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UNESCO Chair
on Visual Anticipation
and Futures Literacy
towards Visual Literacy



ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

The “Alternative Futures” tool cultivates the conscious imagination of multiple trajectories for societal and personal challenges. The tool is designed to engage learners in exploring their prospection (thinking about the future) mechanism in a playful manner and envision different types of futures such as possible/probable and expected as well as ideal futures. In these projections learners spontaneously apply their personal experience, their perceptions on reality, their assumptions, limitations, aspirations, and value systems.

The tool **aims** to:

- Make learners aware of how their thought patterns influence decision-making in the present and their capacity to relate with possibilities in the future.
- Enhance imagination by applying creative storytelling and speculative thinking.
- Support understanding of what sources in the public domain solidify perspective, perceptions and assumptions, and how they shape our prospection process.
- Foster empowerment and resilience by exploring diverse outcomes, by embracing possibilities and coming to terms with uncertainty.
- Cultivate a future-oriented mindset that emphasizes agency and proactive problem-solving.

How to apply it

Facilitators ask learners to think, note and share how they expect the topic under examination to evolve in the future. Facilitators need to set a specific year in the future. This prompts learners to envision within a



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more concrete frame. It is advisable that this point in time ranges somewhere between 50 to 100 years ahead. Learners are much more likely to engage with a timeframe that exists in the spectrum of 'familiar'.

For the possible/probable future, facilitators need to stress that this is just an imaginative scenario; not a wishful, neither a forecasted, nor promoted. Learners need to imagine what, according to their experience and knowledge, they expect that the topic under examination will look like in that point in the future.

It is advisable that learners note on post its and in bullet points the components of their imagined future. Once they conclude their notes, facilitators ask them to share their narrative with the group. At this point of the activity, it is strongly suggested that facilitators prompt learners to distribute their post its on the "Visuality Iceberg" (please refer to the instructions described in that tool).

The "Visuality Iceberg" works equally well with deconstructing present (actual) observations and future (imaginative) scenarios. The combination of these two tools will make tangible for learners the components (outcomes, assumptions, values, structures, systems, emotional states) that compose their possible/probable future narrative.

Once this process is concluded, facilitators repeat the same procedure for the ideal futures: They ask learners to think, note (bullet points on post its) and share how they ideally wish for the topic under examination to evolve in the future. Facilitators need to stress that learners are free to image their ideal version regardless of what they consider as doable. Once learners conclude their notes, facilitators ask them to share. Again, it is strongly advised to apply the "Visuality Iceberg" and deconstruct the components of the ideal narratives.

In both narratives, possible/probable and ideal futures, learners articulate and examine their tacit mental structures, fears, needs and aspirations.

The third and last step in this activity is for each learner to compare the two projections and spot the differences and the similarities. This comparison aims to stress attention on the structures, ideals, and values that support them, generate questions and dialogue among learners and stimulate their curiosity on to how they can contribute towards sustainable and inclusive solutions for their own lives and communities.

Suggested combination with other Visual Literacy tools

The "Alternative Futures" combines effectively with the "Visuality Iceberg" (for both futures), the "Encoded Baby" (for the possible/probable futures), the "Letter to an Unborn Child" (for the ideal futures), the "Wall" (for both futures), the "Stage" (for both futures), the "Identity triangle" (for both futures), and the "Reframing Concepts" (for both futures) tools.

