Democratising Futures, Reinvigorating Democracy? Participatory Futures as a tool for citizen voice and influence in local decision-making

1. Introduction

In recent years, democracies across Europe have been challenged in ways not witnessed on such a scale for generations. General disaffection towards elections, the rise of populism, declining trust towards elected governments and the invasion of Ukraine, to name but a few, have contested longstanding beliefs in the security of democracy across Europe (Canal 2014; Merkel & European Commission; 2019; Torfing et al, 2021). Drawing upon Stoker's (2006) work, Torfing et al positions macro-level factors such as globalisation, financial crises, and technological developments as contributors (2021: 356). The public blame perceived political elites for this, resulting in the rise of populism rooted in the false promise of returning to the 'better' times of the past (ibid). COVID-19 has exacerbated problems within democracy by widening deep-rooted social and economic inequalities (Blundell et al, 2022). Evidence indicates that unequal societies have lower rates of social and civic participation (Lancee and Van de Werfhorst, 2012). Higher rates of income inequality also correlate to lower levels of voter turnout (Solt, 2008).

In these turbulent times, it is unsurprising that innovations within democracy are emerging. Richardson (2014) suggests that new modes of public participation are needed to confront such changes. As such, interest is increasing in the adoption of participatory and deliberative practices in democracy (Elstub and Escoba, 2021; Wagner et al, 2016). Parallel to this is the trend towards co-production in public services, that was used to address the issue of "scarce public resources" following the 2008 financial crisis (Torfing et al, 2021: 353). Yet citizen participation is not always warmly received by political representatives and decision-makers. The growing need to consider, or at least be seen to be considering, citizen voice has implications for established governance practices. It shifts power from the elected official to the public. For those in existing positions of power, the fear of losing that power can hamper citizen involvement (Wagner et al, 2016).

However, enhancing citizen participation has benefits, such as; (1) reducing the threat of populism (Torfing et al, 2021), (2) diversifying the perspectives involved in decision-making, (3) building support for the decisions (4) enhancing the legitimacy of elected officials, (5) growing trust between governance structures and citizens, (6) better, more effective decisions being made and ultimately (7) a healthier democracy (Gouache, 2022; Michels, 2011; Michels and De Graaf, 2010). Despite such benefits, we must ensure we hold a critical lens to citizen involvement practices. The rise in adopting such practices has brought about what Gouache terms, "participation-washing" - "fake participation processes in which citizens are asked to express their opinions on non-decisive or unimportant matters" (2022: 22). This is harmful to democracy as it reinforces the perception that governing institutions are not genuinely concerned with the perspectives of citizens, and a vicious cycle emerges in which apathy, disengagement and disillusionment are perpetuated. Mulgan (2020) identifies an increasing disparity between what the public believe is possible and what they would like to be possible, resulting in people feeling a loss of agency over their futures.

Mulgan calls for a reinvigoration of "social imagination" that centralises communities as "heroes in their own history" (2020: 3). Thus, we can see a link between factors contributing to contemporary challenges faced by democracy and those relating to people's sense of loss of agency over their futures.

Focusing specifically on local democracy and decision-making, this paper examines how citizen participation in democracy can be enhanced by democratising future studies. The article draws upon the growing body of work within the umbrella domain of participatory futures – an area of future studies which focuses on the participatory delivery of foresight practices (Ramos, 2006 & 2017; Ramos et al, 2019; Bourgeois et al, 2022; Ravetz and Miles, 2016). It uses this to situate and critique the 'real-world' application of participatory futures methods by local municipalities. Based on empirical work undertaken in the EUARENAS research project in which participatory foresight techniques were applied in three municipalities in Europe, the paper asks if such methodological innovation can reinvigorate social imagination, connect citizens with decision-making processes and be an effective means of engaging residents in local democracy. With participatory futures offering possibilities to "unblock decision-making and action on contentious, long-term challenges" (Ramos et al, 2019: 7), this article offers an examination of the opportunities and limitations of the participatory application of foresight methods as a tool for supporting democracy and provides comment on its role in local decision-making. It concludes with recommendations for how participatory futures can be used to support municipalities to adopt mechanisms for epistemologically plural knowledge creation and decision-making.

2. Whose dream are we dreaming? Participatory futures and power

Children's rights activist Marian Wright Edelman said, "You can't be what you can't see" in reference to the barriers faced by children in visualising themselves in future careers. Visibility and representation make it easier for us to imagine that such possibilities are indeed possible. By extension, it is not illogical to suggest that a lack of ability to conceive a better future will result in the lack of ability to create one (Jungk, 1969; Malaska, 2017; Pouru-Mikkola and Wilenius, 2021). In short, if you can't dream it, you can't make it. To position this paper, we briefly explore the field of participatory futures under the lens of 'who has the power to dream'.

The hyponymic term, participatory futures, is applied to a range of practices that enable different stakeholders – particularly citizens and 'lay' people – to explore possible futures (Bourgeois et al, 2022; Gidley et al, 2009; Kreibich et al., 2011; Ollenburg, 2019; Ramos, 2017). Here we see the confluence of participatory action research (PAR) practices, with those from future studies. PAR is situated within the domain of action research and is a structure through which knowledge is co-produced with communities and values their agency and experiential knowledge (Baum et al 2006, Bourgeois et al, 2022). As Ramos (2006) acknowledges, the connection between action research and futures is not a new phenomenon. However, he proposes that the growth in confluence between the two fields does warrant it being considered a distinct category within future studies due a set of emerging commonalities. These commonalities act as the boundaries to what Ramos initially terms "action foresight" and later frames as Futures Action Research (Ramos, 2017) – a practice that can enable the co-creation of our futures.

With PAR's ability to empower and reduce power imbalances (Baum et al, 2006; Labonte, 1990), connecting future studies with PAR creates an opportunity to democratise futures by opening-up access to participation (Bourgeois et al, 2022). This resists future thinking being monopolised by those with existing power, influence, and specialist skills (Ramos et al, 2019; Mulgan 2020; Bourgeois et al, 2022). Keeping future thinking in the domain of specialist however, results in what Inayatullah has conceptualised as "used futures" – those futures that have been visioned by others and taken on – consciously or unconsciously – by people (2008: 5). Here a power imbalance is evident. A division has been created between those who have the opportunity and resource to engage with futures and those who have the futures of others imposed upon them. Bourgeois et al (2022), reflects on this divide down the lens of coloniality arguing that it is possible to counteract the colonisation of the future. Drawing on Polchar et al's (2020) and Buntu's (2019) work, they propose that those working in participatory futures must critically reflect on who is initiating, involved in and benefiting from the work, and what assumptions they are making about whose and what futures matter (ibid). This mode of reflexivity should expose power imbalances of "traditional "BOGSAT" ("bunch of guys sat around a table") models of foresight" and thus create space for collective and on-going futures work to take place (Ravetz and Miles, 2016: 487).

Even with the adoption of PAR practices, it is recognised that thinking about the future is not something that is easy, particularly given that present-day contexts and pressures can limit and influence our imagination (Rubin, 1998; Bell, 2002; Pouru-Mikkola and Wilenius, 2021). Developing people's futures literacy – the ability to use the future (Miller, 2018: 2) – could overcome such shortcomings by framing futures in relation to the present and by developing capabilities in working with this knowledge (Pouru-Mikkola and Wilenius, 2021; Bourgeois et al, 2022). Therefore, to overcome power imbalances and to truly democratise futures, we must first make the tools for future-thinking transparent and accessible. The remainder of this article contributes to the emerging body of work on how this can be achieved, focusing specifically on unlocking the potential of participatory futures within the realms of local democracy.

3. Method

3.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

A PAR study was undertaken with three municipalities in Europe between November 2021 and May 2023. PAR supports researchers to work with communities on studies that have real-world implications (Baum et al, 2006: 852). Here, the adoption of PAR was used to conduct testing on participatory futures approaches that aimed to support residents to explore the future of their local democracy and to enhance their participation in local decision-making. As Gouache (2022:67) notes, citizen-focused foresight activities are relatively more fringe than those adopting more conventional modes such as expert panels and literature reviews. As part of this study, two sets of participatory futures activities were delivered. The first set combined storytelling with horizon mapping techniques using residents' lived experiences of democracy as stimuli for future-thinking. The second set was visioning workshops in which mixed stakeholder groups (including citizens) crafted future visions for local democracy. In their work on participatory futures, Hebinck et al (2018)

identify different roles that such activities can play. The activities delivered in this study straddle the "preconceptualization of change" and "offering an avenue for the creation of new actor networks" roles by providing opportunities for residents and municipalities to begin to think about democratic change and connect-up changemakers as part of the process (ibid).

Table I provides an overview of the context and participants of the test sites.

<mark>*Insert Table I: Context and participants of the PAR study*</mark>

The activities were delivered by teams from the local municipalities, some of whom worked in citizen engagement (i.e., Community Engagement Workers). In the case of Municipality 2, an external facilitator from a local NGO with expertise in the delivery of participatory activities was part of the delivery team. Despite some team members' capabilities in facilitation, none had previously delivered participatory futures activities. Prior to delivery, the municipalities attended in-person and online training sessions, focusing on methodology, facilitation guidelines and various aspects of delivery (i.e., recruitment techniques, process documentation, evaluation and learning tools etc.). These were delivered by the research team, with further support sessions run throughout the study. Guidelines for delivery were also produced that contained how-to guides, workshop plans, resources for the workshops and links to further reading.

Different methods were used to document the PAR study's activities and to assess the extent to which the interventions being made were an effective means of engaging residents in local democracy. Underpinning this was reflective practice which helped to distil the learning that was taking place. Such activities included team debriefs, debriefs with the research team and reflective logs. Fostering reflective practice from people involved in research activities is valuable as it provides research teams with alternative and differing perspectives on an intervention, leading to the generation of new understandings (Billups, 2021: 156). Reflections were used to inform the formal data gathering practices. Table II provides an overview of the data gathering, processing and analysis methods used to assess the interventions.

<mark>*Insert Table II: PAR Study Data, Processing and Analysis*</mark>

Vertical analysis of each data mode would conducted, extracting a set of key insights from them. This was followed by a horizontal review of the results using the main enquiry lines of this study as a lens in which to frame them. In addition to this (see sections 3.2 and 3.3), the futures results from activities 1 and 2 were documented by photographs of workshop outputs, audio recordings and written notes by the participants and delivery teams.

3.2 Activity 1: Storytelling and future-thinking

Stories enable people to share experiences. Recently we have seen storytelling used for social justice purposes and to diversify the voices in such spheres (Copeland and Moor, 2008; Couldry, 2008; Lambert, 2006). In these activities, Community Reporting – a digital peer-to-peer storytelling method rooted in lived experience – was adopted, based on its

wider application as a tool for enhancing citizen participation in research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes (Geelhoed et al, 2021; Trowbridge and Willoughby, 2020). Within facilitated workshops, residents conducted peer-to-peer dialogue interviews with one another. Dialogue interviews do not have pre-determined questions and instead begin with a conversation starter – a broad, open question that enables the storyteller to begin to share their experience (i.e., What has been your experience of local democracy?). From here the storyteller recounts their experiences and the interviewer will only interject with further, spontaneous questions based on the responses of the storyteller. In essence, the method seeks to mimic everyday conversations within the parameters of an artificial conversation context. It aims to address conventional power imbalances between the interviewer and the interviewee, circumventing extractive lived experience storytelling practices. In essence, the storyteller is setting the agenda of the interview, despite the interviewer having agency in the activity through the questions they choose to ask. The stories were recorded as audio or video, and then reviewed by the residents to identify the key insights that they then thematically grouped. These findings were the foundations of a Three Horizons Framework activity that created possible future trajectories in local democracy. It enabled residents to think about preferred futures, challenges that may arise in creating emergent opportunities and changes that need to be made (Curry & Hodgson, 2008; Sharpe et al, 2016; Petchey, 2020). The underpinning intention behind these activities was to affirm and legitimise experiential knowledge, a core dimension of PAR activities (Baum et al, 2006: 852).

3.3 Activity 2: Visioning the future

The visioning workshops had 6 sections to them:
1. Welcome: A brief overview of the workshop
2. State of play: Examination of what the current situation in terms of local democracy (drawing on activity 1 insights and other data)
3. Dynamics of change: Identifying the 'signals' and 'drivers' of change in local democracy based on data and participants' experiential knowledge
4. Describing the future: A creative activity in which participants worked in groups to describe possible futures for local democracy
5. Developing a response: Exploration of what changes/key actions are needed to move from the state of play to the future scenario(s) created.
6. Summary: Details of how the insights from the session will be used and opportunities for further involvement

In the 'Describing the future' section, creative techniques enabled participants to describe the future in physical ways. The approaches used can be largely encapsulated by the umbrella term – serious play, which accounts for playful inquiry and innovation methods that serve as vehicles for complex problem-solving (Rieber et al, 1998; Primus & Sonnenburg, 2018). In the context of this workshop, specific tools such as building blocks (combined with annotations), collaging, and photography were used individually or in combination to support participants to create future visions. Specifically, photovoice was used, which is commonly applied in community-based participatory research to enable people to express their points of view or represent their communities by photographing scenes that highlight research themes (Nykiforuk et al, 2011). Upon creating the visions,

participants presented them, explaining some of the nuances. Table III synthesizes the visions from these activities in narrative form.

4. Findings

4.1 Democratising futures research and catalysing social imagination

The development of both futures literacy and people's capacity to use future-thinking tools is required to truly democratise futures research (Pouru-Mikkola and Wilenius, 2021; Miller, 2018; Bourgeois et al, 2022). This PAR study invested significant time in capacity building the municipality teams to deliver the participatory futures activities. Activity Questionnaire results demonstrate that this was pivotal. Guidelines issued were described as *"detailed"* and *"clear"*. Training and support sessions gave municipalities an opportunity to put the methods being taught into practice prior to utilising them with residents. This ability to 'test out' approaches was valuable; "*The most useful element was the training - the opportunity to test the method on yourself…helped prepare the workshop"*.

4.1.1 Participants and recruitment

As part of the PAR study, municipalities were asked to engage citizens who were underrepresented in local decision-making and/or faced additional barriers to participation. Recommended recruitment practices included: (1) working with community organisations as conduits, (2) delivery of the workshops in community settings and at times/date suitable for participants, (3) selecting marketing methods suitable to the demographics, (4) varied forms of remuneration and (5) allocating generous timeframes for recruitment. The Activity Reports showed that some municipalities opted to target a specific underrepresented demographic, whilst others focused on engaging with a heterogeneous group of people who were experiencing marginalisation. In the Activity Questionnaires, both Municipality 1 and Municipality 2 observed that having a mix of participants in the sessions was a key factor in *"stimulating interesting conversations"*. Municipality 2's team noted that it was *"important to sincerely listen to people's stories, and even sometimes when we lose the topic of discussion, let them talk - because for some people it is the first time that they have a voice."* A similar sentiment was expressed by Municipality 3, identifying that it was important to *"not make judgements."* Here we can see that the approaches were able to create a space for dialogue involving both municipalities and residents. This transcended what Ravetz and Mile (2016) dubbed "BOGSAT" approaches to foresight and have the potential to diversify both perspectives in, and influences on, local decision-making.

The teams encountered challenges in the recruitment of participants for the activities, as expressed in the Activity Questionnaires. Two factors contributed to this. Firstly, in Municipality 3 it was felt that there was a lack of interest among the local municipalities' teams to involve the target group of young people in the first set of futures activities. Secondly, in Municipality 2, the time it took to recruit the number of participants needed was challenging. It should be noted here that Municipality 2 was experiencing enhanced time-pressures due to the invasion of Ukraine and subsequent migration. In these two

municipalities, participatory processes in local decision-making are not mainstream practice. Therefore, residents are not used to being engaged in such activities, and instead are more accustomed to traditional activities such as voting (Gouache, 2022: 68). In hindsight, given the aim of reaching underrepresented groups, it may have been beneficial to adopt the 'Marcoussis tomorrow' futures project strategy of going to where the people are (i.e. existing event or activity) rather than inviting them to you to engage with citizens beyond the "usual subjects" (ibid: 75) and enabled such engagement to take place with less time commitments rather than half and full day workshops (ibid: 80).

4.1.2 Visions for the future, Actions for the present

Despite challenges in initial recruitment, Participant Feedback and the Future Visions indicate that the participatory futures activities unlocked participants' ability to think about and articulate the future. The structure of the sessions offered a framework to support such dialogue. The Activity Questionnaires and Activity Reports identified how guiding people through a process via which they connect their present to potential futures enabled participation in abstract conversations. The range of mediums offered – such s text (i.e., post-it notes, written annotations), oral (i.e., stories, discussions, presentation of visions) and visual (i.e., collages, building-block constructions, photographs) – enabled participants to articulate their ideas in ways that were accessible to them. This enhanced inclusion and plurality of perspective. The purpose of this, like foresight in general, is not to predict a singular, correct version of our future (OECD, 2019); it instead evokes epistemological pluralism, supporting diverse visions for the future to emerge (Hancock and Bezold, 1994; Henchey, 1978; Inayatullah, 2010).

In Municipality 2's future vision, we can see a general pessimism about the future that seems distinct to the younger demographic who created it (Mulgan, 2020; Hicks & Holden, 2007; Myllyniemi, 2017). Despite this, the activities not only enabled the young people to identify future solutions to present day ills, but also the power to position themselves as the central protagonists in address these challenges. Here, and across all the visions, we can see a triggering of 'future consciousness' in the participants via their ability to perceive alternative futures and identify the actions needed to create them (Toffler, 1978; Bezold, 2019; Ahvenharju et al., 2018, Dator, 1978). Specifically, the Municipality 2 team noted that it was important not to *"define an ideal future but focus on the signals of change in the present and build discussions around them".* Drawing on Ramos's (2006) work, we can see the confluence of both futures and action research in that the visions display the social change residents would like to see and depict their agency in constructing them (ibid: 651). In adopting methods that enable citizens to see how present-day actions can inform our futures, there is the opportunity to create hope that a better future is viable. Responses to the Follow-Up Questionnaire demonstrated the importance of connecting future-thinking work to the present, particularly when involving citizens who are currently facing the harshest of challenges. This takes participatory futures beyond 'soft and fluffy' idealism about a future that citizens do not believe is possible, and roots it in what can they actively do now, to create the future they want.

1.1 Reinvigorating local democracy?

Participatory futures work has the *potential* to reinvigorate local democracy by activating both a consciousness within the public about the future and the pragmatic actions needed to create it. Yet evidence from the Follow-Up Questionnaire highlights that for this potential to be realised, municipalities must be able to action the results of participatory futures activities. To varying degrees, all three municipalities had used the insights from the participatory futures activities in the pilots they were undertaking with the parameters of the EUARENAS project. In some instances, this has extended into their wider municipality work. This included using the data from the workshops to co-design neighbourhood-level priorities, informing development strategies (locally and regionally), using the visions to stimulate discussions with other residents and in team-building activities. In adopting collective intelligence and knowledge creation in their work, local municipalities embrace opportunities for relationship and trust-building, the development of mutual commitments around shared goals, innovation and the emergence of more effective solutions, and the enhanced legitimisation of their decisions (Gidley et al, 2009; Gloor 2006; Landemore 2017; Torfing et al, 2021; Ravetz and Miles, 2016; Bezold, 2019).

4.2.1 Barriers and potential solutions in using Futures in local governance

Despite this, the municipalities did encounter challenges in applying the results. The Follow-Up Questionnaire identified the political cycle as a specific barrier: *"The findings often require lots of political initiative to be implemented and with the elections coming soon, drastic changes in the municipality's approach may be risky"*. Responses indicated that political leaders were also barriers to implementation; for example, an absence of *"desire and openness"* in politicians can stop progress. This type of short-terminism, born out of the confinements of political cycles, is a common issue within contemporary democracy. It is rooted in elected officials only being accountable to current voters, not future ones and thus being judged on the here and now, rather than the long-term (Boston, 2021; Gouache, 2022). Ramos et al (2019) identified this as a key challenge when working with participatory futures in decision-making realms. Despite some examples of progressive legislation aimed at safeguarding future generations such as The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and calls for farsightedness in policy and decision-making (Ascher, 2009; Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020), short-termism is still prominent. Yet as the 'Marcoussis tomorrow' project is testament to, when there is strong political support for work (Gouache, 2022:82), future-thinking can be part of the local decision-making process.

Participatory futures approaches have the potential to address this issue by rooting futures work in present day-action - combining longer-term thinking with desires for short-term (political) gains. As Ramos et el, state, participatory futures "aim to democratise and encourage long-term thinking, with a goal to inform collective actions in the present (2019: 7). This balancing act between the possibilities of the present and the benefits of long-term approaches seemed to be acknowledged and embraced by Municipality 1. In the Follow-Up Questionnaire, they stated that whilst they could not always implement ideas garnered from participatory processes immediately, they understood the importance of communicating this to residents. Such work builds trust and longer-term relationships with residents to unlock their ability to be *"more collaborative"* in developing the city. This understanding is explained by Municipality 1's more advanced adoption of citizen participation in democracy. The team saw this as *"part of our DNA"*, whereas Municipality 2

and Municipality 3 were less confident in the municipalities' overall abilities in citizen participation. Ongoing feedback and learning loops are a part of what Monteiro and Dal Borgo (2023) put forward as pillars that support decision making with strategic foresight. Drawing on the much larger scale Lithuania 2050 and Spain 2050 foresight projects, such on-going conversations and iterations support the making of "rigorous and integral findings" for responsive decision-making (ibid:33).

Writing in the context of urban planning, Ravetz and Miles' identify that successful foresight work can "build capacity for social learning and collective intelligence, and anticipatory governance" rather than short-term, one-off projects, which are more common (2016: 469). More so, Gidley et al's work in participatory futures with climate-vulnerable communities found that approaches need to be adapted to ensure they are context appropriate for deep social learning to occur (2009: 438). The findings from this small-scale empirical study align with this, highlighting the need for longer-term work, investment in the capability of systems to adopt foresight approaches and need to adapt methods to suit the context. The Activity Questionnaires and Activity Reports identify subtle ways in which the approaches tested were adapted for their local context, such as length/structure of activities and their embedment into existing activities and programmes of work. A limitation of this study is that the co-learning and collective intelligence approaches between municipality and citizens were focused mainly on the topic of democracy rather than the application of participatory futures approaches; the co-learning and pooling of expertise here was between research team and municipality.

4.2.2 New types of knowledge need new ways of working

In reflections from the Follow-Up Questionnaire, a municipality worker commented that *"[we lack the] "experience and understanding of how to use the findings from the foresight activities"*. Two of the municipalities noted that a lack of skills and knowledge of working with participatory approaches was a system problem within the municipalities. This hindered the mainstreaming of participatory futures work and the insights gained beyond the individual teams involved. This shortfall was found to lie partly in the abilities of municipalities to work with different forms of data to make decisions. A reliance and trust in conventional data such as statistics and opinion polls was expressed in the Follow-Up Questionnaire; *"[These] are known and used practices. It is assured that these inputs are important"*. Established forms of data and data-gathering such as these were deemed to be more *"efficient"* and less biased, and were preferred because they took less time to administer.

The Follow-Up Questionnaire identified that the ability to work with divergent findings and perspectives to make decisions was not seen as a core strength of local municipalities. Despite the individual municipality team members understanding the benefits of a plurality of perspectives and data, Municipality 2 stated that it did not feel the wider municipality structure was very effective at working with *"different findings, opinions and perspectives on issues when making decisions"*. Therefore, if participatory futures can realise its potential to integrate knowledge systems and bring together divergent expertise to address complex challenges of the present (Ramos, 2006; Ramos et al, 2019; Ravetz and Miles, 2016), it is imperative that practitioners do not only focus on democratising future-thinking tools but

also work with organisations and systems to enable them to use this knowledge effectively. There are existing forerunners that demonstrate that cities can work in such a way. In Bologna, the Civic Imagination Office was established to promote civic engagement and bridging building between citizens and the municipality around imagination (Hopkins, 2009). Now incorporated into the Fondazione Innovazionne Urbana, imagination and citizen involvement are central to the centre's work in building the city of the future. Foundations of these new ways of working in municipalities, as the former Director of the Civic Imagination Office has articulated, is having a team, resource and time to bring things into fruition (ibid). With such infrastructure, future-thinking work with citizens not only enables citizens to reconnect with their power to dream, but also connect such dreams with the power to change.

2. Conclusions

This paper draws on the testing of participatory futures methodologies in the context of local democracy via a PAR study. It presents an original contribution to knowledge on how futures practices can support citizen involvement in local decision-making. It identifies the importance of supporting the development of futures literacy in citizens, public administration officials, and political and strategic leaders. The paper demonstrates how broadening the application of existing foresight techniques through their confluence with PAR principles, spaces can be created that reignite people's social imagination in which citizens and those working in local municipalities can engage in dialogue about the future.

Whilst there are people working with local municipalities with the will to work alongside communities to create more equitable futures, they encounter several barriers when trying to integrate this with the existing system. Barriers include the short-terminism connected to political cycles, the influence of political agendas and a lack of ability to work with the type of knowledge that participatory futures produces. In this lies an opportunity for researchers and practitioners alike to examine how capacities in futures literacy can be embedded into systems and equip municipalities with the ability to put futures knowledge into practice. Through enabling municipalities to work alongside communities to implement actions that move towards future visions, trust and engagement between citizens and local democratic structures can be enhanced. Research and practice directions in participatory futures should move beyond the methodological development of participatory futures and look towards how such approaches can be embedded into wider system change. In conclusion, participatory futures presents an opportunity to support epistemological pluralism within local democracy, opening-up decision-making processes to new forms of knowledge and expertise, and diversifying the voices heard in those spaces. Although we are not there yet, we can imagine a future where it is the norm and hence, we can create it.

3. Bibliography

Ahvenharju, Sanna & Minkkinen, Matti & Lalot, Fanny. (2018). The Five Dimensions of Futures Consciousness. *Futures*. 104. 10.1016/j.futures.2018.06.010.

Ascher, W. (2009) *Bringing in the Future: Strategies for Farsightedness and Sustainability in Developing Countries*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Baum, F, C. MacDougall, and D. Smith (2006) Participatory action research glossary in *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 60:854–857. doi: 10.1136/jech.2004.028662

Bezold, C. (2019). The History and Future of Anticipatory Democracy and Foresight. *World Futures Review*, *11*(3), 273–282.

Bell, W. (2002) Foreword in D. Hicks (Ed.), *Lessons for the future: The missing dimension in education* (xi-xvi), Routledge-Falmer, London.

Billups, F. (2021). *Reflective practice tools*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Blundell, R, M. Costa Dias, J. Cribb, R. Joyce, T. Waters, T. Wernham and X. Xu (2022). Inequality and the COVID-19 Crisis in the United Kingdom, *Annual Review of Economics*, 14:1, 607-636.

Boston, J. (2021) Assessing the options for combatting democratic myopia and safeguarding long-term interests in *Futures*, Volume 125, January 2021, 102668.

Bourgeois, R., Karuri-Sebina, G. and Feukeu, K.E. (2022), "The future as a public good: decolonising the future through anticipatory participatory action research", *Foresight*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. https://doi-org.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/10.1108/FS-11-2021-0225

Buntu, A.O. (2019), "Lost in the Afrikan city: the role of youth in decolonising Afrikan urban development", *Urban Governance Paper Series*, SACN, Johannesburg.

Canal, R. (2014) *Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy.* Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and *Human* Rights, United Cities and Local Governments.

Copeland, S and A. Moor (2018). Community Digital Storytelling for Collective Intelligence: towards a Storytelling Cycle of Trust. *AI & Society*. 33:101 – 111.

Couldry, N. (2008). "Mediatization or Mediation? Alternative Understandings of the Emergent Space of Digital Storytelling." *New Media & Society*, 10, no. 3: 373–391.

Curry, A. & Hodgson, A. (2008). Seeing in Multiple Horizons: Connecting Futures to Strategy. *Journal of Futures Studies*. 13: 1 - 20.

Dator, J. A. (1978) The Future of Anticipatory Democracy. In *Anticipatory Democracy*: *People in the Politics of the Future*. New York: Random House.

Elstub, S. and Escobar, O. (2019) *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance,* Edward Elgar.

Geelhoed, S, Trowbridge, H, Henderson, S and Wallace-Thompson, L. (2021) "Changing the Story: An Alternative Approach to System Change in Public Service Innovation", *Polish*

Political Science Review, vol.9, no.2, 2021 pp.52- 70. https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2021-0012

Gidley, J.M. and Hampson, G.P. (2005) The evolution of futures in school education in *Futures*, 37: 255-271

Gidley, J., Fien, J., Smith, JA,Thomsen, D & Smith, T. (2009). Participatory futures methods: Towards adaptability and resilience in climate-vulnerable communities. *Environmental Policy and Governance*. 19. 427 - 440.

Gloor, P. A. (2006). *Swarm Creativity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gouache, C. (2022) Imagining the future with citizens: participatory foresight and democratic policy design in Marcoussis, France, Policy Design and Practice, 5:1, 66-85, DOI: 10.1080/25741292.2021.1930687

Hancock, T and Bezold, C. (1994) "Possible futures, preferable futures", *Healthcare Forum Journal*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 23-29.

Hebinck, A., J. M. Vervoort, P. Hebinck, L. Rutting, and F. Galli. 2018. Imagining transformative futures: participatory foresight for food systems change. *Ecology and Society* 23(2):16. https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10054-230216

Henchey, N. (1978) 'Making sense of futures studies', *Alternatives*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 24-28.

Hicks, D and Holden, C. (1995) *Visions of the future – why we need to teach for tomorrow* Trentham Books Limited, London.

Hopkins, R. 2019. 'Bologna, the City with a 'Civic Imagination Office' in *Resilience*. Published 7th March 2029. https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-03-07/bologna-the-city-with-a-civic-imagination-office/, accessed 24/6/2024.

Inayatullah, S. (2008), "Six pillars: futures thinking for transforming", *Foresight*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 4-21. https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680810855991

Inayatullah, S. (2010) Theory and practice in transformation: the disowned futures of integral extension. *Futures*, 42 (2), 103–109.

Janssen, M., & Estevez, E. (2013). Lean government and platform-based governance. *Government Information Quarterly*, 30, S1–S8.

Jungk, R. (1969) Imagination and the future in *International Social Science Journal,* XXI (4), 557-562

Kreibich, R., Oertel, B., & Wölk, M. (2011). Futures studies and future-oriented technology analysis principles, methodology and research questions. *HIIG Discussion Paper Series No. 2012-05*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2094215

Labonte, Ronald (1990). Empowerment: notes on professional and community dimensions in *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 26:1–12.

Lambert, J. (2006). *Digital Storytelling: capturing lives, creating community* (2nd edition). Berkeley: Digital Diner Press.

Lancee, B. & Van de Werfhorst, H. (2012). Income inequality and participation: A comparison of 24 European countries in *Social Science Research* 41. 1166-78. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.04.005.

Landemore, H. (2017). *Democratic Reason*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Malaska, P. (2017) Futures consciousness and the knowledge of the future in S. Heinonen, O. Kuusi, H. Salminen (Eds.), *How do we explore our futures?* The Finnish Society for Futures Studies, Helsinki.

Margetts, H., & Naumann, A. (2017). Government as a Platform. Oxford: Oxford University.

Merkel, W and European Commission (2019). Democracy: 'Inclusion is the future – not exclusion' in *Horizon*, 25th April 2019 < https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/democracy-inclusion-future-not-exclusion> [Accessed 10/1/2022]

Michels, A., and L. de Graaf. 2010. "Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy." Local Government Studies 36 (4): 477–491. doi:10.1080/03003930.2010.494101.

Michels, A. 2011. "Innovations in Democratic Governance: How Does Citizen Participation Contribute to a Better Democracy?" International Review of Administrative Sciences 77 (2): 275–293. doi:10.1177/0020852311399851.

Monteiro, B and Dal Borgo, R. 2023. Supporting decision making with strategic foresight: An emerging framework for proactive and prospective governments. ECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 63, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/1d78c791-en.

Myllyniemi S. (2017) Katse tulevaisuudessa. Youth Barometer 2016, *Publications of State Youth Council*. Ministry of Education and Culture. No 56. Grano Ltd.

Mulgan, Geoff (2020). The Imaginary Crisis (And how we might quicken social and public imagination) in *STEaPP Working Paper*, UCL, Version 1.

Nykiforuk CI, Vallianatos H, Nieuwendyk LM. (2011) Photovoice as a Method for Revealing Community Perceptions of the Built and Social Environment. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 1;10 (2):103-124. doi: 10.1177/160940691101000201. PMID: 27390573; PMCID: PMC4933584.

OECD. (2019). Strategic Foresight for Better Policies. Available at: www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/ourwork/Strategic%20Foresight%20 for%20Better%20Policies.pdf [Accessed 20/02/2021].

Ollenburg, S (2019) A Futures-Design-Process Model for Participatory Futures in *Journal of Futures Studies*, June 2019, 23(4): 51-62.

Polchar, J. Feukeu, K.E. Bisht, P. Aydogan, Ơ. Hlatshwayo, S. Markle, A. and Singh, P. (2020), "Whose futures matter?", available at: www.linkedin.com/pulse/whose-futures-matter-joshua-polchar (accessed 17 March 2022).

Ramos, J. (2006) Dimensions in the confluence of futures studies and action research, *Futures*, Volume 38, Issue 6: 642 – 655.

Ramos, J. (2017). Linking Foresight and Action: Toward a Futures Action Research. In: Rowell, L., Bruce, C., Shosh, J., Riel, M. (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40523-4_48

Ramos, J, Sweeney J.A, Peach, K and Smith L. (2019) *Our futures: by the people, for the people*. Nesta, <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/our-futures-people-people> , accessed 10/2/2024.

Ravetz, J. and Miles, I.D. (2016), Foresight in cities: on the possibility of a strategic urban intelligence, *Foresight*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 469-490. https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-06-2015-0037

Rieber, L. P., Smith, L., & Noah, D. (1998). The Value of Serious Play. *Educational Technology*, 38(6), 29–37. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44428495

Richardson, L. 2014. "Engaging the Public in Policy Research: Are Community Researchers the Answer?" *Politics and Governance* 2 (1): 32–44.

Petchey, L. (2020). *Three horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term*. Public Health Wales and the office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

Primus D.J. & Sonnenburg, S. (2018) Flow Experience in Design Thinking and Practical Synergies with Lego Serious Play, *Creativity Research Journal*, 30:1, 104-112, DOI: 10.1080/10400419.2018.1411574

Pouru-Mikkola, L and Wilenius, M. (2021) Building individual futures capacity through transformative futures learning in *Futures*, Volume 132, ISSN 0016-3287, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2021.102804.

Sharpe, B., A. Hodgson, G. Leicester, A. Lyon, and I. Fazey. 2016. Three horizons: a pathways practice for transformation. *Ecology and Society* 21(2):47. http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08388-210247

Solt, F. (2008). Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement. *American Journal of Political Science*, *52*(1), 48–60. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25193796

Stoker, G. (2006a). Public value management: A new narrative for networked governance? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 36(1), 41–57.

Toffler, A. 1978. "Introduction on Future- Conscious Politics." In *Anticipatory Democracy*, edited by Clement Bezold, xi–xxii. New York: Random House.

Tonurist, P. and Hanson, A. (2020). *Anticipatory Innovation Governance: Shaping the Future through Proactive Policy Making Documents*. Working Paper. OECD.

Torfing, J., Kristjansen, E.T., Sørensen, E. (2021). Co-designing Neighbourhood-Level Social Improvement and Innovation. In: Loeffler, E., Bovaird, T. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53705-0_18

Trowbridge, H and Willoughby, M (2022). Re-humanizing the system - how storytelling can be used to bridge the divide between services and citizens. *Public Money & Management* 45 (5), pp. 298-299. 10.1080/09540962.2021.1981014

Wagner, S, A., Vogt S. and Kabst, R. (2016) The future of public participation: Empirical analysis from the viewpoint of policy-makers in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Volume 106, 65-73, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2016.02.010