

Summary of project proposed for a UNESCO Chair in Images of the futures and co-creation

For Open Time | Applied Futures Research
at Erasmus University College Brussels

Description

The proposed project in the interdisciplinary domain of futures studies asks how media, art and design processes can be used towards futures literacy (Miller, 2017) and social foresight (Slaughter, 1996), also described as a society-wide capacity for anticipation (Candy, 2017). With this project we aim to develop and conduct multi-stakeholder activities for engagement with images of the future in diverse local environments. We seek to learn how these activities can be tailored to the specific conditions of different settings and to the diversity of participants in the activities. These overall project-aims and the specific strategies for research, teaching, training and communication are well aligned with the UNESCO agenda. In particular, the planned activities connect directly, though not exclusively, into the anticipatory systems and futures literacy work that UNESCO is developing and that has informed the organisation of numerous Futures Literacy Laboratories. In relation to UNESCO priorities the project pays attention to Sustainable Development Goals and includes activities with actors from underdeveloped and developing nations.

In futures studies 'images of the futures' have long been understood to impact significantly on the development of cultures and societies (Polak, 1972, Dator, 2002). Current work on a Futures Literacy Framework (Miller, 2017) suggests 'using-the-future' for orientation and action in the present (for emergence) among other uses. This literature indicates that anticipatory capacities and foresight are needed for addressing and affecting change. The importance (and the challenge) of including diverse stakeholders in this work towards change are not to be underestimated.

Postnormal times theory emphasizes the need for civic and policy actors to jointly navigate the current era's contradictory, complex and chaotic change. It suggests that this requires attention for ethics, creativity and imagination (Sardar 2012). The polylogues put forward by postnormal thinkers to address this need, privilege cultural and artistic tool sets, perspectives and approaches. Candy and Dunagan (2017) see "designing circumstances or situations in which the collective intelligence and imagination of a community can come forth" as the central challenge for contemporary foresight practitioners, pointing out the importance of participation in futures design processes. The proposed project tests the assumption that media, art and design processes are particularly suited to active and reflexive engagement with images of the futures and can support futures literacy and collective capacities for anticipation or social foresight.

Objectives

The overarching objective of the project is to leverage the strengths of media, art and design approaches (processes, perspectives and tools) to establish, activate, and amplify futures literacy and social foresight (the capacity for collective anticipation) towards the goal of an inclusive sustainable society (and all that society needs to be more than that).

- Contribute to a knowledge base for actors seeking to deploy (multi-stake)holder activities for engaging with images of the futures in the global North or South based on the exchange of knowledge and experience between the project partners on the opportunities for and barriers to futures-oriented co-creation.
- Develop and share a selection of media, art and design approaches, procedures and tools for the co-creation of images of the futures that can be tailored and deployed in various settings, including futures literacy laboratories and polylogues.
- In collaboration with the partner institutions and organisations, organise and support various customised activities, including futures literacy laboratories and polylogues, using these tools and approaches for experimental co-creation of images of the futures around the themes of a selection of SDGs in case studies with stakeholders in at least eight different settings in the global North and South.

- Build a collection of images of the futures in relation to the SDGs resulting from co-creative activities using media, art and design inside and alongside the proposed project. Make this collection accessible to educational, research, social, cultural and policymaking actors in the global North and South as well as the public at large and regional and international institutions.

Activities

Open Time | Applied Futures Research (OT|AFR) is the centre of expertise of the Erasmus University College Brussels (EhB) at the Management, Media and Society department. Three study programmes (Communication Management, Idea & Innovation Management, Tourism and Recreation Management) dedicate their structural research and teaching activities to futures-oriented practice here. We develop formal educational approaches and also provide coaching and training outside of formal education. We work with professional, educational, cultural and policy stakeholders in the context of concrete case studies. With the international partners gathered for this project, we aim to further develop and expand these activities, enhancing pertinent knowledge creation and knowledge transfer inside and beyond our own local super-diverse urban environment.

For the *research* we will conduct a *literature study* to clarify the diverging uses of four sets of concepts central to the proposed project: (1) 'co-creation' and 'collective knowledge production'; (2) 'futures literacy' and 'capacity for collective anticipation' and 'social foresight'; (3) the potential of cultural and creative approaches for (civic) engagement; (4) 'images of the futures'. Further we will identify and develop *tools from media art and design* to aid the co-creation of images of the futures with diverse stakeholders. We will conduct three *case studies* in OT|AFR's immediate environment and at least as many in the environments of the international partners. We will conduct a *content and discourse analysis* of the collection of resulting images of the futures and *ethnographic participant surveys*.

We will undertake formal *educational activities* and share *teaching materials* with partner institutions and more widely in the Teach the Future library. We will run short-term training for professionals, civic and cultural actors, policy-makers and educators seeking to engage with images of the futures. We will invite at least one *guest lecturer* per annum from one of the partner institutions to contribute to (a series of) teaching activities at the Management, Media and Society department of the Erasmus University College Brussels and also offer at four (series of) guest lectures to partner institutions in the global South, one in Europe and one in Asia. We will pursue funding opportunities for *scholarships* for students and for one researcher from the global South. The *dissemination and communication* of project activities and results will receive special attention in relation to the media-rich approaches we will deploy.

Participating partner institutions

Education institutions: CESAR School (Brasil), Narxoz Business School (Kazakhstan), Tamkang University (Taiwan), University of Trento (Italy), Turku University of Economics (Finland), South American Institute for Resilience and Sustainability Studies (Uruguay).

Other organisations: Agence Future (Belgium), Centre d'Art Waza (RD Congo), CPPFS (Bosnia, United Kingdom, Spain), Plurality University (France), Teach the Future Europe (Netherlands), TE VAIT X (Tahiti)

Other institutions and organisations will be invited to participate at later stages.

References

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