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municipalities

(decision makers, employees, residents)

eds.

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futuvaisuus-koulu

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Welcome to exploring futures!

Welcome to Futures Day! We're delighted that you have decided to join us on this journey of exploration into alternative futures!

The future is constantly present in our daily life, influencing our actions and our decisions, whether consciously or subconsciously. For this reason it's important that we keep an open mind when imagining the future and that we critically follow the public debate about the future and prevailing images of the future.

The Futures Day provides useful tools for the development of personal futures awareness and futures literacy. These cards are intended to help you to design your very own Futures Day. They provide guidance and direction in imagining and visualising different kinds of futures or in organising a group discussion about some specific theme, such as the smart technology revolution. The exploration of futures can indeed be seen as a game of possibilities and probabilities where our imagination and creativity are allowed to run free.

The Futures Day is a global event and therefore we hope you will share your impressions and experiences on social media under the hashtag *#futuresday*.

We hope you have an interesting and inspiring Futures Day!

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How to use the Futures Day cards

We have produced this set of cards to make your journey of exploration into futures as successful as possible. This does not mean to say that you have to follow these cards literally, or that there is just one right way to organise your Futures Day. On the contrary, you can and should use all the Futures Day materials based on your own needs and interests.

The cards are divided into **four** categories and **colour coded** as follows:

The orange cards give an introductory welcome to the Futures Day, explaining how the cards work and giving tips on constructive futures dialogue.

The pink cards provide an introduction to the basics of futures thinking.

The green cards will run you through the process of studying futures, from scanning the horizon to creating a vision. You should dedicate at least 2–4 hours to introducing running through this process.

The blue cards provide an introduction to five different future phenomena. These themes are based on the foresight work "Driving forces of change for municipalities and regions 2016-2030"done by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. You can use these cards in shorter term work, for instance during a coffee break discussion at your workplace. The methods described in the green cards are useful for a more in-depth exploration of these blue-card phenomena.

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Tips for exploring futures

When exploring futures please bear in mind the following principles of constructive futures work:

* It's both possible and worthwhile to study futures because it's easy and great fun.
* There's no such thing as right and wrong in futures thinking, and therefore there's no need to worry about making mistakes.
* A climate of trust and confidence, playfulness, a sense of fun and humour, and experimenting and blundering are all central to exploring futures.
* The future is open to countless possibilities, so there should be no restrictions on the imagination.
* The exploration of futures is very much about personal experience and insight.
* One size does not fit all: freely apply the methods of futures thinking according to your own needs and interests.

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Tips for futures dialogue

When exploring futures please also bear in mind the following principles of constructive futures dialogue:

* It's also important to share and exchange views and experiences, otherwise thinking about the future may seem all too overwhelming.
* The purpose is not to debate, persuade or win others over about one's own views, but to give equal space to different points of view and to build new understandings about the matter in hand.
* Futures thinking is not based on hard facts alone, but emotions, tacit knowledge and intuition have an equally important role.
* Respect each other and show equal appreciation for everyone's futures thinking.
* Don't shy away from addressing emerging conflicts and try to search out issues that remain hidden.
* A good way to conclude might be to discuss the thoughts and insights elicited by futures thinking in each participant.

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Why is futures thinking so challenging?

We humans are not, by nature, very good at imagining the future. We tend to predict our own immediate future based on our immediate past. Our capacity for futures thinking is furthermore often constrained by various latent thought distortions and often unconsciously held images and perceptions about the future and about what is possible and probable in the present and the future. Indeed the way we think about the future is typically too vague and too limited to be useful. As futures scholar Noel Gough has suggested, we often consider futures in terms of:

* tacit inferences: we don't actually discuss the future, but assume that it will just appear all by itself;
* token invocations: we discuss the future in terms of stereotypes and clichés, but these have very little real detailed content; and
* taken for granted assumptions: we discuss the future or a few alternative futures as if they were matters of course, as if there were no other options.

It is important to be aware of one's own assumptions about the future, to bring them out in the open and to review them critically. It's also good to recognize that we easily tend to ignore things in which we are not interested, which we don't understand or which are not socially acceptable. Indeed in futures thinking it is important to recognize the systemic nature of the world around us: everything is interconnected and nothing happens in a vacuum.

The aim in developing our futures thinking is to learn how to stretch our thinking, to take a broader view on the future and to exercise our capacity for imagining the future based on decisions that are made in the current moment. After all it is these decisions that create the future, so it is important that we can imagine the future with true openness rather than lock our future into the constraints of our own mind.

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Principles of studying futures

The future is a fascinating subject. We all can engage and immerse ourselves in the exciting world of futures thinking. There are no rights and wrongs in futures thinking. All that is required is to keep in mind the key three key principles advanced by pioneer of futures research Roy Amara:

1. The future cannot be predicted because there does not exist any one specific future, but there exists always countless alternative futures.

2. The future is not a predetermined, fixed or inevitable fate – even when we are unable to see any alternatives to that future.

3. The future can be influenced because it is shaped by our acts and choices in the current moment.

The future does not arrive ready-made, instead we make the future. What have you done today and how will it shape the future?

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Alternative futures

Futures research is not about predicting the future, but about trying to find out

1. what is possible,
2. what is probable, and
3. what is desirable and undesirable in the future.

The exploration of *possible futures* is by nature an open-ended exercise. The purpose is to break loose from the constraints of the current moment and to creatively and imaginarily explore what possibilities are open in the future. In the case of *probable* futures the focus is turned to examining which of the futures identified as possible are in fact probable. The next step is to discuss the values on the basis of which the future is defined as *desirable* or *undesirable.*

The utility of exploring futures is determined not on the basis of the "accuracy" of future predictions. Instead, the exploration of alternative futures can help to identify a wider range of possibilities in the present time, to seize these possibilities and to work for a better future. The exploration of alternative futures will also make us better prepared to meet the future because it will no longer take us by surprise to the same extent.

What kind of futures are possible? Why is some future impossible? What futures are probable? Why is some future probable or improbable? What kind of future is desirable? Why? For whom?

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Introducing futures

Aim To attune participants to futures thinking and to set the general framework, i.e. to define the focal theme, future horizon and level of analysis

Grouping Small groups or all together
Materials required Notebook if considered necessary

Examples of how to organize a session
- Have a discussion in group or set up an assignment
- Choose a focal theme, level of analysis and future horizon

A good way to start the process is by attuning participants to the subject of futures. Engage your groups in a discussion about:
What is the future? Is one hour from now the future? What about tomorrow?
What about 10 years from now? Can the future be predicted? What can we know about the future? How can we know about the future?
After the warm-up discussion, the next step is to choose a specific phenomenon and to consider the future of that phenomenon.

1 Choose a focal theme or phenomenon

2 Choose a level of analysis

- Own, personal future
- Future of immediate community and environment
- Future of the world and humankind
Choosing a level of analysis will help to narrow down the subject. In practice different levels intersect and overlap: after all we're part of the world and the world is part of us.

3 Choose a time horizon

All that has not yet happened belongs to the future. However it's quite a different matter to discuss what is going to happen 1, 10 or 100 years from now.

Perhaps the best way to gain a sense of the future horizon is to think back in time: to consider what the world was like 1, 10 or 100 years ago.

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Exploring futures

35 % of total allocated time

Aim: To introduce the concepts of weak signal, trend, megatrend and black swan and to discuss these forces of change

Grouping Individual work, small groups or whole group

Materials required Own choice of method for identifying forces of change, Horizon scanning wheel -worksheet, post-it stickers

Examples how to organize a session
- Introduce different forces of change and ways of identifying them to participants
- Spend enough time searching for forces of change
- Compile forces of change into Horizon scanning wheel -worksheet

Once you have chosen a focal theme, the next step is to **scan the horizon:** to identify the forces of change that are impacting the focal theme at the current moment and that will shape it in the future. These forces of change include weak signals, trends, megatrends and black swans. Forces of change can be identified by observing one's own living environment and the current debate on what is happening in society and the wider world.

Megatrend = a major path of development, an identifiable cluster of phenomena with a clear direction of development

Trend = long-term change moving in a clearly identifiable direction

Weak signal = event or phenomenon that can be considered a first expression of change or a new trend in development

Black swan = an unexpected and unlikely factor of change that has significant effects and that suddenly pushes a chain of events onto an uncertain path

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Interpretation of futures

Aim To identify desirable, undesirable and probable futures based on the collected factors of change

Grouping Small groups
Materials required Futures table worksheet

Examples of how to organize a session
- Together with your participants, go over the concepts of desirable, undesirable and probable future
- Introduce the futures table to your participants
- Fill in the futures table worksheet one row at a time, considering the desirable, undesirable and probable futures of your focal theme

35 %
of total allocated time

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Once you have scanned the operating environment it is time to move on to consider the implications of the change factors identified for the future of your focal theme. Use the futures table to help with interpreting the change factors. The table is used as a matrix in which to enter alternative images of the future.

For simplicity the alternative futures are here limited to a desirable, undesirable and probable future. The futures table makes it easier to examine these futures from different angles, in this case from the point of view society, the economy, people, technology and the environment.

For instance, the future of school in 2030 cannot be understood just by looking at the physical school building (environment), but it's also necessary to consider what is taught at school (society), what teaching methods are used (technology), who are being taught (people) and what teaching resources are available (economy).

Once the futures table has been filled in, select from each row one alternative future and combine them into a common image of future.

What kind of alternative futures are possible? Are some futures more probable than others? Which image of the future is the most desirable? Why and from whose point of view?

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Making futures

20 %
of total
allocated
time

Aim	To create a common vision of a desirable future for a group and to consider how individuals can contribute to the attainment of that vision
Grouping	Small groups or all together
Materials required	Depending on the method chosen for representing the vision Together with the participants, go over the concept of vision
Examples of how to organize a session	- Compile your visions in the manner chosen - Consider what concrete steps are needed to set this vision into motion - Share the visions on social media under the hashtag #futuresday

Once you have filled in the futures table worksheets and crafted different images of the future, it is time to develop a common vision based on the images. A vision is a description of a common desired state (e.g. a small group, the class or the whole school) one wants to reach by the end of a selected future horizon, for instance in 2030.

Vision checklist:

- a vision is concrete and descriptive but not too detailed and prescriptive
- a vision is coherent, logical and realistic articulation
- a vision allows for rapid flexibility in a changing world
- a vision inspires everyone to push in the desired direction
- A vision can be represented in any format, for instance by using artistic, dramatic or audiovisual means – or a combination of all these.

How can the vision be turned into reality? What steps are needed in the current situation in order to move towards your vision – at the individual level, at municipality level, and more widely in society? What actions and choices can you make even today in order to promote the attainment of the vision? What kind of obstacles might there be to the realisation of your vision?

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The smart technology revolution

We're living in a time of transition. We have reached the cusp of what is known as the sixth wave. Futures scholars often talk about the age of smart technology. The previous, fifth wave was called the age of information technology.

Key technological drivers of the sixth wave include automation, biotechnology, the internet of things, gene technology, 3D printing, robotisation, artificial intelligence and virtual reality. It is expected that gene and biotechnology, for instance, will radically change food production. Preventive and curative medical technologies will revolutionise the way we view health and well-being as well as related actors, processes and structures.

Topics for discussion

Smart technology has application in many municipal services, including health care, education and transport	How is the smart technology revolution seen in your municipality? How could smart technology be put to use in your municipality?	In what new ways could the use of smart technology be further expanded?

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Climate change and natural resources

Climate change is having a dramatic impact on the global operating environment. Combating and adapting to climate change are major concerns for the EU and the whole world today, and in the decades ahead they will inevitably receive growing attention in the work of local and regional councils.

Growing demand for raw materials is set to drive up prices, which will particularly benefit the pioneers of the ongoing materials revolution (e.g. circular economy).

Apart from the importance of adopting a global perspective, increasing weight will be given to the maintenance of a healthy and safe local living environment and to the prevention of environmental degradation.

Topics for discussion

What effects will climate change have?	How are you preparing for climate change? How are the principles of circular economy reflected in the work of your municipality?	How could the municipality and local residents promote the principles of circular economy?

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The growth of inequality

The content in co-operation with the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities & the Prime Minister's Office

The growth of inequality presents a host of challenges to society. Welfare society is committed to looking after its weakest members, and the standards of health and well-being in Finland have constantly improved.

Most people are still content with their situation, but experiences of inequality are clearly on the rise. Inequality occurs, among other things, between socio-economic groups, genders, the majority population and minorities and between geographic regions. Inequality and the accumulation of inequalities is a far-reaching and multidimensional problem for society that reduces all human resources, adversely affects economic growth and undermines social stability. Other trends and changes, such as the advance of technology and the lack of fiscal space, can also exacerbate inequality, unless there is a concerted and focused drive to safeguard equality.

Topics for discussion

How is the growth of inequality manifested in your municipality?	How could the growth of inequality be prevented?	What steps and experiments has your municipality undertaken to ensure that all citizens will be looked after in the future?

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The population and regional differentiation

The global megatrend of urbanisation looks set to continue. More than one-half of the world's population is now living in cities, and projections are that by 2030 the figure will exceed 70 per cent. In Finland, too, the rate of urbanisation is very high. Intensive business and industry restructuring and the consequent turbulence in the labour market are further driving people to move into areas with more study and job opportunities. Immigration is also accelerating urbanisation in Finland. Urban regions are competing for skilled workers, residents and business companies. A major national concern at the present time is whether growth will be confined to just the biggest cities in the country.

The population will also continue to age in the current and next decade throughout Europe, and most particularly in Finland. The number of retirement-age people as a proportion of the total population is continuing to rise, at the same time as the population of working age is shrinking. Although population ageing is affecting all municipalities across the country, municipalities differ significantly in terms of age structure development. At the moment the share of the working-age population varies from 50 to 70 per cent. However polarisation between well-off and underprivileged older people continues to remain a related risk factor.

Topics for discussion

| What is the demographic situation and outlook in your municipality? | How to prepare for the projected population development?

Where do you expect and hope your municipality will be in the | What steps are needed – what could you do differently even today – to set the vision into motion? |

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New forms of democracy

It is expected that in the future, people will continue to want to engage in society and to have the opportunity to influence their immediate environment, but it is possible that civic engagement and participation will be channelled in different ways than is traditionally thought. Representative democracy will increasingly be challenged by various forms of direct intervention and influence. Many futures scholars are expecting that western democracy will descend into crisis if it fails to reform itself and accept new forms of direct influence as an integral part of the political system.

New democracy means low threshold participation, for instance through online questionnaires, votes and elections, participatory budgeting, customer and local resident panels, joint service development and network influencing. Examples include various ad hoc public campaigns primarily on social media. Other arenas for new forms of participation include various kinds of pop-up events. It seems that civic organisations will assume a prominent role in the new democracy field. New democracy is increasingly about partnership-based collaboration.

Topics for discussion

How do new forms of democracy manifest themselves in your municipality?	How would you want to exercise public influence?	What kinds of new forms and means of influence could you think of introducing?

We hope you have an inspiring Futures Day!

Don't forget to share your experiences in
social media with *#futuresday*

If you have any questions please get in touch at
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