politics, environment, or culture. Identifying and analysing these helps us understand what might influence future developments.

Trends

Observable patterns of change over time. These can be social, economic, technological, or environmental and are often used as the basis for projecting futures.

Wild Cards

Low-probability but high-impact events such, pandemics, major technological breakthroughs, or natural disasters, that can radically disrupt expected futures.

Signals of change

Early indicators of potential change. These might be emerging technologies, new behaviours, or niche innovations that suggest larger shifts ahead.

Scenarios

Narratives or models of different possible futures, often created to help people imagine how the world might evolve under various conditions. Scenarios are not predictions but tools for thinking.

3.2. Phases of participatory foresight

Stemming from the classic foresight process, the phases of the participatory foresight process are exploration, anticipation and action[viii].

Participatory Foresight Phases

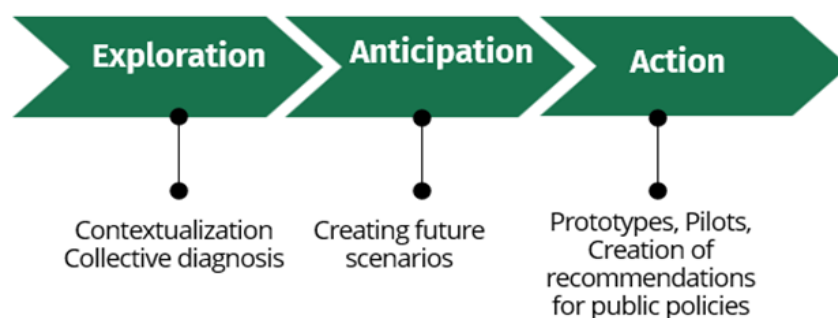


Figure 1: Participatory Foresight Phases @ Authors

Phase 1: Exploration (Diagnostic)

A typical foresight exercise begins with horizon scanning to identify emerging or evolving trends, weak signals and possible disruptions that might affect a country, region, city or policy area, depending on the purpose of the study. It then uses this information to identify the drivers of change shaping the future of the area under study.

Phase 2: Anticipation (Visioning)

The central phase involves developing alternative possible futures that reflect and represent the material gathered and analysed in the horizon-scanning phase. Often, this requires using the different possible outcomes of key drivers to develop a set of future scenarios. Other approaches, such as design fiction and speculative futures, may also be used.

Phase 3: Action (Policy recommendations, Prototyping, Pilot)

Tools such as wind-tunnel testing are used in this phase to understand the implications of the different scenarios and apply them to policy development and strategy formulation. In more dynamic contexts, simulation and gaming approaches can be used to introduce new elements (shocks, wild cards) into the scenarios, usually result in policy recommendations.

At the end of the three phases, the important task of embedding the findings of the work into organizational processes takes place. This will be easier if the initial scoping is clear at the outset on what the subsequent steps should be.

3.3. Methodologies

Participatory foresight blends a variety of creative, strategic, and interactive methodologies to bring people into the process of imagining and shaping the future. On its own, each method is suited to different contexts and objectives. Some of the key methodologies include:

3.1.3. Creative and artistic approaches

Design fiction

Design fiction is a foresight technique that uses speculative storytelling, speculative image or video, and prototype development to explore potential future scenarios, aided or not by artificial intelligence. It encourages stakeholders to engage with emerging technologies and societal shifts.

- **Age Group:** All age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Time depends on the scope of the project

- **Resources Needed:** Depends on the scope of the project
- **Example:** A short story that is set in the future: In that story, all cars will be connected between each other, just like a swarm of bees, sharing among them the best routes, traffic incidents and road conditions.
- **Example 2:** A physical prototype of a new communal transport vehicle, developed with the contribution of artificial intelligence software.

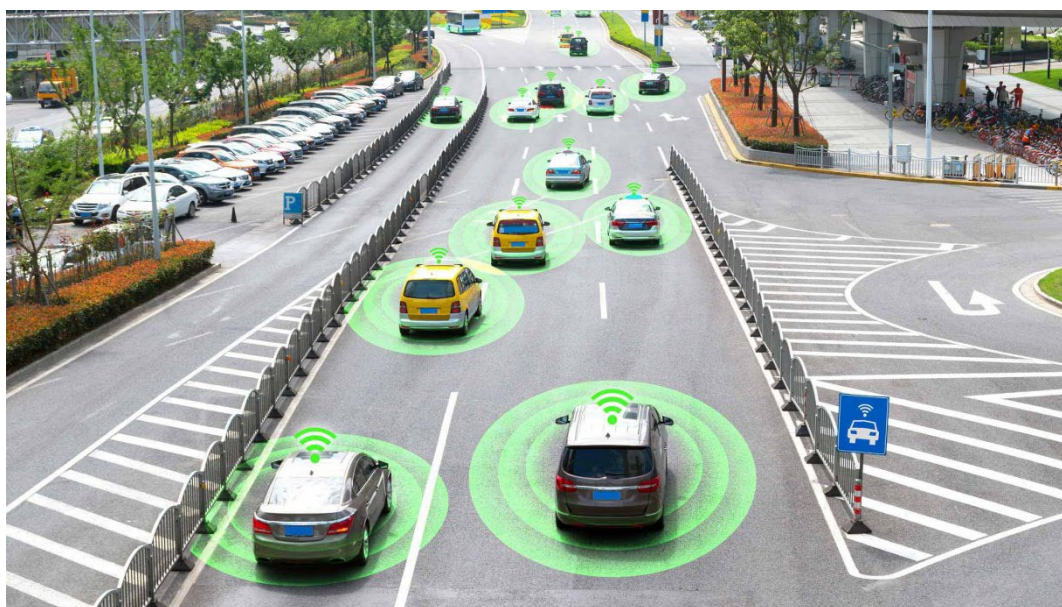


Figure 2: Swarm intelligence concept applied to urban traffic. In this concept, each car is connected with other cars in order to identify the best route, traffic incidents and road conditions, sharing this information with the local traffic authority @ Unsplash

Futures theatre and film

A branch of the speculative theatre genre, future theatre is a creative and immersive storytelling method used to explore possible futures. It combines elements of theatre, role-playing, and speculative design to help people experience and reflect on different scenarios that might unfold based on current trends, technologies, or decisions.

- **Age Group:** All age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Time depends on the script of play or film
- **Resources Needed:** Script
- **Example:** The play "Golem" by 1927 Theatre Company is a multimedia theatre piece that uses live performance with animation and film to explore themes of automation, technology, and control. Loosely based on the Golem myth, it critiques contemporary reliance on technology. The fusion of media and futuristic themes marks it as a key example of future theatre.



Figure 3: Public exhibition of the play "Golem" by the 1927 Theatre Company

3.1.4. Workshops and scenario-building

Backcasting

A goal-oriented method that starts with a preferred future vision and works backward to identify the necessary steps to achieve it. It is useful for long-term planning and sustainability strategies.

- **Age Group:** all age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Approximately 60 minutes
- **Resources Needed:** If in-person, post-its and pens
- **Example:** Defining the necessary steps to create a car-free neighbourhood by 2030.

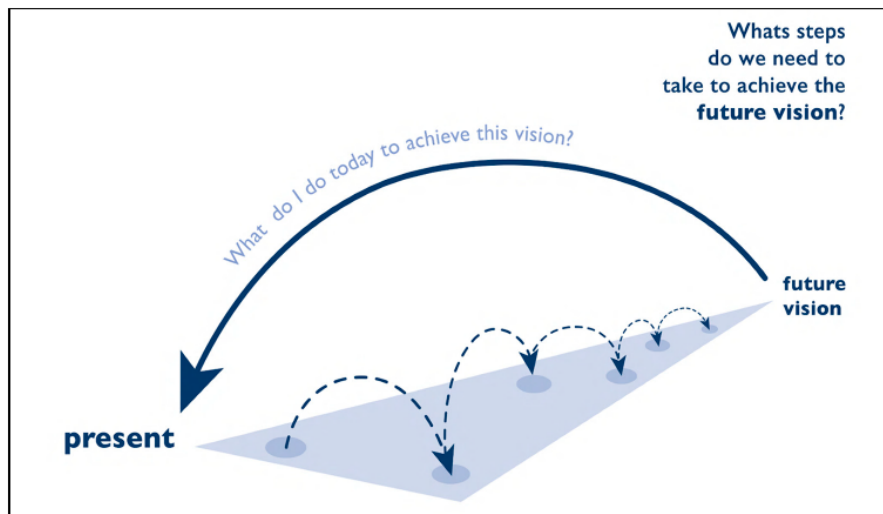


Figure 4: Backcasting visual concept @: Matos et al. (2024)

Causal layered analysis

A deep foresight method that examines surface-level trends, systemic causes, underlying worldviews, and cultural narratives and beliefs. It helps reframe problems and uncover transformative solutions.

- **Age Group:** all age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Approximately 60 minutes
- **Resources Needed:** If in-person, post-its and pens
- **Example:** Questioning the preferences of citizens for private transportation over public transportation.

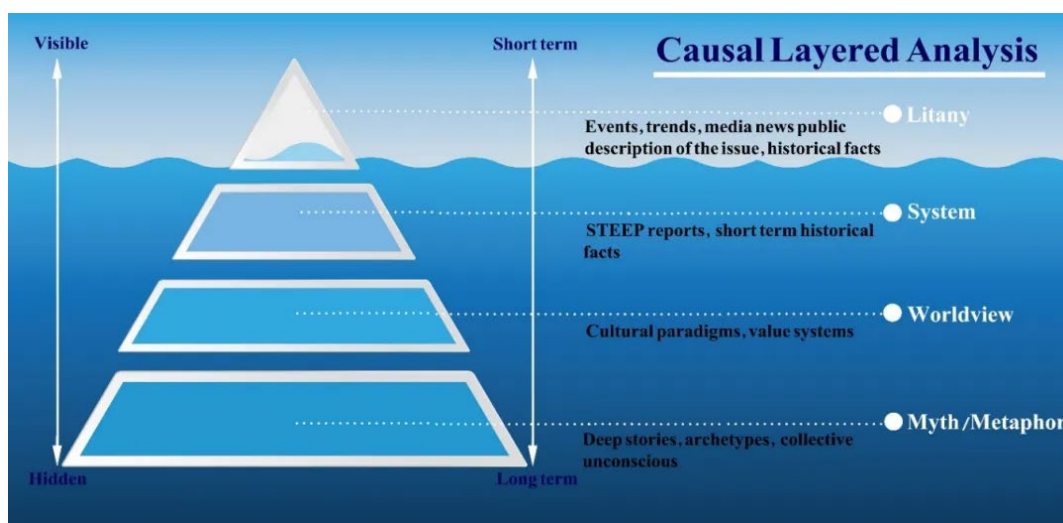


Figure 5: Visual representation of Causal Layered Analysis @ Zackery et al. (2022)

Futures wheel

A visual mapping tool that helps analyse the ripple effects of a specific change or trend. It is useful for identifying indirect consequences and interdependencies in future developments.

- **Age Group:** All age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Around 60 minutes
- **Resources Needed:** If in-person, post-its and pens
- **Example:** After defining a public transportation proposal (e.g., free transportation for children under 18 years old), define the possible consequences of this new policy.

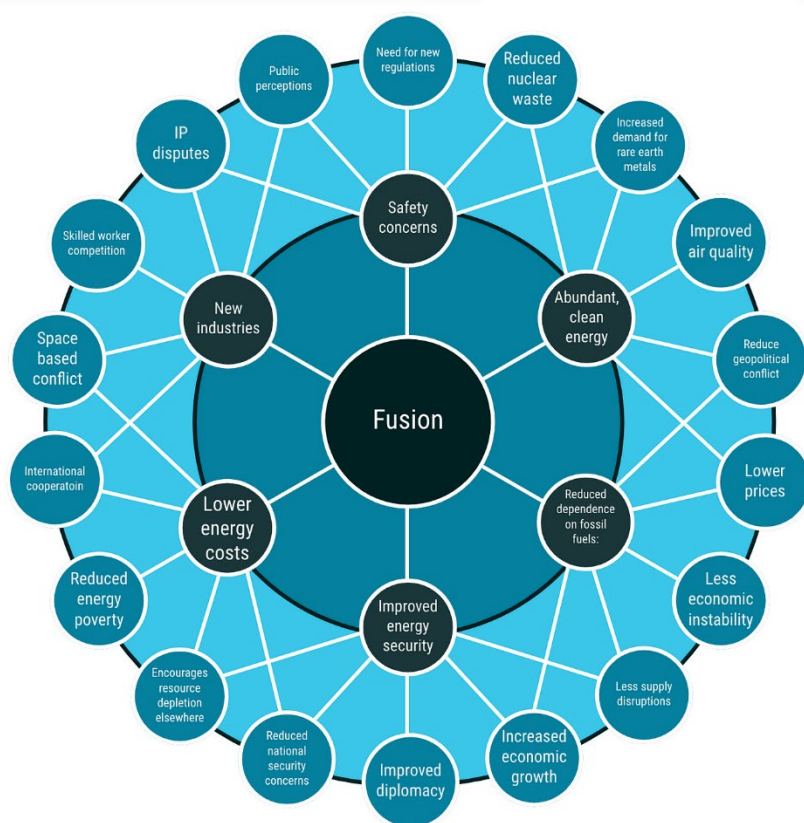


Figure 6: Futures wheel canvas @ Glenn, J. C. (2009).

3.1.5. Digital tools and platforms

Participatory agent-based modelling

A simulation method that models how different actors (individuals, organizations, or systems) behave under various future scenarios. It helps explore emergent trends and decision-making impacts.

- **Age Group:** All age groups
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats

- **Duration:** Time depends on the number of participants and scope
- **Resources Needed:** Computer or tablet and agent based modelling software
- **Example:** Computed simulation of new traffic management for a specific neighbourhood.

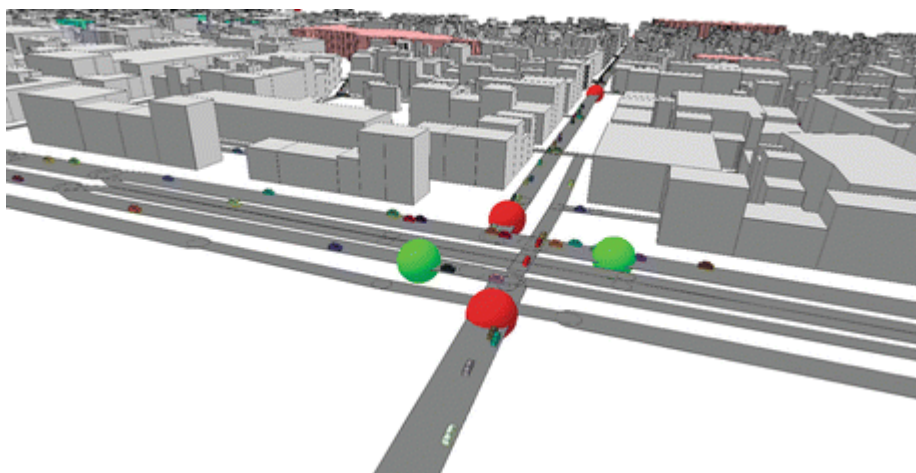


Figure 7: Agent-based modelling of urban traffic, based on data provided by participants @ Czura et al. (2015)

3.1.6. Surveys and interviews adapted for young people

Delphi method

A structured expert consultation process where multiple rounds of surveys lead to a consensus on future developments. It is useful for forecasting trends and policy planning.

- **Age Group:** Adults
- **Format** (online, in-person, hybrid) : All formats
- **Duration:** Time depends on the number of participants
- **Resources Needed:** If in-person, post-its and pens
- **Example:** Convene a workshop with a group of randomly selected citizens to identify the public transportation needs of the city.

3.1.7. Simulation and role-playing methods

Serious games

Interactive role-playing simulations that immerse participants in future scenarios, allowing them to make decisions and experience potential consequences. This tool enhances engagement and learning.

- **Age Group:** All age groups

- **Format (online, in-person, hybrid) :** All formats
- **Duration:** Time depends on the specific game
- **Resources Needed:** Physical board game or game software
- **Example:** Boardgame about creating cities of the future.

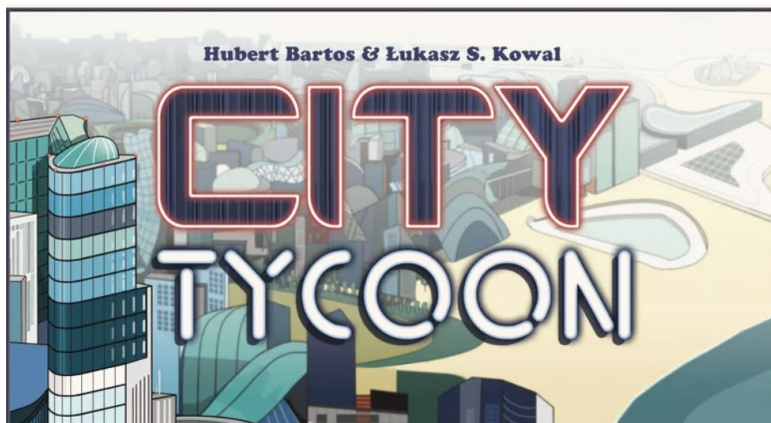


Figure 8: City Tycoon board game

Immersive scenarios and Augmented Reality / Virtual Reality

Using augmented or virtual reality to create experiential environments where participants can engage with and navigate future scenarios. It is effective for public engagement and policy testing.

- **Age Group:** All age groups
- **Format (online and hybrid) :** All formats
- **Duration:** Time depends on the specific software
- **Resources Needed:** Computer, tablet or smartphone and software
- **Example:** Smartphone and tablet app that allows the user to create and visualize, at the street level and in real time, different solutions of green infrastructure.



Figure 9: Smartphone and tablet app that allows the user to create and visualize, at the street level and in real time, different solutions of green infrastructure @ Reaver (2023)

4. Case studies and best practices

4.1. Case studies

4.1.1. UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. It is also a network that brings together government and other stakeholders such as civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, media, and, importantly, children themselves who wish to make their cities and communities more child-friendly. The initiative was launched in 1996 by UNICEF and UN-Habitat to act on the resolution passed during the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to make cities liveable places for all.



Figure 10: Child Friendly Cities

Link: <https://www.childfriendlycities.org/cfci-framework>

The CFCI promotes the idea that cities should not only accommodate children but also actively prioritize their needs, voices, and rights. This includes access to quality education and healthcare, safe and inclusive public spaces, protection from violence and exploitation, opportunities to participate in decision-making, and equal access to services and opportunities. The initiative recognizes that urban environments have a significant impact on children's lives and well-being, and that empowering children as active citizens contributes to stronger, more resilient communities.

At the heart of CFCI is a commitment to child participation, encouraging local governments to engage children and young people in shaping the communities they live in. It also fosters cross-sector collaboration among city planners, educators, health workers, and community leaders to create policies and environments that are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to children's needs.

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative is flexible and adaptable to different local contexts and challenges. It has been implemented in over 3,000 municipalities across more than 40 countries, helping cities to develop action plans, set measurable goals, and evaluate progress toward becoming truly child-friendly.

4.1.2. UNICEF's Youth Foresight Fellowship

The UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellowship, launched by UNICEF Innocenti in 2022, is the first initiative of its kind within the United Nations system. It is a dynamic, eight-month program that empowers a diverse cohort of young changemakers, aged 15 to 25, to use futures thinking and strategic foresight to influence the direction of child rights and global development.



Figure 11: UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellowship

Link: <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/youth-foresight-fellowship>

The fellowship is designed to build the capacity of young people to engage with complex global challenges, identify emerging trends, and co-create long-term solutions. Fellows are trained in cutting-edge foresight methodologies, such as scenario building, horizon scanning, speculative design, and systems thinking. These tools help them to critically imagine and shape preferred futures across key areas affecting children and youth.

Each year, the fellowship focuses on a thematic priority. For 2025, the spotlight is on “The Futures of Education”, exploring how education systems must evolve in the face of accelerating technological, environmental, and social changes. The 15 selected fellows represent all UNICEF regions and come from a wide range of cultural, academic, and socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring a rich and inclusive exchange of ideas.

Throughout the fellowship, participants work closely with UNICEF Innocenti, UNICEF country offices and national committees, and global youth networks. Their insights contribute to flagship research and advocacy initiatives, including “Prospects for Children: Global Outlook” and the “Young Visionaries: Youth Foresight Child Rights Report.” Fellows also play a vital role in high-level global events like the UNICEF Leading Minds Conference, with the 2025 edition focusing on reimagining education in Africa.

This fellowship not only amplifies youth voices in global policy debates but also creates meaningful pathways for youth-led action and leadership.

4.1.3. Block by Block (United Nations)

Block by Block began in 2012 as an innovative partnership between the UN and Mojang Studios, developers of Minecraft. With the adoption of gamification and virtual reality, this approach actively engages neighbourhood residents who don't typically have a voice in public projects. They learn how to use Minecraft, a powerful tool for visualization and collaboration, to design the space that they would like to see. And then they build it.



Figure 12: Block by Block workshop

Link: <https://www.blockbyblock.org/>

This tool is easy to use and cost-friendly, providing workshop participants from heterogeneous regions of the world a way to visualize a three-dimensional environment, in a format designed for rapid iteration and idea sharing. Minecraft helps neighbourhood residents model their surroundings, visualize possibilities, express ideas, drive consensus, and accelerate progress.

Central to Block by Block is the notion that to make urban planning and design processes more participatory, people without design or architectural skills need easy ways to use tools to effectively describe their ideas and desires to professionals. The lack of such tools makes it difficult for non-professionals to engage in dialogue with professionals because they lack the technical skills, confidence, and language to adequately communicate their ideas. This creates an engagement gap which is particularly prevalent among marginalized communities with fewer resources and lower levels of education, for example, with youth, people living in informal settlements, and the disabled, and, as a result, when deliberation occurs, it is often biased towards more powerful stakeholders with greater resources.

According to official data, the project has catalysed the revitalization of urban neighbourhoods in [55 countries](#), impacting the lives of more than 2.8 million people.

4.1.4. Y-PLAN (Youth – Plan, Learn, Act Now) UC Berkeley’s Centre for Cities + Schools (CC+S)

Y-PLAN breaks down the silos that typically separate the worlds of city planning, K-12 schooling, and higher education to create an interdisciplinary and intergenerational community of practice. By leveraging diverse perspectives, knowledge, and resources, this collaboration benefits all participants! It allows young people, civic leaders, and academics to learn from one another, reimagine their urban ecosystems, and develop strategies for making cities more just and joyful.

Y-PLAN enables students to learn beyond the walls of their classrooms, both literally and figuratively. They investigate real-world, community conditions that impact their lives by analysing core elements of the built environment: Housing; Transportation; Public Space; and Schools, Services, and Amenities. Y-PLAN projects often examine several elements at once, since they explore complex, multifaceted issues like climate resilience.

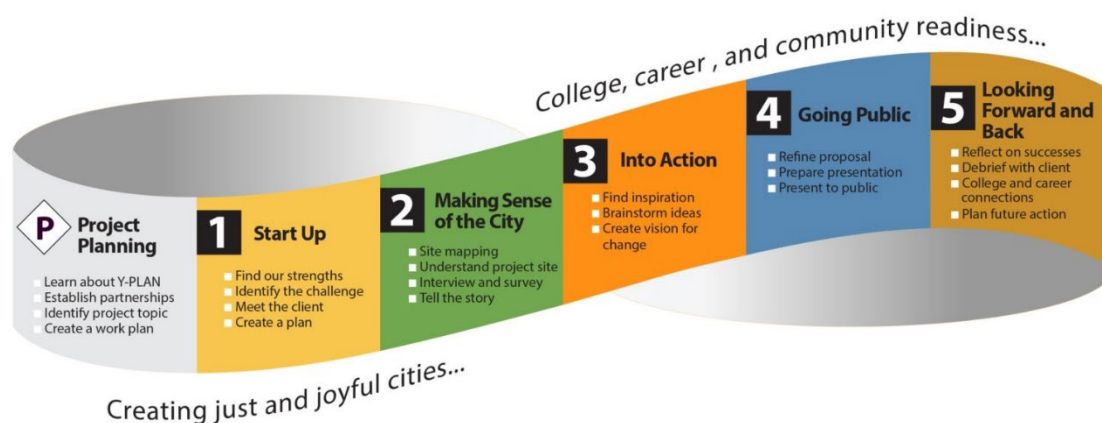


Figure 13: Phases of Y-PLAN

Link: <https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/major-initiatives/y-plan/>

Young people follow a 5-step methodology, modelled both on the scientific method and participatory planning techniques used by civic professionals.

4.1.5. Designathon Works (Netherlands)

Inspired by children and their capacity to imagine better futures, social designer and educator Emer Beamer founded Designathon Works in 2014 in Amsterdam, NL. What began as a one-

day designathon in one city has expanded into over 55 cities and regions worldwide, with multiple designathons taking place each year. Designathon Works is powered by an incredible network of people who believe in preparing the world's nearly 2 billion children to prosper in a rapidly changing and increasingly technological world.



Figure 14: Designathon logo

Link: <https://www.designathonworks.com/>

During a designathon, children are guided through a 7-step experiential process, linked thematically to a bigger global challenge such as water scarcity, poverty, biodiversity loss, or citizenship.

4.1.6. Art for Futures LAB (Germany)

The Art For Futures Lab (AFFL) adopts a transdisciplinary and participatory foresight method that merges artistic practices with futures thinking to co-create regenerative future narratives. Rooted in speculative design, design thinking, futures literacy, and worldbuilding, AFFL facilitates immersive workshops where participants engage in imaginative exploration, collective sense-making, and prototyping of desirable futures.

The method blends tools such as guided meditation, data storytelling, and the creation of tangible and digital artifacts, ranging from visual art and performance to short films, XR experiences, and social media interventions. Participants draw on real-world innovations (green, blue, and clean tech; nature-based solutions) from a curated innovation archive and use frameworks like backcasting to trace their pathways toward the future. AFFL empowers diverse communities—especially youth—to reimagine their agency and envision systemic change, emphasizing coexistence with more-than-human actors and fostering long-term thinking in the face of 21st-century challenges.

Link: <https://artforfutureslab.com>

Example 1:



Figure 15: Example of vision for the city of the future, co-created during workshop

In the 2024 EU workshop *“Seeing the Green”* in Finland, students aged 18–25 from across Europe used the AFFL method to explore planetary food systems. Through meditation, research, and collaborative design sprints, they created speculative prototypes: a sugar-intake tracking app, a 2050 TikTok campaign, and interactive installations blending fiction and data. Their outputs were showcased in a site-specific walk-through exhibition and served as tools for science communication and behavioural change.

Example 2 :



Figure 16: Ocean Future School Lab

The *Ocean Future School Lab* is an adaptation of the Art For Futures Lab methodology designed specifically for young learners aged 10–14. As part of the German contributions to the UN Ocean Decade, this lab was implemented in coastal schools across Northern Germany. Using the Future Box „Ocean”—an educational toolkit co-developed by IFAI with researchers and staff from FUTURIUM museum—students explored pressing marine issues through creative exercises and futures thinking.

The program included Exploration Tours to nature-based solution sites and marine innovation hubs, complemented by interactive workshops on ocean literacy, climate data, and regenerative design. Through methods such as guided meditations, embodied role-play, and art-based sense-making, students envisioned future ocean worlds. They created theatre scenes, storyboards, animations, and games to communicate their ideas.

The final outputs were presented in school festivals and youth parliaments, engaging local stakeholders and policy-makers. This method empowered students to reflect critically on ocean futures while building imaginative and participatory skills. The *Ocean Future School Lab* exemplifies how artistic foresight education can make complex environmental challenges tangible and accessible, sparking intergenerational dialogue and community engagement for regenerative transformation.

4.1.7. Youth 4 Bauhaus (Belgium)

Youth4Bauhaus (Y4B) refers to the green initiative of the European Commission – New European Bauhaus (NEB), launched in October 2020. Inspired by creativity, art, and culture, this initiative aims to bring the *European Green Deal* to our living places and common lives. It is a collective effort to imagine and build a sustainable, inclusive, and “beautiful future”, in which a space for designing future ways of living is created, emphasizing the need for intersecting arts, culture, social inclusion, science, and technology.



Figure 17: Workshop of the Youth 4 Bauhaus project

Link: <https://www.collectiveup.be/project/youth4bauhaus>

Citizens are at the core of this cross-sectoral initiative. Thus, they need to be better informed about various topics ranging from principles of sustainable development, architecture, urbanism, business, sociology, ecology, and culture. Young people are key as they represent the future and Y4B’s innovative approaches will bring them closer to how to get involved in changing public spaces.

The project empowers youth to reshape public spaces sustainably. It encourages their active engagement in urban planning aligned with NEB’s principles, emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability. Y4B inspires innovative thinking, fostering collaborative actions among youth for vibrant and purposeful public areas. By raising awareness and fostering intersectional learning, it cultivates a visionary generation aligned with the European Green Deal, driving impactful changes toward a more sustainable and inclusive future.

4.2. Best practices involving youth participation in building the future of cities

Youth participation is a critical element in building sustainable, inclusive, and innovative futures for cities. In urban planning, involving young people in participatory foresight processes allows them to contribute their unique perspectives and ensures that the future reflects their needs and aspirations[ix].

Some best practices for involving youth in participatory foresight in urban planning include:

4.1.8. Inclusive and accessible platforms

It is essential to create inclusive spaces where youth from diverse backgrounds can participate. Digital tools, workshops, and community events should be designed to be accessible, considering factors like digital literacy and geographical reach. Using creative methods such as gamification and visual tools can make complex foresight exercises more engaging and understandable for young participants.

4.1.9. Capacity building

Providing youth with the necessary skills and knowledge about foresight techniques can empower them to actively engage in decision-making. Training programs, mentorship, and educational initiatives on topics like urban sustainability, climate change, and social justice can enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to participatory foresight.

4.1.10. Collaborative design

Encourage youth to collaborate with city planners, policymakers, and other community members in co-designing future cities. This collaboration ensures that the voices of young people are not only heard but also integrated into real policy-making processes. Joint workshops and interactive sessions can help foster mutual understanding and creative solutions to urban challenges.

4.1.11. Use of technology

Leveraging digital platforms such as virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) can make urban planning more interactive and allow young participants to visualize and simulate potential urban futures. These tools can enhance engagement, helping youth better understand the long-term impacts of their decisions.

5. Key considerations for inclusive youth engagement

5.1. Participatory foresight and inclusion

Foresight workshops designed for children have the potential to significantly promote inclusivity by intentionally engaging underrepresented groups in envisioning and shaping future scenarios. By using accessible, sensory-rich, and participatory methods, such as storytelling[x], role-play, visual arts, and gamified design, these workshops lower traditional barriers to entry that often exclude children from marginalized backgrounds, including those with limited literacy, disabilities, or from low-income and minority communities[xi]. Such inclusive approaches ensure that diverse perspectives and lived experiences are reflected in future visions, empowering children who are often overlooked in policy and planning processes. Additionally, creating safe, respectful, and culturally sensitive spaces for expression helps to build confidence and agency among all participants, reinforcing the idea that every child has a right to contribute to shaping the world they will inherit[xii].

5.2. Participatory foresight processes and inclusion of youth

Working with children and young people during foresight workshops presents unique challenges that require careful planning and sensitivity. One key consideration is the need to customise language to ensure concepts are accessible and engaging, avoiding jargon or abstract terms that may be confusing or intimidating. It is also essential to take into account the developmental stage of participants, as their cognitive abilities, emotional maturity, and attention spans vary widely across age groups. Activities and facilitation techniques must therefore be tailored appropriately to support meaningful participation. Additionally, special data protection requirements must be strictly followed when involving minors, including obtaining informed consent from guardians, ensuring anonymity, and safeguarding any personal information collected. Together, these factors demand a thoughtful, ethical, and flexible approach to effectively include young voices in shaping future visions[xiii].

By involving young people, participatory foresight can tap into a pool of ideas, innovative thinking, and solutions that align with the values and concerns of future generations[xiv].

As a participatory process, this can be conducted in a myriad of ways:

5.2.1. Co-creation of future scenarios that attend to the needs and preferences of young people

One of the core components of participatory foresight is the co-creation of scenarios that explore potential futures. Through age-appropriate workshops and collaborative design activities, young people can work alongside city planners, urban designers, and experts to brainstorm and visualize multiple future pathways for proximity cities. These scenarios might include considerations of urban mobility, green spaces, housing, digital infrastructure, and social services. Young people can contribute their ideas and preferences, ensuring the designs reflect their lived experiences and desires for the future of child-friendly cities[xv].

5.2.2. Scenario testing and simulation

Participatory foresight can also incorporate scenario testing and simulation exercises, where young participants engage with speculative and/or virtual models of proximity cities. Using digital tools like gaming simulations, urban planning software, and virtual reality (VR), and making the most of the digital literacy of young people, such participatory processes can experiment with different design solutions and assess their impact on various aspects of life, such as transportation, energy use, or public health. These interactive methods allow young people to see in real time the implications of different choices and become more invested in the outcomes[xvi].

5.2.3. Inclusive decision-making

A key element of participatory foresight is ensuring that decision-making processes are **inclusive** and give a voice to all segments of society. This is especially important when working with young people, who may often feel disconnected from traditional decision-making structures. Participatory foresight facilitates platforms where young people can express their concerns, suggest ideas, and take part in discussions with key stakeholders, such as local government officials and urban planners. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility over the planning process and empowers young people to advocate for their values and needs, while directly strengthening their education as citizens[xvii].

5.2.4. Educational and empowerment initiatives

By integrating foresight methodologies into school curricula or extracurricular programs, young people can be educated on the principles of future planning, urban design, and sustainability. Through participatory foresight, they not only learn about the challenges that cities face but also develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for contributing to the creation of better cities. Empowering young people in this way positions them as the leaders and change-makers of tomorrow[xviii].

5.2.5. Youth-led initiatives and collaboration

Participatory foresight can also facilitate the creation of youth-led projects that focus on specific aspects of proximity cities, such as sustainability, digital connectivity, or social innovation. By offering mentorship, resources, and platforms for youth-led initiatives, participatory foresight can provide young people with the tools they need to enact real-world change and contribute to the development of proximity cities. Furthermore, these initiatives can foster collaboration with other generations, creating intergenerational dialogue that enhances the inclusivity and diversity of ideas[xix].

6. Stakeholder insights

6.1. Possible impacts of participatory foresight

Participatory foresight involves engaging a wide range of people in thinking creatively and critically about the future. It allows communities, policymakers, researchers, and citizens to collaboratively explore what might happen, what they want to happen, and how to get there^{xi}. This approach offers significant benefits:

6.1.1. Empowers communities

Participatory foresight gives people a voice in shaping the future, particularly those who are often excluded from traditional planning processes, such as youth, marginalized communities, or residents without formal power. When people are invited to share their hopes, fears, and visions, they feel more connected to the decisions being made and more confident in their role as active citizens. This sense of empowerment can lead to stronger civic engagement, increased community sense of belonging, and more equitable outcomes in the long term[xx].

6.1.2. Improves policy and planning quality

When decision-makers involve citizens and stakeholders in foresight activities, they gain access to a wider pool of knowledge, lived experiences, and priorities. This makes plans and policies more grounded in reality, responsive to actual needs, and sensitive to local context. Participatory foresight can help planners uncover overlooked issues, test assumptions, and identify unintended consequences early on, leading to more robust, adaptive, and people-centric strategies[xxi].

6.1.3. Encourages long-term thinking

In a world often driven by short-term political cycles and economic pressures, participatory foresight creates space for imagining beyond the present. It encourages individuals and institutions to consider future generations, long-term consequences, and paths of change that may take decades to unfold. This shift in mindset helps build resilience to future shocks

(like climate change or technological disruption) and promotes more sustainable decision-making today[xxii].

6.1.4. Builds shared vision and trust

By bringing people together to co-create visions of the future, participatory foresight can strengthen community bonds and reduce tensions among different groups. Participants begin to understand each other's perspectives and work toward common ground, even if they start with different priorities. This process helps build trust not only between citizens, but also between communities and institutions, which is essential for long-term collaboration and social cohesion[xxiii].

6.1.5. Stimulates innovation

Foresight methods often use creative tools like storytelling, design fiction, scenario games, and speculative prototypes to stretch participants' imagination. This creates fertile ground for new ideas and unexpected solutions that might not emerge in traditional planning settings or within the usual debate format. By imagining multiple futures, participants are more likely to challenge norms, spot hidden opportunities, and think beyond existing systems of thought, cultural patterns and beliefs[xxiv].

6.2. Challenges of participatory foresight

Notwithstanding, it also comes with challenges^{xii}:

6.1.6. Time and resource intensive

Meaningful participation takes effort. Organizing workshops, recruiting diverse participants, developing tools, and analysing input requires considerable time, funding, and skilled facilitation. If resources are limited, the process may be rushed, under-supported, or poorly executed, reducing its impact and risking frustration among participants and organizers alike[xxv].

"Participatory processes are becoming inclusive all across the board, and you actually want to have that. But that requires quite a lot of coordination resources."

Piret TONURIST- OPSI, OECD

6.2.2. Risk of tokenism

When participatory foresight is done only for the sake of appearances (to check a box or create the appearance of inclusion), without any consequence in the end result, it can backfire. If people invest time and creativity in a process but don't see their ideas reflected in outcomes, they may feel manipulated or ignored, leading to aversion or abstention in future participatory processes. True participatory foresight requires a commitment to integrating insights into actual plans and being transparent about how decisions are made[xxvi].

6.2.3. Power and personality imbalances

Even in participatory settings, not all voices are heard equally. People with more confidence, education, or social status/reputation may dominate discussions, while others remain silent or are side-lined. Without active efforts to create safe, inclusive environments and equal opportunities to contribute, the process may reproduce existing inequalities rather than challenging them[xxvii].

6.2.4. Complexity of futures thinking

Thinking about the future, especially uncertain, complex, or long-term futures, can be difficult for some participants. Some participants may struggle with abstract concepts, unfamiliar language, or speculative exercises. If methods aren't well tailored to the audience, they can feel alienating or confusing. Effective facilitation, creative tools, and accessible language are essential to ensure meaningful engagement[xxviii].

6.2.5. Taking the big step = translation into action

One of the biggest challenges is turning visionary ideas into real-world change. Institutional structures, funding gaps, political resistance, or competing priorities can block implementation. There's often a gap between what communities dream about and what systems can realistically deliver. Without strong follow-through mechanisms and cross-sector collaboration, the energy generated during foresight activities may end up without tangible results[xxix].

6.3. Recommendations for civic labs and practitioners

Considering the previous sections, it is possible to identify several recommendations for initiatives that mobilize a participatory foresight methodology to co-create a vision or strategy to foster the emergence of proximity cities:

6.3.1. Embed participation early in strategy development

Start involving communities at the earliest stages of planning for proximity cities. Early engagement builds trust and ensures that community input shapes foundational decisions, rather than being retrofitted into pre-existing frameworks.

6.3.2. Tailor methods to local contexts

Use foresight tools and activities that match the cultural, social, and educational backgrounds of participants. Visual tools, storytelling, mapping, and play-based methods are particularly effective for engaging youth, underserved communities, or people unfamiliar with urban planning concepts.

"It is important to have a safe environment, making sure that you are not putting them in situations where there might be visions of dystopia of what the future might look like. So, this kind of physical and mental safety is really important, because you don't want to put kids in a situation that they have difficulty interpreting, and that they may feel unsafe or emotionally insecure."

Piret TONURIST- OPSI, OECD

6.3.3. Ensure inclusivity and equity

Actively seek to include underrepresented voices, such as children, seniors, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups. Provide accessible venues, translation services, childcare, and flexible formats to reduce participation barriers.

"Inclusivity and representation are really, really important as well, as that if you want to have a participatory process with the children involved, I would try to get beyond only the ones that are representatives, like representatives or participating as representatives in school groups or these, because you get a very, very specific group of kids that are highly engaged, that think about the world in a specific manner, and you're introducing a little bit of bias into it."

Piret TONURIST- OPSI, OECD

6.3.4. Invest in capacity building

Equip both facilitators and participants with the skills and knowledge needed to engage meaningfully. Offer training in futures thinking, systems change, and creative facilitation to build long-term foresight capacity within communities.

"Sometimes youth people don't have access to the same types of data. And so, what you may find is varying levels of understanding of certain world changes, things that may happen in the future. And so, you may get some limited context that you must provide some upfront education on or development if you want equal responses, depending on the type of participatory foresight that you're going to be doing."

Mark Bryan- Future Today Strategy Group

6.3.5. Translate visions into actionable roadmaps

Support participants in identifying concrete next steps based on their future visions. Link their ideas to policy frameworks, urban development plans, and pilot projects that can serve as stepping stones toward long-term change.

"So whatever story you're telling needs to be compelling enough that they feel like they might risk missing out if they don't continue their participation, if they don't follow along with the story, if they don't follow along with what the outcomes are with, you know, as the implementation moves forward. So, you need to build that at the very beginning so that they want to be part of the entire process. That's first and foremost."

Mark Bryan- Future Today Strategy Group

6.3.6. Foster collaboration across sectors

Encourage collaboration between citizens, urban planners, researchers, educators, and local authorities. Proximity cities benefit from integrated thinking, participatory foresight should connect across health, mobility, education, housing, and environmental sectors.

6.3.7. Support youth engagement and learning with adult allies

Adult allies play a crucial role in fostering and supporting meaningful youth participation and education in policymaking processes. Their support ensures that young people are not only included, but also empowered to contribute effectively. Adults can provide mentorship, access to networks, and institutional knowledge, helping youth navigate complex systems and build the confidence needed to voice their perspectives. Importantly, adult allies must embrace a mindset of partnership—actively listening, validating young voices, and creating safe, inclusive spaces where intergenerational collaboration can thrive. By recognizing youth as equal stakeholders in shaping the future, adult allies help bridge generational divides and promote more inclusive, sustainable, and forward-looking policy outcomes[xxx].

6.3.8. Create feedback loops and accountability

Keep participants informed about how their input is being used. Transparent communication and regular updates build trust and show that participation leads to real influence. Institutional accountability mechanisms should be put in place to track implementation.

"The second part, you know, the participatory idea of like co-implementation. In that instance, you almost need to think about the participant as a client. So, in the design process, you know, we usually have varying stakeholders that we must report out to on a various basis."

Mark Bryan- Future Today Strategy Group

6.3.9. Make foresight an ongoing practice

Treat foresight not as a one-time event, but as a continuous process that evolves with the city. As needs and conditions change, communities should be invited back to revisit and adapt their visions and strategies.

“But one of the things that I think could be thought about is how you make these systems constant, more available in real-time versus an event-like activity. Meaning, what are the ways that you can make it so that the participants never have to re-engage as part of the process? And so that's why I think it needs to be more thought about like a systematic approach and a real-time feedback loop versus just a one-off event.”

Mark Bryan- Future Today Strategy Group

6.4. BONUS: How can municipalities and public servants use this information?

6.4.1. Facilitate youth-centred scenario co-creation

Organize workshops where youth collaborate with planners to imagine futures they want to live in. Use storytelling, design fiction, and visualization tools to help them express their ideas for mobility, climate adaptation, or social spaces.

Example:

A city runs a design workshop where students develop future scenarios for a “15-minute neighbourhood” around their school. Their input leads to real proposals for safer walking routes and more green spaces.

6.4.2. Use simulations and digital engagement tools

Digital tools like urban simulation games, virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR), and interactive apps allow youth to experiment with different city scenarios and visualize the impact of their choices in real time.

Example:

Using a mobile AR app, teenagers in Oslo visualize different layouts for greener streets and test how these changes affect mobility and climate resilience.

6.4.3. Create inclusive youth decision-making platforms

Ensure youth have representation in local foresight initiatives, city councils, or advisory boards. Use deliberative methods like youth juries or participatory budgeting tied to foresight exercises.

Example:

A city includes high school students on a foresight committee for climate policy, allowing them to evaluate future challenges and propose youth-led initiatives.

6.4.4. Integrate foresight into education

Introduce foresight thinking into schools and extracurricular programs. Help youth develop futures literacy, critical thinking, and collaborative design skills.

Example:

A civic education course incorporates participatory foresight tools, such as the Futures Wheel and Backcasting, letting students explore how today's decisions shape their city in 2040.

6.4.5. Support youth-led urban projects

Empower youth to lead their own foresight-based projects. Provide funding, mentorship, and platforms for visibility, especially around issues like digital equity, sustainable transport, and green spaces.

Example:

A youth collective designs a prototype for a zero-emission transport hub for teenagers. With city support, they test the idea in a local pop-up space.

6.4.6. Foster intergenerational collaboration

Participatory foresight creates space for dialogue between generations. City servants can design intergenerational workshops that bring youth together with elders, planners, and politicians.

Example:

An intergenerational lab in Barcelona brings retirees and students together to reimagine how community spaces can support social cohesion in proximity cities.

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9. Annex 1- Interview script

1. Within the current VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) context, what are the limits and potential of adopting participatory foresight as a tool for democratic participation and innovation?
2. What precautions should be taken when implementing the participatory foresight methodology in the context of the proximity city? Especially when it involves children and young people.
3. How can participatory foresight methodology support the experimentation of new solutions?
4. How can engagement and continuity over time be guaranteed in the various phases of participatory foresight, particularly in the urban context?

10. Annex 2- Example of facilitator script and timetable for a participatory foresight workshop (youth-focused)

10.1.1. Facilitator's script

Workshop Title: "Our Future City: A Youth Foresight Lab"

Target Audience: Young citizens (ages 13–25)

Duration: 3–4 hours (can be adapted for half-day/full-day events)

Preparation checklist

Venue or online platform set up (with breakout rooms, if virtual).

Materials: flip charts, markers, post-its, printed templates (e.g., Futures Wheel, scenario cards).

Digital tools (if applicable): Miro board, VR apps, presentation slides.

Inclusive access (language, dietary needs, mobility).

Ice-breaker activity and music playlist

Part 1: Welcome & Exploration (approx. 60 min)

Opening (10 min)

Introduce goals, agenda, and the idea of a proximity city.

Icebreaker: "City in 15" Game (10 min)

Prompt: "What are the top 3 things you'd want within 15 minutes of your home in the future?"
Everyone draws/writes and shares.

Activity: Horizon Scanning (40 min)

Prompt Questions:

What trends are already changing your city?

What signs or “signals” of the future do you see in your school, street, or social media?

Method:

In groups, identify 3–5 emerging trends (e.g., climate anxiety, increased urban traffic, e-scooters in pedestrian lanes, ...).

Place them on a wall chart labelled: Social, Environmental, Technological, Political, Cultural.

Part 2: Anticipation – future scenarios (approx. 75 min)

Activity: Creating Future Scenarios (45 min)

Prompt: “Now that we’ve explored possible changes, let’s imagine what the city might actually feel like in 2040.”

Instructions:

Give each group a scenario card (optimistic, pessimistic, disruptive, resilient).

They create a story: What does school, work, transport, parks, or housing look like in that world?

Materials: Large paper, markers, or digital canvas.

Part 3: Action & Reflection (approx. 60 min)

Activity: Backcasting (30 min)

Prompt: “Now let’s reverse-engineer how to get from today to that future.”

Steps:

Start from their imagined 2040.

List backward (Backcasting): What should happen by 2035? 2030? Next year?

Prompt:

“What do we need to build, change, or learn to get there?”

Final Sharing & Group Reflection (20 min)

Each group presents their scenario + pathway.

Prompts for group discussion:

- “What caught your attention in this scenario?”
- “What could we do tomorrow?”

Closing (10 min)

Explain how their input will be used (policy reports, youth councils, prototypes, exhibitions).

10.1.2. Facilitator’s timetable

Facilitator Script Summary Table: 'Our Future City: A Youth Foresight Lab'

Section	Activity	Time	Prompts	Description	Materials / Tools
Preparation	Setup & Materials	—	—	Venue/platform setup, inclusive access, icebreaker prep, music playlist	Flip charts, markers, post-its, templates, digital tools
Part 1: Welcome & Exploration	Opening	10 min	—	Introduce goals, agenda, concept of a proximity city	Slides (optional)
	Icebreaker: 'City in 15'	10 min	“What are the top 3 things you'd want within 15 minutes of your home in the future?”	Everyone draws/writes and shares	Paper, pens
	Horizon Scanning	40 min	“What trends are already changing your city?” “What signs or ‘signals’ of the future do you see in your school, street, or social media?”	In groups, identify 3-5 trends and place them on a wall chart by category (Social, Environmental, etc.)	Wall chart, markers

Part 2: Anticipation	Creating Future Scenarios	45 min	“Now that we’ve explored possible changes, let’s imagine what the city might actually feel like in 2040.”	Groups use scenario cards to create stories about life in 2040	Scenario cards, large paper, digital canvas
Part 3: Action & Reflection	Backcasting	30 min	“Now let’s reverse-engineer how to get from today to that future.” “What should happen by 2035? 2030? Next year?” “What do we need to build, change, or learn to get there?”	Trace backwards from the imagined 2040 scenario	Paper, pens
	Final Sharing & Group Reflection	20 min	“What caught your attention in this scenario?” “What could we do tomorrow?”	Each group presents their scenario and pathway, followed by a discussion	Presentation materials (optional)
	Closing	10 min	—	Explain how participant input will be used (e.g., policy reports, exhibitions)	—