Philea | Philanthropy Europe Association

COPENHAGEN INSTITUTE FOR FUTURES STUDIES

Futures Philanthropy: Anticipation for the Common Good

ANTICIPATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The future is not singular: It may take as many shapes and forms as there are people seeking to define it. The future depends on investments and choices that are made now, and the realities that will emerge from these will shape the future as time unfolds. As a sector, philanthropy is uniquely positioned to contribute to the long term and therefore to apply a futures lens to its work. Even when acting in an emergency or when responding to compounding crises, we in the sector can consider aspirations for the future that we want and integrate them into our thinking and actions. If, according to Albert Einstein, today's problems can not be solved with yesterday's solutions, then we must develop new ways of thinking to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

As a sector which prides itself on its ability to take risks, innovate and build bridges between communities, it is even more relevant for philanthropy to strengthen its futures muscle.

My hope is that this publication will help us all do just that, by serving as a guide on how to use foresight and futures thinking in philanthropic practice. It is our belief at Philea that communities can challenge and inspire each other, and that learning from peers and the evolving field can lead to transformative change.

"Futures Philanthropy: Anticipation for the Common Good" explores how and why philanthropy could play a role in fostering anticipation for the common good and what anticipation looks like when it is put in the service of society and common interests. The publication is broken down into four parts:

FORESIGHT AND PHILANTHROPY provides arguments and know-how, as well as practical insights, cases and methodologies on how to embrace futures thinking holistically.

FUTURES OF PHILANTHROPY showcases voices from the dynamic European philanthropy ecosystem sharing practices, learnings, struggles, questions and aspirations. Beyond theoretical insights these are actionable strategies to shape a better tomorrow.

FUTURES OF EUROPE invites us to challenge our assumptions and mental models. Combining data and projections with questions and signals of hope, it aims to unleash our imagination and cognitive flexibility.

APPLIED FUTURES PHILANTHROPY TOOLS closes the publication with a selection of instruments, including a self-reflection tool and a futures "canvas", that can help you consider how you can apply futures philanthropy practices to your own organisation and context.

This work is the result of a partnership built on shared interests and a common vision. It represents two critical disciplines: futures and foresight, championed by the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies; and philanthropy, nurtured by Philea and our extensive philanthropic community which brings expertise and deep knowledge of the field to this endeavour.

I hope the pages ahead inspire you to employ futures thinking and anticipation in your work, and in turn help you to contribute to a healthy, sustainable and equitable future for people and the planet.

DELPHINE MORALIS

CEO, PHILEA

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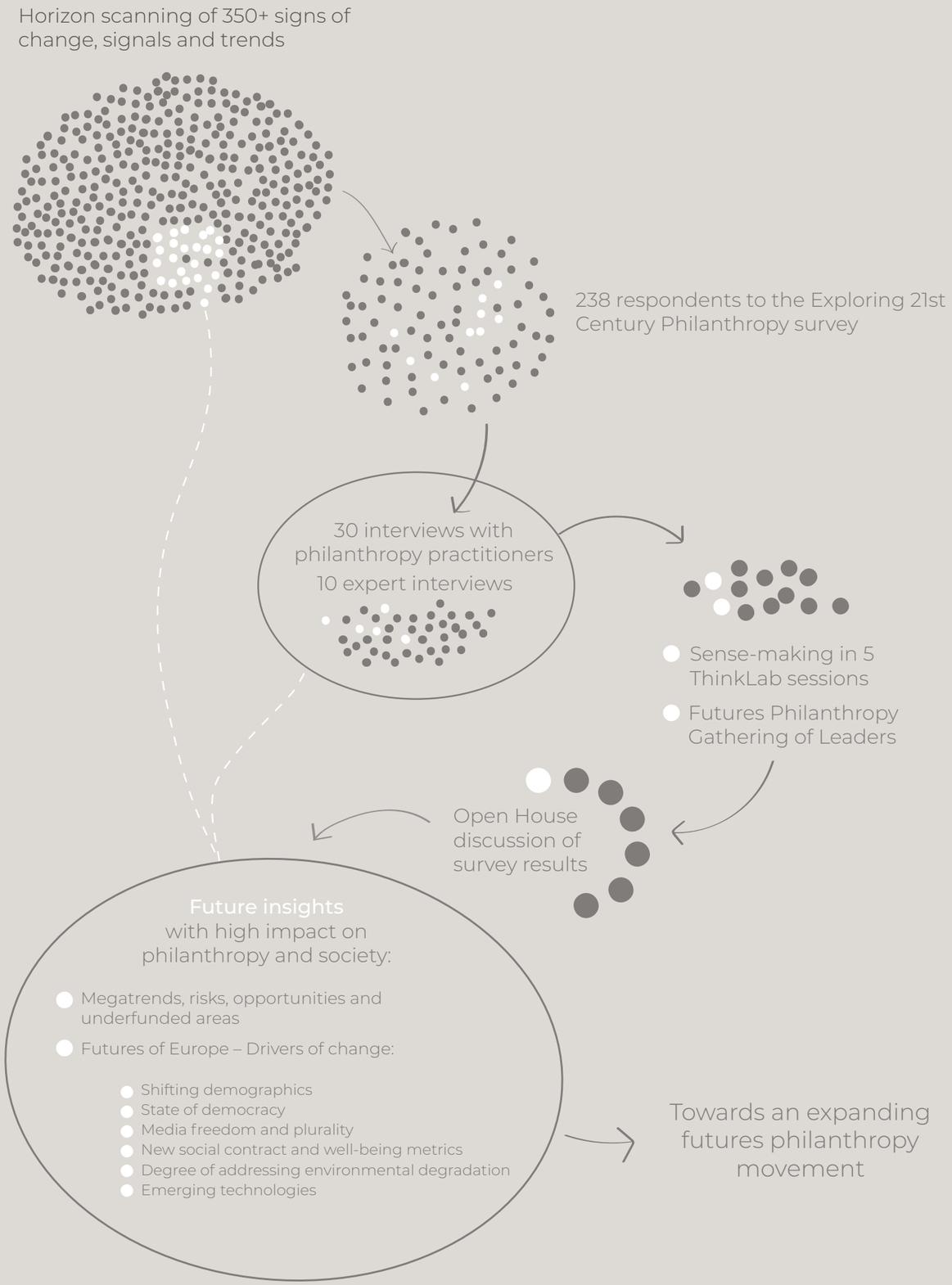


HOW WE ARRIVED HERE

This publication, based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, is a result of extensive desk research and horizon scanning of over 350 signs of change, signals and emerging trends (February – April 2023). Semi-structured interviews with 40 funders, philanthropy networks and experts in the fields of technology, climate, democracy and EU policy were conducted (July 2022 – May 2023).

The insights were discussed during five ThinkLab sessions and at the in-person Futures Philanthropy Gathering of Leaders (May – July 2023). The Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey, conducted by Philea from April to August 2023, provided insights into mega-trends, risks, opportunities and future vulnerabilities in the next decade, yielding 238 responses from various sectors ranging from philanthropy to civil society, academia, business, think tanks, media and governments. Preliminary survey results were presented and discussed at an Open House event (September 2023). The survey data was further analysed using principal component analysis, helping us arrive at core factors and major drivers of change impacting society and the philanthropy field.

PART 1

FORESIGHT AND PHILANTHROPY

TOWARDS FUTURES PHILANTHROPY

The future is unfolding all around us, and we are in touch with it every day – whether through the ideas we generate; the strategies and programmes we design; the partnerships and collaborations we embark on; or through the aspirations, emotions and goals we nurture within ourselves. The future is not a distant void detached from the current moment, and the journey to better anticipate and imagine it begins now. But no single approach to the future holds all the answers. Depending on a single perspective can cause us to overlook the valuable insights that other viewpoints might offer. Merging futures thinking with philanthropy has the potential to address present-day crises and support long-term transformative change.

Regardless of our roles or locations, chances are that most of us have felt a lack of agency in our efforts to create a positive impact, which can seem insignificant when compared to the sheer scale of the systemic challenges facing us. These challenges span environmental, economic, political and well-being crises, the ongoing consequences of the pandemic, and the destruction caused by war. Faced with these complex and seemingly uncontrollable problems, efforts to mitigate, restore, prevent and innovate can seem inadequate. The reason is not that we aren't giving the problems the time they deserve, but that the way we choose to tackle them is no longer fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Overcoming systemic short-sightedness and “there-is-no-alterative” thinking

Despite the long-term nature of our present challenges, many of the systems with the power to address these challenges are geared towards short-sightedness coupled with widespread “there-is-no-alternative” thinking. What is more, new terms such as "futures anxiety" are emerging, reflecting concerns of younger generations who are increasingly hesitant about starting families in today's uncertain world. Politicians chase re-election every four to five years, and private organisations tend to put the pursuit of strong quarterly financial statements above all other considerations. The prioritisation of immediate goals and concerns means that both future opportunities and the lasting impacts of our decisions are sometimes overlooked.

Across sectors, essential skills are needed to connect long-term thinking to the present and create hopeful narratives and images of the future that address problems. To be effective at provoking change, and to ensure we do not fall back into systemic short-sightedness, these narratives and images should include diverse civil society and community voices.

Overcoming short-sightedness and a crisis of imagination also requires a shift in mindset for both individuals and decision-makers aimed at addressing dominant images of the future – the ideas, concepts and visions of tomorrow that are prevalent in public conversations. Whether around established narratives around the threat of malevolent AI, or capitalism as the only imaginable economic paradigm, dominant images of the future can colonise our imaginations and stifle the formulation of alternative routes of action and development.

Here, anticipation and futures thinking can play a role in unlocking innovative pathways for navigating our complex and often stagnant systems, offering fresh perspectives and solutions. Yet while imagining alternative pathways is a necessary beginning, their realisation requires action and sustained support. Although competing visions and frameworks that aim at better and more participatory futures do exist, achieving their objectives has proven to be a formidable challenge. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for instance, have done much to spark social change, foster development initiatives and provoke organisational introspection with noble intentions, yet a 2023 report reveals that only 12% of the goals are on track toward being realised by 2030.[1]

The evolving complexities of global challenges like climate change, worsening mental health, deepening inequalities, and rapid technological advancements demand a more forward-thinking approach from philanthropic organisations. Here, too, short-termism and a lack of alternatives can be a hindrance. When the focus is on immediate, tangible outcomes, the underlying systemic issues that create the very societal problems foundations seek to address often remain neglected.

The diversity of the European philanthropic landscape, with its tapestry of different cultures and traditions of giving, reflects the varied histories and norms of each country. Foundations and philanthropic organisations are among the freest institutions in our societies. With their flexibility, access to resources, networks, potential for innovation and ability to focus on the long term, they can make a significant contribution to overcoming current and future crises and proposing alternative solutions. Foresight and futures thinking can help unlock new skills and mindsets that are needed in the 21st century.

A brief history of futures

When used in the context of fostering long-term thinking, the word future changes from meaning a distant time yet to come,[2] to become a tool and process that can be used to inform current decisions – i.e. using the future to inform the present.

Terms like 'futures studies', 'strategic foresight', 'futures thinking' or often 'futures' in short, as well as 'futures literacy', 'futures design' and 'futuring' are used to address ways of working with the future in a structured manner. The skills and tools required in any of these processes are built on two inherent premises. The first is that there is not one, but many possible futures. The second is that it is possible to make choices today that will influence future developments.

The idea of envisioning future alternatives is by no means a novelty. From prophecies and divination to art and philosophy, using imagined futures to make decisions in the present is an ancient practice. A notion emphasised in indigenous knowledge is that the future is ancestral; an intergenerational vantage point that highlights the connection between the past, present, and the future, including the need for equitable and just pasts to build better futures and to be good ancestors.

The formal and systematic approach to using the future known as 'futures studies' originated in the 1960s as a product of political needs. Faced with an unpredictable international relations landscape, American public advisory think tanks like RAND Corporation and the Hudson Institute began to draft various scenarios for the future in order to "cope with history before it happened", as the futurist Herman Kahn put it. This early scenario work often had military applications and included simulating potential US responses to nuclear war. In Europe, notably in France, scenario planning was beginning to be used as well, first in the policy realm and later in the corporate context. 'Strategic foresight' arose as the business-oriented sister discipline to futures studies.

Since then, critical voices have further enriched the practice by applying futures outside the traditional policy and corporate contexts. Futures studies and foresight have continued to diffuse, advance, and merge with other domains, including design and the arts, to achieve more immersive storytelling and tactile interpretations of possible futures. In education, futures are increasingly being used to equip youth with the ability to playfully engage with uncertainty.

Futures studies have also found a home outside its traditionally Western context. In cultures in the East and Global South, non-linear notions of time perspective have shaped the way futures are practised, and the recent movement to decolonise futures work can be seen as a push to both democratise it and put it to use in service of communities.[3]

In 2020, UNESCO declared futures literacy to be an essential skill for the 21st century. Futures literacy draws on the human ability to imagine and use multiple and diverse futures – not just to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, but also to see the present anew.[4] Achieving a greater degree of futures literacy is a way to understand how our cultures, worldviews, backgrounds and intentions tend to influence how we view the future.

Complimentary to studying possible futures in a foresight context, futures literacy focuses on anticipation and imagination – how and why we think about futures in different ways. It is a skill used to embrace uncertainty and appreciate complexity as a necessary step to not only inform our planning and preparation for the future, but equally so, to approach the future with spontaneity and a sense of exploration and discovery.[5] Ultimately, by becoming more conscious of how our understanding of the future guides decisions, both in a professional and personal setting, we can make choices that are better informed and less clouded by biases and misguided assumptions.

From strategy to transformation

While numerous innovative approaches to conducting futures work have emerged, its prevalence in the corporate realm remains unmatched to date. There, the merit of foresight is documented in a growing body of empirical studies showcasing how the practice can lead to enhanced proactivity and mental flexibility in decision-making, increased organisational performance and an improvement in the ability to address industry-specific challenges, while charting the complexities of the contextual environment.[6]

Yet the public, multilateral and civic sectors are by no means dormant. When applied to this context, the emphasis of foresight shifts from improving organisational performance to achieving societal transformation and regeneration. In the public sector, anticipatory governance is gaining ground, where futures and foresight are used to inform policy-making at local and national levels. Policy institutions devoted to integrating futures and foresight into anticipatory governance systems have emerged across the world, including in Wales, which appointed the world's first Commissioner for Future Generations in 2015. The Commissioner acts as a political watchdog, ensuring that all public initiatives and policies implemented align with the well-being goals created with the public to reach the goal of a prosperous Wales.[7]

At the regional, international and multilateral levels, the EU, OECD and the UN are implementing futures capacities through increased upskilling across agencies and the development of foresight studies. These efforts highlight signals of change as well as the immediate challenges and opportunities for member states to shape more timely, appropriate and robust policy-making. Notably, the UN Secretary General's office, under Our Common Agenda, is working towards a "Declaration for Future Generations" and a "Summit for the Future" aimed at aligning multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow.[8]

The humanitarian and civic sectors are often denoted as laggards in adopting foresight, and while that may be true when considering a more formal and often top-down approach, it is important to remember how organisations in this sector differ from corporations. Informal foresight frequently happens here, driven less by power or capital and more by participation and imperatives for marginalised groups to speak their truth to power and thereby propose alternative futures.

This type of foresight, more implicit than formally documented, thrives in activism, drawing from real world experiences and the quest for social and climate justice. Yet the informal foresight practitioners in this sector often struggle to influence key decision-makers, with some exceptions such as climate activist Greta Thunberg's advocacy, which amplified the voices of the younger generation toward global policy and market leaders.[9]

Yet more structured approaches to foresight do exist in the humanitarian and civic sector as well. The International Federation of Red Cross is pioneering foresight practice in the humanitarian sector, where scenarios were used to envision escalating tensions and the increased need for aid to Ukraine prior to Russia's invasion in 2022.[10] The International Civil Society Centre created a "Scanning the Horizon" initiative, a global scouting and analysis platform that brings together international civil society and national umbrella organisations, as well as funders and development consultancies to share insights, monitor key trends and develop strategies[11].

Still, anticipation for the common good, grounded in formal foresight and futures literacy and driven by philanthropy and civil society, needs to evolve to enhance strategic influence on policy-making. By incorporating insights from civil society we can guarantee that real world, frontline perspectives and the inclusion of marginalised voices can contribute to shaping resilient and equitable images of the future. This inclusion not only enriches the policy-making process but also ensures that a diverse range of experiences and needs are considered in the creation of sustainable and inclusive strategies for the future.

Philanthropic futures practice

The philanthropic sector is in a unique position to harness the strengths of foresight unhindered by the obstacles that can limit its application in a corporate or policy context. Operating outside the confines created by electoral cycles or the short-term imperatives set by the market, the philanthropic sector can embrace foresight to drive positive change in a way that embodies the true essence of long-term commitment. Coupled with its broad reach, independence, freedom as well as its ability to bridge public, private, civic and academic spheres, philanthropy can take a leading role by building capacity, amplifying the voice of local communities and civil society and fostering anticipation for the common good in a way that is both inclusive and impactful.[12,13]

Advancing a futures and foresight lens across strategies, programmes, instruments, and learning agendas can become a resource to inform philanthropic giving and action and alleviate future vulnerabilities. Looking to-wards alternative solutions and regenerative futures, this synthesis of foresight and philanthropy can address the dominant images of the future by asking clarifying questions like: whose future is being prioritised, who benefits from these scenarios, and what assumptions are driving these narratives?

In envisioning regenerative futures, we shift our focus to sustainable and nurturing systems that prioritise well-being and ecological health. Regenerative futures involve creating systems that not only sustain but also replenish and restore environmental and social resources. This approach contrasts with extractive models, aiming instead for a balance where human activities contribute positively to the environment and society.

At its core philanthropy seeks to craft hopeful futures through initiatives aimed at the common good. Foresight can become an asset for the sector by guiding it through uncharted territories, and helping to create lasting positive change. By applying foresight, philanthropy can proactively tackle challenges, establish meaningful collaborations, and create more future-oriented strategies, programmes and instruments, as well as learning agendas (see Part 2 of this publication).

For Futures Philanthropy the vision is a diverse, future-fit European philanthropy that rises to the challenges of our times and keeps asking relevant questions. Uncertainty and complexity are not challenges to be addressed and managed, but the very fundamental characteristics of the times we live in. Futures Philanthropy is an invitation to foster collective anticipation and imagination to come up with alternative solutions, harness the potential of communities, move beyond quantifiable impacts, and be prepared for current and future crises by creating the conditions for deep, transformative change.

Having a long-term vision

Having a long-term vision requires patience and commitment. This is why our funding commitments at the Romanian-American Foundation often span 7 to 10 years, giving partners the freedom they need to achieve our common purpose. Philea's Futures Philanthropy Initiative has served as a source of inspiration for us to launch a similar process in Romania – together with our partners, local communities, and civil society organisations.

– Suzana Dobre, Romanian-American Foundation, Romania

A GUIDE TO USING THE FUTURE

Adopting a futures mindset

Anticipation for the common good can sound daunting, but the right mindset and the right set of tools can be the first steps leading to a transformational journey for individuals, organisations and communities alike. This journey starts within. Before studying futures as a topic, it is vital to consider *how we think* about it in the first place. A futures-oriented mindset can ensure that we "look up" and do not become captives of the immediate present, established routines, or cognitive frameworks.

A critical assessment of our mindset can empower the imagination, enhance our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur. Once we have familiarised ourselves with a futures mindset, we can begin working with the tools and approaches that allow us to discover the possibilities of what might lie ahead.

When it comes to cultivating futures literacy,[1] even a little can go a long way. We can start with integrating a set of principles into our daily activities, which aim at shifting our thinking about the future in a less predetermined, more empathetic, explorative and systematic direction. Below we outline a list of principles that can help change how we think about the future.

PRACTISING ANTICIPATION AND WELCOMING UNCERTAINTY

Planning and preparation often overshadow the importance of exploration and discovery. By actively contemplating how future possibilities influence our present actions and decisions, we can become more attuned to the unexpected forces, shaping our world. This mindset can change uncertainty around a perceived setback into an asset, recognising the unpredictable and complex nature of the future as a wellspring of insight and innovation.

How might we embrace uncertainty as a resource to inform our approach both personally and professionally?

ADDRESSING ASSUMPTIONS AND FALLACIES

Biases can distort our perception, assumptions can lead us to accept beliefs without evidence and fallacies can corrupt our reasoning. Recognising these is crucial to adopting clearer and more diverse foresight.

What are approaches that can be used to identify biases and assumptions?

LISTENING WITH THE INTENT TO UNDERSTAND

Relying on traditional 'maps' or methods may no longer suffice, as the landscape of tomorrow is ever-changing. Adapting to these evolving scenarios requires empathetic thinking, attuned to the nuances of diverse perspectives and experiences.

How can incorporating empathy into futures thinking lead to more inclusive and effective strategies?

FOSTERING EXPANSIVE THINKING BY LEADING WITH QUESTIONS

Encouraging open-ended inquiries paves the way for innovative thinking and problem-solving. An environment of curiosity makes people more comfortable with taking intellectual risks by expressing ideas and concerns without fear.

How can regularly asking 'what if?' help to unlock new possibilities and foster a culture of creative exploration?

SHIFTING FROM INSIDE OUT, TO OUTSIDE IN

Many organisations remain deeply rooted in their original principles, yet struggle to evolve with the changing world. It is essential to transition from an inward-focused approach to one that embraces an outside-in perspective. This shift requires a broadened view, akin to a bird's-eye perspective, that acknowledges and integrates global megatrends into the organisation's core mission.

How does your organisation's work align with emerging global patterns? Are your philanthropic efforts merely reactive or are they proactively shaping and responding to these broader societal shifts?

CHALLENGING 'OFFICIAL' IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

By questioning and dissecting dominant images of the future, we can pinpoint assumptions, break free from outdated or inappropriate visions and perhaps even avoid the repetition of past mistakes.

How can scrutinising conventional wisdom open up space diverse perspectives and alternative solutions?

TREASURING FAILURE AS LEARNING

Embracing risk-taking and experimentation cultivates an environment ripe for discovery. Venturing into uncharted territories often yields greater rewards than playing it safe, as true innovation often lies beyond the realm of safe bets.

How can treating failures as learning experiences change approaches to progress in your organisation or fields?

PRIORITISING THE VOICE OF TOMORROW

Emphasising the meaningful inclusion of children, young people and future generations in present governance and decision-making is at the heart of critical thinking and sparks vital intergenerational conversations. This practice is more than a gesture; it is a commitment to consider the long-term impact of our actions in philanthropy and other fields, as outlined in the case study on page 36.

How will decisions made today be judged by those who inherit their consequences tomorrow?

From Mindsets to Tools

The tools on the following pages aim to serve as an inspiration to apply futures thinking to your own organisation and collaborations you are part of.

The journey begins with the setting of clear parameters. This means defining your scope, topic and objectives, and involving a diverse group of participants in the process to mitigate blind spots. This preparatory phase is crucial to shaping a focused and effective foresight endeavour. To assist in this first step, there is a holistic suite of approaches to consider which are informed by both theory and practice. This guide, which draws on the Six Pillars of Futures Studies by Sohail Inayatullah, futures expert and a professor, is designed to assist philanthropic organisations in adopting an iterative and proactive approach that explores hidden assumptions and alternative and preferred futures, while also road mapping the next steps to take.

What is the topic, timeframe and intention of your futures endeavour? Consider applying a futures lens to one of your causes, or the organisation's purpose and mission.

How and where can you introduce futures, foresight and imagination practices in your organisation?

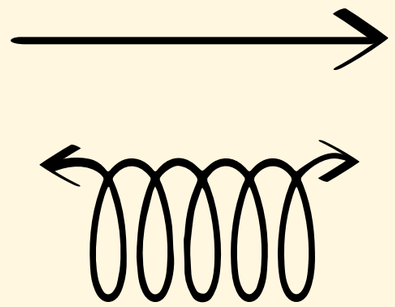
Who can you bring along from amongst your colleagues, governance, peers, partners, and communities?

Timing the future

Do you view the future as a product of luck or karma, or do you see your journey there as a planned and risk-assessed progression? Or, perhaps you see the future as having endless possibilities, where anything could happen. Timing the future (Figure 1) involves identifying the grand patterns of history and understanding the unique models of change we individually perceive. This prompts us to consider our own perspective on time and change. When doing this contemplation, we can explore and hold space for different perspectives than our own, which can stem from varying cultural backgrounds and world views.

- *Do we see the future as a straight path of progress, achievable through hard work and leading to a brighter tomorrow, or in non-linear and exponential ways, as explained in Figure 1?*
- *Are new futures primarily driven by the creative efforts of minorities who challenge traditional pathways with innovations across various domains?*
- *How might a few key decisions have the power to render old behaviours obsolete and enable a new transformative direction?*

Figure 1
Timing the future

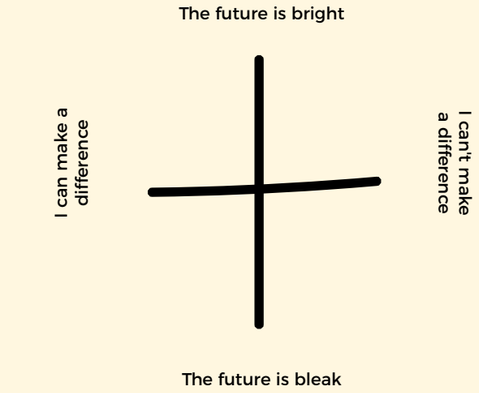


Establishing a futures discourse with the Polak Game

The Polak Game (Figure 2) helps us reveal our views on the future and where they stem from. To reflect on our outlook and sense of agency, start by responding to these two questions: 'In the next 10 years, do you see the world as getting better or worse?' and 'How capable do you feel of personally affecting the future?' By considering our personal perspectives and those of others in response to these questions, we can gain insight into our individual and collective views of the future. This tool is particularly effective in revealing how we hold diverse assumptions and perspectives to the unfolding possibilities of the future.[2]

- *How do the images of the future you hold shape your decisions and actions today?*
- *In what ways do your background, experiences and current circumstances influence your views of the future?*
- *How might we create a culture tapping into the wealth of knowledge, ideas, and aspirations that unleash desirable futures and a sense of agency in us?*

Figure 2
The Polak Game



Collective intelligence and sensemaking with futures literacy

Futures literacy helps build collective intelligence through sensemaking and promotes diversity of thought, creativity, openness to uncertainty, experimentation and innovation. Futures Literacy Laboratories (Figure 3), by Riel Miller, former Head of Foresight and Futures Literacy at UNESCO, is a facilitated learning journey that stimulates anticipation and establishes a common ground fruitful for taking intellectual risks.

The first phase aims to reveal assumptions by imagining probable and desirable futures. In the second phase, the future is reframed and negotiated through an alternative future scenario constructed with dilemmas and provocations. The third phase seeks to rethink the present by asking new questions that have arisen throughout the process, leading to the fourth phase, which informs the possible next steps. A Futures Literacy Lab is an ideal way to better understand both the surrounding world itself, as well the diverse perspectives that exist in it.

- *What are the hidden assumptions and biases that imagining alternative futures could reveal? What dilemmas, tension points, and friction areas exist in your field?*
- *What new questions do you have now, that you didn't have before?*

Mapping futures with the Futures Triangle

To provide clarity on where we come from and where we are going, you can map the past, present, and future through the *Futures Triangle* (Figure 4), which is a simple tool to start a conversation or brainstorming session about driving forces of change.

The 'push of the present' phase aims to provide quantitative insights by asking: *Which trends are carving out the trajectories ahead*? The 'weight of the past' phase, based on qualitative analysis, uncovers barriers to change by asking: *What dominant narratives hinder progress?* Lastly, the 'pull from the future' phase, collects visionary outlooks by asking: *What are the ideal visions for the future?* [3] The sum of the parts can then help to paint a picture of plausible futures.

- *Consider the areas your organisation is working on, the causes you support, or the mission of your foundation. What trends constitute the push of the present, what barriers to change signify the weight of history and what preferable images of tomorrow represent the pull from the future?*
- *How does the sum of the parts help you paint a picture of a plausible future?*

Figure 3
Futures Literacy Laboratory

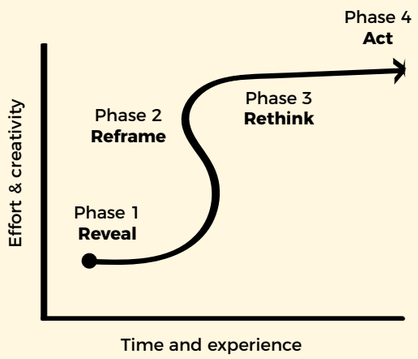
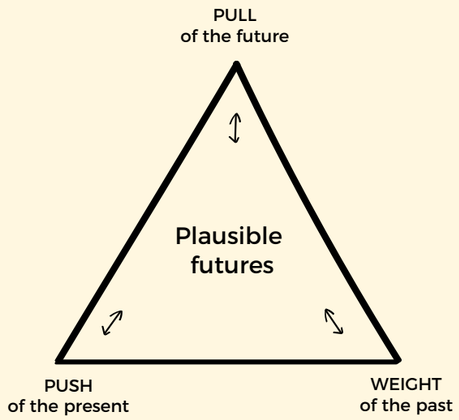


Figure 4
The Futures Triangle



Anticipating signals with the Emerging Issues Analysis

The Emerging Issues Analysis (Figure 5) involves identifying and examining new issues on the horizon (also called 'weak signals') that might not seem important now but could become significant in the future. It is different from looking at past trends to guess what might happen next, because the emphasis of this model is on noticing emerging topics that break from the past rather than being extensions of it.

The aim can either be to notice potential problems early on, before they become too big or complex to handle easily, or conversely, to identify how to harness new opportunities. Often, the subtlety of these weak signals means that they are overlooked, neglected, or misinterpreted, despite their potential significance. This oversight can stem from a lack of awareness, ingrained biases, or evaluations that fail to capture the potential importance of the signals.

- *Consider your organisation, its operating environment, or the philanthropic sector at large. Which emerging issues are on the horizon, and how might they develop to have an impact?*
- *How could various signals, like new technologies and social movements, intertwine, and what consequences might arise from exploring "what if?" scenarios?*

Deepening futures with the Causal Layered Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of the future, the Causal Layered Analysis (Figure 6) offers a four-tiered approach to understand futures from surface trends (litany) and systemic causes to cultural values and deep-seated myths and metaphors, providing insight beyond immediate observable phenomena. This model is a versatile tool for understanding problems both from the top-down — starting with immediate trends and moving to deeper systemic and underlying issues — and from the bottom-up, revealing underlying myths, assumptions, and cultural values necessary to foster comprehension of new systems, offering a dynamic approach to analysing and shaping desired futures[4].

- *How can you foster deeper dialogues with philanthropic peers to explore persisting biases, challenges, and myths, and simultaneously help create new narratives within the philanthropy ecosystem?*
- *How do the futures envisioned by minority groups, indigenous peoples, and other marginalised communities compare to dominant paradigms, and how can their involvement shape the programmes and instruments within your organisation?*

Figure 5
Emerging Issues Analysis

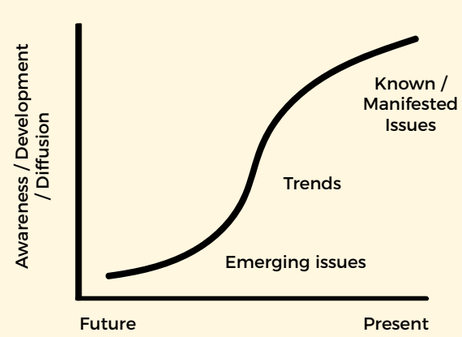
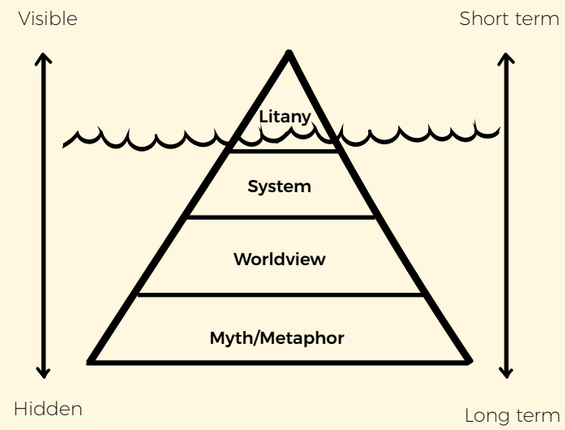


Figure 6
Causal Layered Analysis

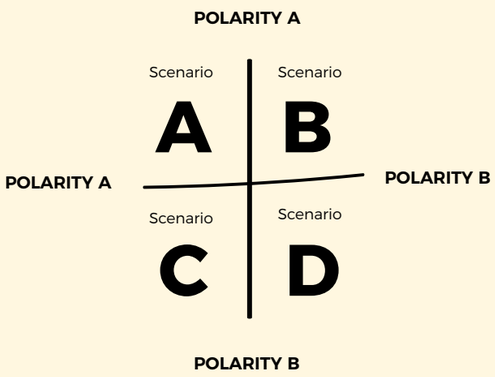


Creating alternative futures with scenarios

The journey forward entails creating compelling narratives about potential futures through scenario planning, a cornerstone of strategic foresight that emphasises envisioning various futures to broaden our current thinking rather than predicting outcomes. This process involves steps from defining the future question of interest, analysing key change drivers, to pinpointing the uncertainties with the greatest potential impact. This leads to identifying two critical uncertainties, which are used to construct four scenarios across their extreme potential outcomes, illustrated in Figure 7. These scenarios blend analytical thinking with storytelling, aiding in ideation, prototyping, strategic development, and planning for responses. For practical insights on scenario development and its implications, particularly regarding the future of Europe, refer to the "Scenarios in action" section in Part 3 of this publication or experiment with constructing your own scenarios using the critical uncertainties outlined on page 28.

- *How would your organisation's strategy, programmes, and instruments respond to different future scenarios?*
- *What key uncertainties could affect your programmes, strategies, and mission's future? How could these uncertainties influence your scenario planning, revealing new paths and opportunities for your organisation?*

Figure 7
Scenarios



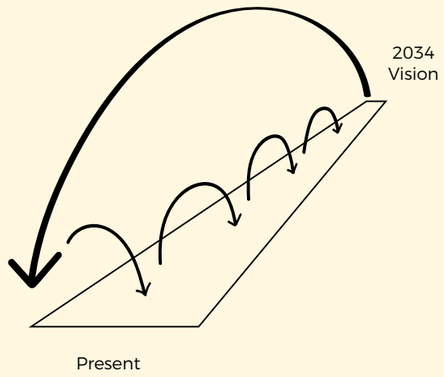
Transforming the future with visioning and backcasting

Once you have arrived at alternative future scenarios in your journey, identifying aspirations and ways to achieve them comes next. A journey towards a desired future can be guided by complementary foresight methods such as visioning and backcasting (Figure 8).

Visioning serves as a guiding light for decision-making as it involves creating an inspiring image of the future that represents our aspirations and unites stakeholders under a common purpose. In contrast, backcasting begins with a predefined vision of the future and meticulously works its way backwards to the present, outlining the policies, strategies, and milestones required to fill the voids. Together, they assist in charting pathways to an aspirational future[5].

- *In what ways can backcasting from a clearly defined future vision be used to inform and adjust current strategies and actions within philanthropic organisations?*
- *What is your organisation or community's vision for a desirable future, and what steps can you take today to progress towards that vision?*
- *What partners and coalitions do you need on the pathway to this desirable future?*

Figure 8
Visioning and backcasting



Transformation pathways with the Three Horizons framework

The Three Horizons framework, developed by Bill Sharpe, author and researcher, serves as a pathway practice to facilitate transformation by strategically examining various time horizons and the corresponding necessary actions (Figure 9).

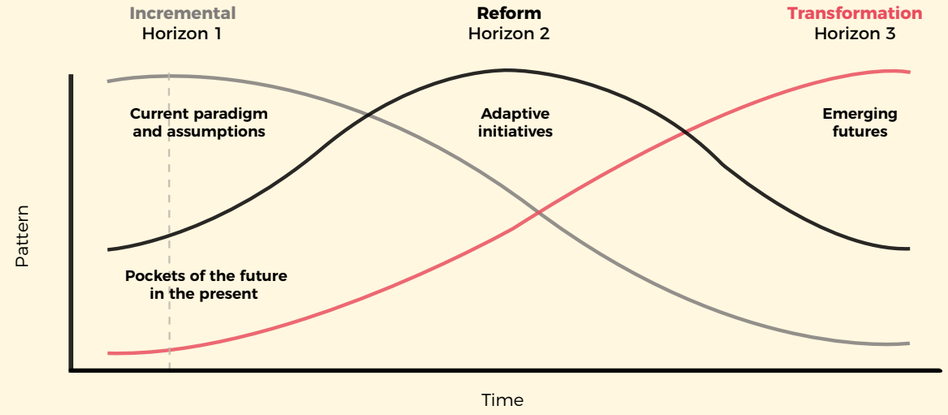
Think of it as a roadmap for change where the first horizon represents how things are currently done. In this status quo, there may be practices aimed at implementing incremental change, or there may be signs of wear, misalignment with assumed future needs or simply obsolescence. The third horizon stands for transformation and embodies the ideal future – a vision of how we want things to be which is full of aspirations and hopes. The second horizon serves as the bridge between the present and the future. It is the space of innovation and disruption. Some of the innovations will help sustain the first horizon, while other ideas will support the third horizon and help transition to the outlined vision[6,7]. This is a dynamic model, with the third horizon eventually becoming the first and opening the space for new innovations and solutions responding to new needs and aspirations.

- *What does the shift from the first to the third horizon entail for your organisation and where are the opportunities and challenges in this transitional space?*
- *Consider examples of the third horizon manifesting in the present. What 'pockets of the future' can you observe today?*
- *How does your organisation's current strategy align with third horizon objectives? Is there a need to reassess priorities to better contribute to this envisioned future?*

IN SUMMARY, the use of futures and foresight tools in philanthropy can act to guide missions, conversations, and coalitions towards more effective and future-oriented philanthropic actions. By training teams and your partners in these methodologies and incorporating futures-driven exercises into team meetings, conference programmes and boardroom discussions, you can foster an environment ripe for idea generation and deeper reflection.

The following pages provide insights into the megatrends, risks and opportunities shaping society and philanthropy in the next decade, which are based on the results of the Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey. They will guide you through the evolving context and explain why adopting a futures mindset and a long-term view is essential to navigating these changes.

Figure 9
Three Horizons Framework



"Foresight could uncover underfunded areas and where philanthropy should allocate its resources. The foresight conversation is very much dominated by the tech industry. The voice of civil society is missing in this."

– Rhodri Davies, Why Philanthropy Matters, U.K.

21ST CENTURY PHILANTHROPY SURVEY

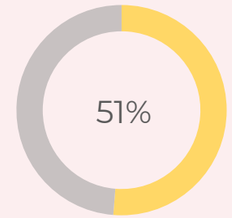
Megatrends, future vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities in the next decade

In spring 2023, 238 philanthropy, civil society, academia, business, think tank, government and media organisations and representatives shared insights into the future of the philanthropic sector in the **Philea Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey co-designed with the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies.** Perceptions about major trends, risks, opportunities, and future vulnerabilities matter, as they shape our actions today.

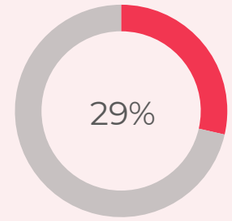
In 2033, will philanthropy have a voice? Will it be a trusted, legitimate partner co-shaping societal and ecosystem development, or will it be considered old-fashioned, elitist, and unable to inspire debate or provide sparks for transformation? How are philanthropic practice and decision-making evolving? What are the most relevant structural and strategic choices philanthropic leadership is facing?

These times call for philanthropy to be bold and to think in a new key. The next pages provide the big picture that emerges from this collective exploration.

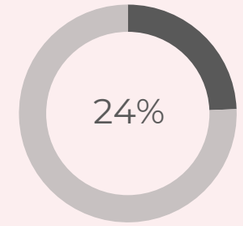
Types of respondents
– multiple response options were possible



PHILANTHROPIC ORGANISATIONS



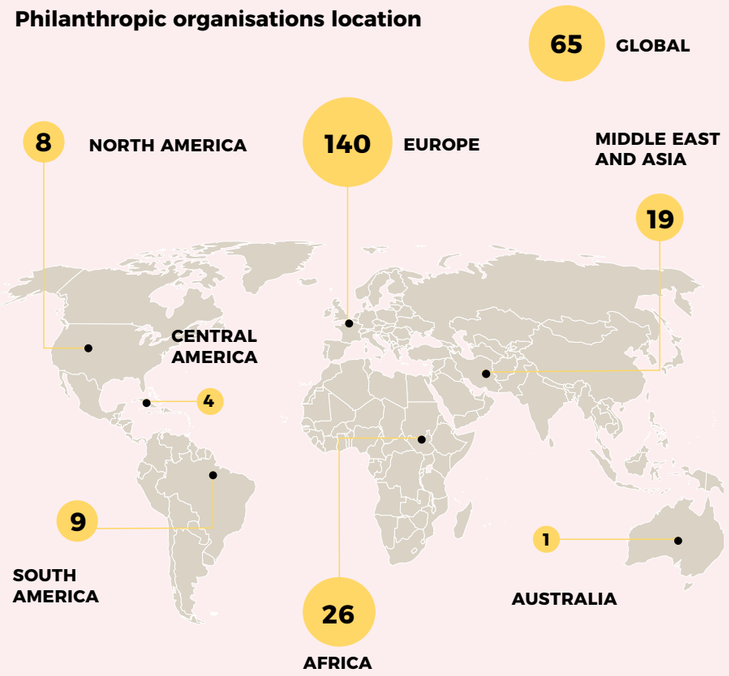
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS



RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS, THINK TANKS, BUSINESS, GOVERNMENTS, AND MEDIA

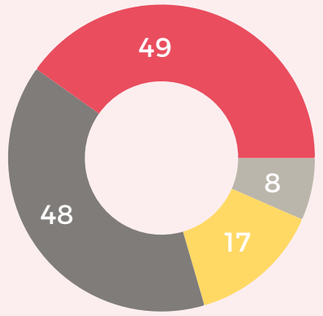
Other 19%: Donor collaboratives, pooled funds, non-endowed philanthropic organisations, fundraising foundations, philanthropic networks, membership associations, regranters and intermediaries, consultancies, social enterprises, and international organisations

Philanthropic organisations location



N = 238

Philanthropic organisations within the sample



ENDOWED FOUNDATION
PHILANTHROPY SUPPORT ORGANISATION
CORPORATE FOUNDATION
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Philanthropy in a new key

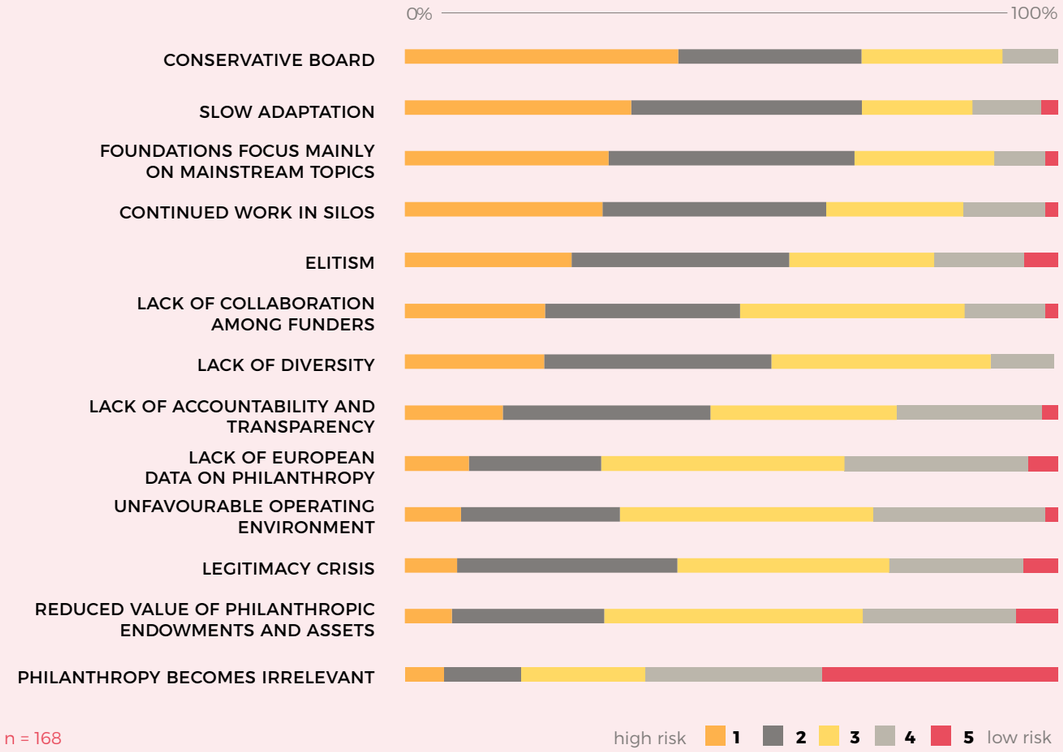
The biggest internal risks in the next decade

The respondents of the survey identified *conservative boards* (42%) as the highest internal risk philanthropy is facing in the coming decade (see Figure 1). It is followed by *slow adaptation* (37%) and *foundations focusing mainly on mainstream topics* (32%). Short-termism of philanthropic engagement, risk aversion, power imbalance, overemphasis on strategy over impact, restricted funding practices, and focus on technical issues rather than cultural change are among the topics respondents raise critically in their comments on potential internal risks.

At the same time, there is consensus that philanthropy is an essential force in driving action and collaboration in the future. The results of the survey are reassuring in that only 6% of the sample felt that there was a high risk that philanthropy would not be relevant in the future. The subsequent principal component analysis, aimed at breaking down the responses into patterns, helped identify correlations between the risks. The key composite factors below, reduced to four from the initial list of 13 internal risks drive the survey findings and invoke a future debate around risk-management strategies for philanthropic organisations:

- ELITE-DRIVEN CONSERVATISM
- LEGITIMACY CONCERNS, INSUFFICIENT ACCOUNTABILITY, AND DATA
- SLOW ADAPTATION AND LACK OF COLLABORATION
- THREATS TO FINANCES AND OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

FIGURE 1: **FUTURE INTERNAL RISKS**



n = 168

The most relevant opportunities in the next decade

Among the most relevant opportunities for philanthropy in the next ten years are adopting systemic approaches; trust-based philanthropy; focus on breakthrough innovation; integrating futures thinking and foresight; and collaborating with governments, businesses, and communities (see Figure 2). These opportunities are key, and stories of how community members are seizing these opportunities are featured in the next part of this publication.

In retrospect: What has shaped the sector in the previous decade

Understanding the past is important to enhance agency so that alternative futures can be created.[1] The survey respondents reflected on what has impacted the sector in the last decade. To a large extent these include digital technology, collaborative practices, social movements, deepening economic inequality, and a volatile political environment. The principal component analysis helped us arrive at a smaller set of components and reveals three major factors that shaped change in the philanthropy landscape:

- INTERNAL OPERATIONAL CHOICES
- EXTERNAL POLITICAL CONDITIONS AND INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS
- DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, NEW MEDIA, AND REGULATION

Among the top three factors that had the strongest positive effect on the field are monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning; use of data; and collaboration, according to the survey responses.

FIGURE 2: **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

n = 168

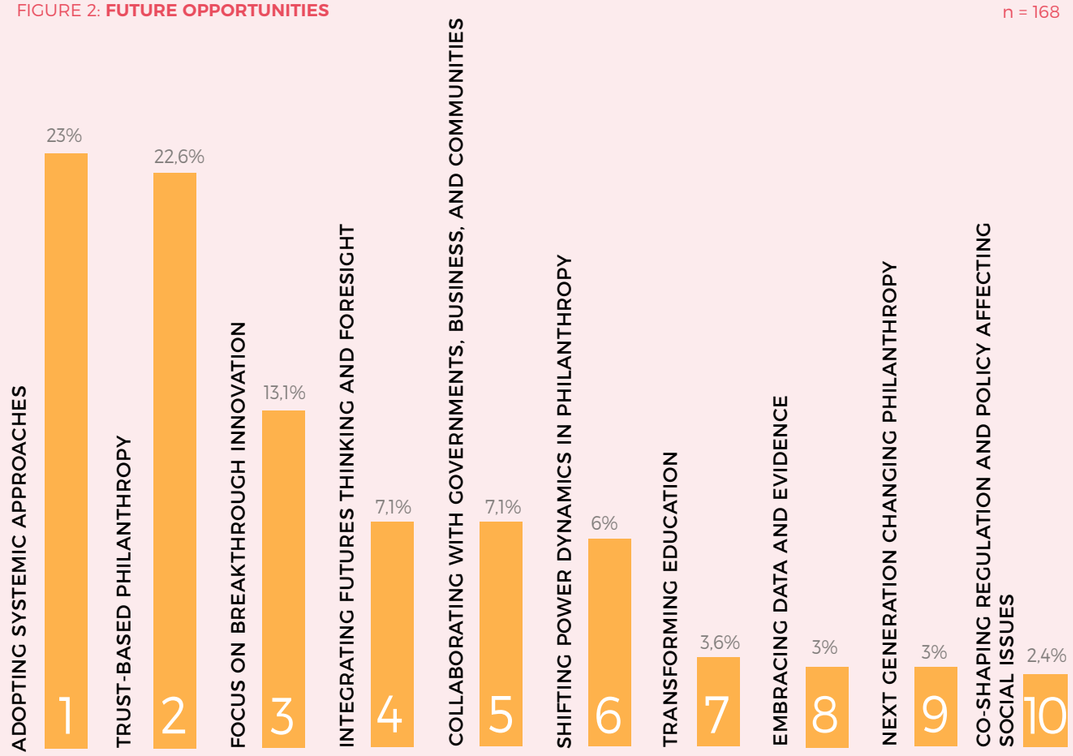


FIGURE 3: **CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES**

POLARITY A — **CRITICAL UNCERTAINTY** — POLARITY B

Proliferation of democratic innovations across societies — Crisis of democracy and decline in democratic participation

STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Mitigation and adaptation efforts reduce effects and impact — Lack of mitigation and adaptation efforts increases effects and impact

DEGREE OF ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

AI is shaped as a tool for the common good — AI is shaped as a tool to preserve profit, power and control

ETHICAL USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Society is driven by inclusive and diverse social values — Deepening societal divides over identity, gender, race, ethnicity and religion

CHANGING SOCIETAL VALUES

More equal income and wealth distribution — Unequal income and wealth distribution

INCOME AND WEALTH DISTRIBUTION

Enhanced social cohesion, within and across countries — Increased social fragmentation within and across countries

LEVEL OF PUBLIC TRUST AND SOCIETAL COHESION

Ranking critical uncertainties for the future of Europe

Critical uncertainties in foresight are factors that are both highly uncertain and might have a significant impact on the future. These uncertainties can profoundly influence the direction and outcomes of strategic planning, scenario development, and decision-making processes. Below are the factors that respondents (n = 179) believe will fundamentally alter or affect Europe and thus philanthropic organisations and even the civic sector as a whole in the future. Here, we identify two extreme but possible future outcomes - or polarities - for each of top ranked critical uncertainties for the future of Europe that requires philanthropy's attention in the next decade. These polarities, generated and added post-survey, serve to enhance understanding and envisioning of how each of the uncertainties may unfold, and thereby impact philanthropy and society at large.

Megatrends

Relative certainty in an uncertain world

American writer John Naisbitt, who coined the term "megatrend", is known to have explained that "*trends, like horses, are easier to ride in the direction they are going.*" These long-term forces often inspire the basis of foresight work as they can fuel the imagination and inform strategies, risk management, and innovation. As such, a megatrends analysis offers insights into how future-defining trends are interconnected and interdependent. They shed light on how the future unfolds through a combination of unstable forces and stable trends.

Inspired by Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies' list of global megatrends, respondents have prioritised and contributed key megatrends that will shape philanthropy's future in the next decade, which are illustrated on the following page. The top five megatrends identified by the respondents include, *climate change and environmental degradation; AI and automation; concentration of wealth; climate migration; and the rising influence of new governing systems.*

These megatrends form an intricate web, where disturbing one thread can impact the broader picture. Consider the compound effects of the trajectory of one megatrend on vulnerable communities, conflict and displacement, and governance systems – all areas relevant to philanthropy. Climate change, for instance, is not only associated with. environmental degradation but also exacerbates climate migration, leading to displacement which in turn can put pressure on governance systems.

By acknowledging the interplay between megatrends, philanthropic organisations can strategically prioritise initiatives, advocate for policy changes, identify research gaps, and leverage opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and resilience building. Ultimately, megatrends can act as a compass to embrace complexities and potential future impacts, ensuring that we are better equipped for the future: *understanding them is vital for anticipating the common good.*

"The findings of this survey serve as both a mirror and a map — highlighting that conservative boards pose a challenge in achieving impactful change in today's world. However, within this challenge lies a profound opportunity: approaches to systems change. This isn't just theory for us at the Bikuben Foundation; it is our lived experience.

Our transformation is deeply rooted in governance changes, with pivotal decisions made by the board to become a systems change funder. It demanded a seismic shift in perspective and a steadfast commitment to reimagining the potential of philanthropy. By embracing a systems approach, we have positioned ourselves to catalyse deeper, more sustainable impacts across the sectors we support."

- Søren Kaare-Andersen, CEO,
The Bikuben Foundation, Denmark

MEGA-TRENDS

FUTURE FORCES AFFECTING PHILAN-THROPY AND SOCIETY

1.
CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION
Pollution and emissions threaten ecosystems, health, and cultures.

2.
AI AND AUTOMATION
AI and robotics advancements will reshape work, life, education, and leisure.

3.
CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH
While global inequality between countries has declined, wealth inequality within countries is growing in many parts of the world.

4.
CLIMATE MIGRATION
Extreme weather events and competition for resources drive involuntary migration.

5.
RISING INFLUENCE OF NEW GOVERNING SYSTEMS
A strong competition of governing systems emerges globally, while democracy is retreating worldwide.

6.
INCREASING FRAGMENTATION OF GLOBA-LISATION
Fragmentation of the global economy leads to more regional trade with like-minded partners, while global travel, trade, and communication remain an important pillar.

7.
AN AGEING WORLD
An older global population strains healthcare and alters consumption and markets.

8.
POPULATION GROWTH
The 21st century will witness dramatic global population growth.

9.
INDIVIDUALISATION AND EMPOWERMENT
Empowered individuals forge new, diverse communities online and offline.

10.
FOCUS ON HEALTH
Understanding of genetic insights and lifestyle influences coupled with new technologies enables personalised healthcare.

11.
URBANISATION
Cities will become larger, more complex, and interlinked.

12.
NETWORK ECONOMY
Digitalisation fosters peer-to-peer processes and value creation through decentralised and non-hierarchical collaboration.

13.
COMPETITION FOR RESOURCES
Intensifying resource demand sparks conflicts and security issues among states and in communities.

14.
CHANGING EDUCATION
Technology shifts learning from traditional to flexible, personalised paths, while the landscape of skills needed in the 21st century changes.

What are megatrends?

Megatrends – large global and societal change drivers – hold determining cues to the directions for philanthropy in the coming decade. These overarching forces can help decode the future of global societies, revealing local manifestations and thus providing a degree of certainty in an uncertain world.

SOURCE: CIFS MEGATRENDS AND EXPLORING 21ST CENTURY PHILANTHROPY SURVEY

Assess your futures-preparedness

Understanding the interconnected effects and potential impacts of megatrends is vital. With this report, you can evaluate the intricate interplay across philanthropy and civic society at large, and contemplate their influence on strategic priorities, policy advocacy, identification of research gaps, and seizing opportunities for innovation, collaboration and enhancing resilience.

Future vulnerabilities and societal issues

Addressing the climate crisis – from awareness to action

While the climate crisis is high on the agenda throughout the survey, respondents commented on the lack of awareness around effective solutions to complex issues such as environmental degradation, involuntary migration, competition for resources, or biodiversity loss.

Philanthropic funding globally going towards climate mitigation has more than tripled since 2015, increasing from $900 million to more than $3 billion in 2021, according to the ClimateWorks Foundation[1]. The Philea mapping "Environmental Funding by European Foundations vol.6"[2] documented a similar trend with an increase of 48% of climate funding, from €708 million in 2018, to over €1 billion in 2021. However, in comparison to the scale of challenges such as reversing biodiversity loss or decarbonising our economies, this amount remains low. More collaboration among funders coupled with systemic approaches is required.

Philea's European Philanthropy Coalition for Climate connects a diverse group of foundations, philanthropy infrastructure organisations and other partners to accelerate transformational change and is part of the global #PhilanthropyForClimate movement with a shared commitment to meaningful climate action.[3]

Democratic recession and the rise of authoritarianism

The themes of retreating democracy, growing polarisation and societal divide were clear throughout the survey results. One of the respondents observed: "*More former democratic states will develop into semi-democratic, populistic and authoritarian systems; there will be a strong competition of systems where democracy is only one option as a path ahead.*"

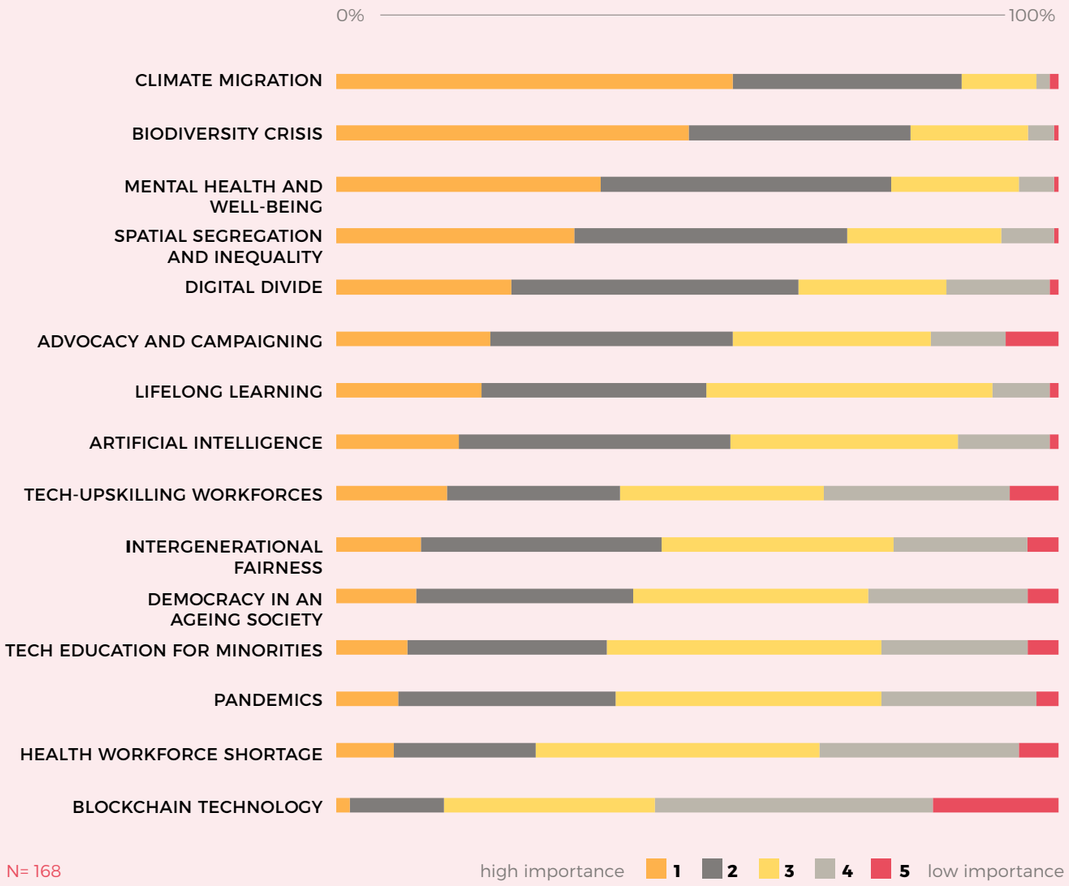
Lack of trust in public institutions and governments, economic insecurity, disinformation and radicalisation of political discourses on issues such as migration, gender, and racial equity are mentioned throughout the survey responses as major drivers of a deepening societal divide. The underlying root causes of growing polarisation are linked to the rise of inequalities between and within countries and the concentration of wealth. To be able to respond to growing polarisation and backsliding democracy, we need a deeper understanding of philanthropic democracy funding in Europe.[4]

Mental health and well-being

Mental health and well-being are among the top future societal vulnerabilities, and number one priority according to civil society organisations represented in the sample (n= 55). This is a warning signal to all philanthropic organisations – regardless of their mission – and a growing trend. By 2030, depression alone is likely to become the second highest cause of disease burden in middle-income countries[5] and the third leading cause in low-income countries, as predicted by experts. Some respondents emphasise the severe impact of social media on the mental health of young people, in particular those who are increasingly experiencing depression and anxiety. As observed in one of the comments: "*The youth population represents the future of Europe. Their aspirations, values, and engagement in various areas, including politics, technology, and social issues, can shape the trajectory of the continent. Youth unemployment, education, mental health, and social inclusion are some key concerns related to this demographic.*" While there has been increasing funder focus on mental health, much more remains to be done – broad collaboration across sectors with greater focus on advocacy efforts to allocate resources to what could yet prove to be one of the defining challenges of our time.

Figure 4 highlights a ranking of potential future societal vulnerabilities that would need philanthropic engagement and attention. The ranking is derived from interviews and research prior to the Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey.

FIGURE 4: **POTENTIAL FUTURE SOCIETAL VULNERABILITIES**



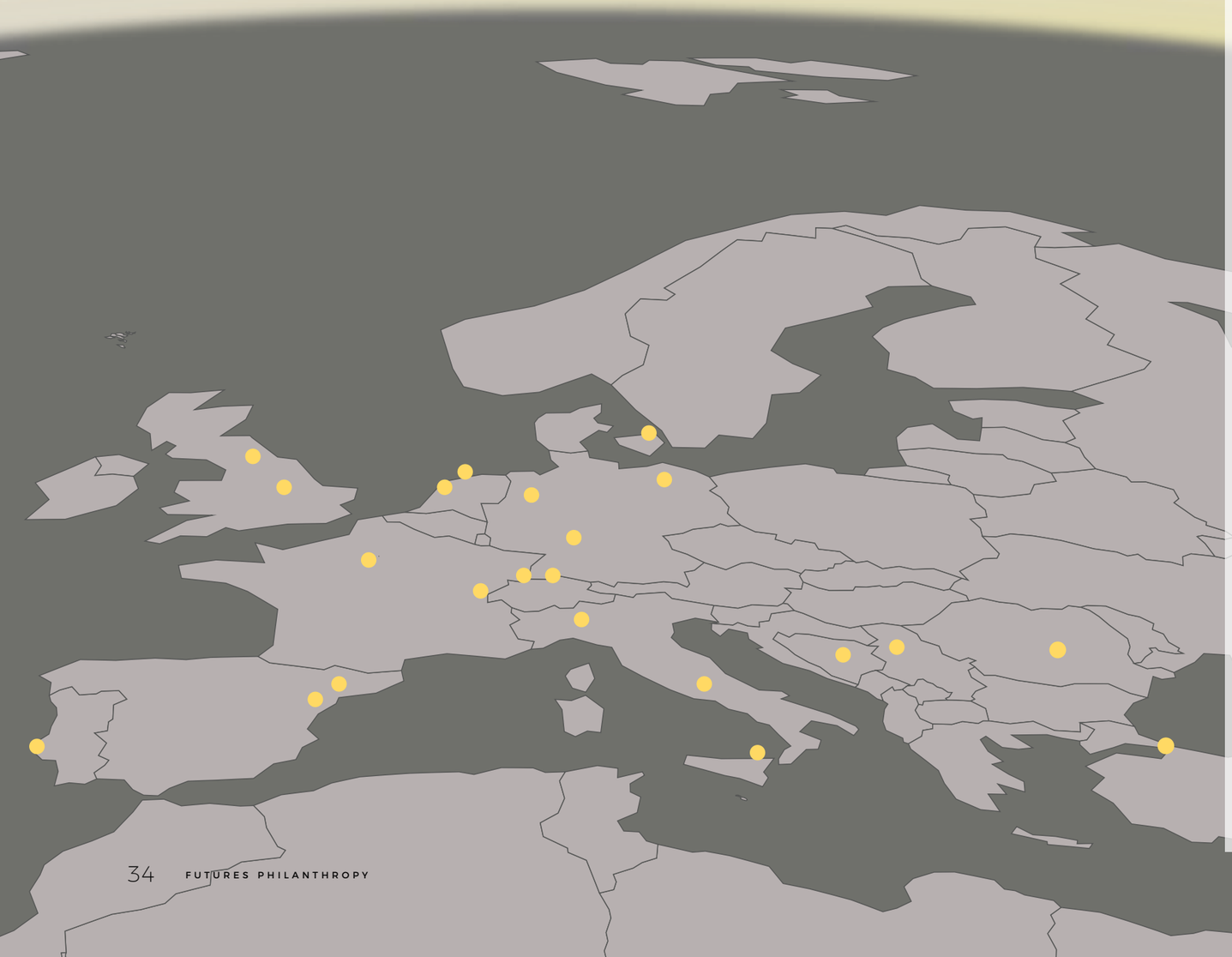
N= 168

There is no simple playbook on how to tackle complex issues such as biodiversity loss, backsliding democracy, or mental health, but the urgency of the moment is clear. It is also clear that we require a collective effort to shift narratives and common perceptions. We are thankful to Barry Knight, CENTRIS, for having encouraged this survey and having helped us with the design and statistical analysis of the results. Thanks also go to David Hesse, Mercator Foundation Switzerland; Joe Elborn, Evens Foundation; and Lizzy Eilbracht, Adessium Foundation for having critically reviewed the questions and multiple-choice responses. The futures philanthropy community has been instrumental in disseminating the survey and ensuring a wide range of responses, making it a truly collective endeavour.

SCAN QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE 21ST CENTURY PHILANTHROPY SURVEY

MAPPING EMERGING PRACTICES IN THE EUROPEAN ECOSYSTEM

The application of foresight and futures thinking in European philanthropy is diverse and evolving. This initial ecosystem mapping provides glimpses into novel practices of European funders and networks as a source of inspiration. As you can see in what follows and in the next part of the publication, futures philanthropy does not follow a dogmatic understanding of foresight, but rather offers a broad range of approaches that span long-term horizons, systems thinking, trust-based collaboration, innovation and experimentation, as well as commitment to future generations and more...



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:
- **Mozaik Foundation:** *Collaborates with entrepreneurs, emphasising long-term impacts on younger generations.*

DENMARK:
- **Bikuben Foundation:** *Implements systems approaches in their programmes and initiatives.*
- **Novo Nordisk Foundation:** *Provides support and infrastructure for science, research, and quantum computing.*

FRANCE:
- **Fondation de France:** *Applies systems approaches to their programmes and initiatives.*

GERMANY:
- **Allianz Foundation:** *Conducts a study on "Next Generations" exploring the perspectives of young adults in Europe on the future.*
- **Bertelsmann Foundation:** *Implements the RANGE platform, utilising foresight tools for strategic planning.*
- **Famtastisch Foundation:** *Applies systems approaches, involves communities in decision-making, provides unrestricted funding and focuses on long-term vision.*
- **Robert Bosch Foundation:** *Offers new funding instruments based on trust to support actors and ideas.*

ITALY:
- **Assifero:** *Introduces the "Future Chair" initiative.*
- **Community Foundation of Messina:** *Has a 10-year strategic framework, provides innovative funding such as microcredits and empowering budgets.*
- **Compagnia di San Paolo:** *Implements a holistic strategy, fosters breakthrough innovation in areas such as quantum computing.*

THE NETHERLANDS:
- **European Climate Foundation:** *Integrates strategic foresight into foundation operations.*
- **Laudes Foundation:** *Implements a holistic strategy and applies systems approaches to programmes and initiatives.*
- **Porticus:** *Employs systems approaches and has an exploratory budgeting method.*

PORTUGAL:
- **Gulbenkian Foundation:** *Initiated "Portugal 2030" and the Intergenerational Fairness initiative, and contributes to an index on intergenerational fairness.*

ROMANIA:
- **Romanian-American Foundation:** *Provides long-term, flexible funding opportunities spanning 7-10 years.*

SERBIA:
- **Trag Foundation:** *Bottom-up community empowerment.*

SPAIN:
- **la Caixa Foundation:** *Breakthrough-research and innovation*
- **The Home of the Pioneers of Our Times:** *Focuses on long-term vision and implements holistic strategy*

SWITZERLAND:
- **Botnar Foundation:** *Strategic learning and evaluation, meaningful child and youth participation.*
- **Mercator Foundation:** *Adopts an iterative strategy, publishes "Signals" internal newsletter, and practices foresight internally.*
- **Oak Foundation:** *Adaptable and forward-looking strategic learning agendas.*

TURKEY:
- **Sabanci Foundation:** *Embarks on a future design project to develop impactful and relevant scenarios about how philanthropy might develop in the next 20 to 30 years.*

UNITED KINGDOM:
- **Joseph Rowntree Foundation:** *Runs an "Emerging Futures" programme, focusing on forward-thinking and imagination initiatives.*
- **Open Society Foundations:** *Streamlines approaches to futures thinking in horizon scanning, crisis preparedness, and strategic planning.*

ARE YOU READY TO LEAD THE WAY?
Please let us know about your futures practice

DARE TO ANTICIPATE

How the Mercator Foundation Switzerland made foresight part of its organisational culture

A sustainable future and a good life for all within planetary boundaries requires a profound societal transformation — new ways of producing and consuming, learning and participating. The Mercator Foundation Switzerland aims to inspire change by empowering civil society to meet the major challenges of our time – the climate crisis, erosion of democracy, inequality of opportunities and the impact of digital transformation.

THE ISSUE

Formulating strategy in a world of interconnected, fast evolving crises is a challenge. How do you balance immediate needs with long-term goals? How do you stay on target while opening up to new ideas? And how do you find allies across sectors to ensure deep and systemic impact? More and more foundations are starting to experiment with foresight practices – with tools to anticipate potential futures and risks. But foresight is no ready-made remedy. Its methods need to be embedded in the organisational culture and paired with the time to test, apply, and reflect.

THE CONTEXT

Historically, strategic foresight emerged in the military context. It has since become a relevant method for corporations and governments to look out for emerging trends, risks, and opportunities – and to think through scenarios and test how to respond. However, the needs and interests of civil society are not routinely considered in such foresight exercises. Anticipation for the common good remains a wish, not a reality.

THE PATH FORWARD

Foundations can play a crucial role in establishing foresight for the common good. They can be alert to "weak signals", foster participatory anticipation methods, mobilise cross-sectoral interest in emerging trends and provide risk capital to launch experiments on future issues.

Establishing foresight routines in a foundation can strengthen the organisation and its impact, but also civil society itself.

The Mercator Foundation Switzerland (Stiftung Mercator Schweiz) sees its main role as that of a catalyst. It seeks to initiate collective action processes and provides spaces and means for ecosystems of change. The foundation has dismantled traditional strategy cycles and moved towards more agile, iterative planning in order to be a proactive and ever-learning funder. Mercator Foundation Switzerland's work is essentially about cross-sectoral collaboration, courage and risk-taking. This requires an organisational culture that centres curiosity and experimentation and is comfortable with anticipating future developments and testing new approaches. Strategic foresight is an essential part of this, helping the organisation to challenge its own routines and linear thinking.

THE METHOD

Through signals analysis, sensemaking sessions, practical experimentation and learning dialogues, the Mercator Foundation Switzerland identifies emerging trends, increasing its impact in areas such as urban surveillance, the role of finance in transformation, and public interest journalism. These initiatives exemplify Mercator's commitment to harness foresight for the common good by fostering participatory anticipation methods, mobilising cross-sectoral partnerships, and providing risk capital to ultimately contributing to positive change.

Mercator Switzerland's approach towards strategic foresight can be summarised in four stages:

In this first stage, the team is encouraged to engage in horizon scanning and detect weak signals – indicators of potential societal changes. Based on these insights, a monthly bulletin is curated, fostering participatory foresight within the organisation to identify patterns and emerging trends.

Through informal and creative sensemaking discussions and pattern recognition, the team is then able to identify patterns in a plethora of diverging signals. This stage is vital to understanding emerging trends.

To deeply comprehend emerging trends, practical experimentation is required. Mercator Foundation Switzerland goes beyond observation and sensemaking with their Futures Lab, a sandbox for strategic experiments that challenge established methods by trying new methods, alliances, and funding mechanisms – all with the goal of maximising long-term impact.

The foundation evaluates all experiments thoroughly, engaging in continuous strategic dialogue with board and team members; adjusts its theory of change; and communicates key learnings across and beyond the organisation, including the achieved impact utilising the MELA+Sharing framework to monitor, evaluate, learn, adapt and share its work.

READ FULL CASE STUDY :

PART 2

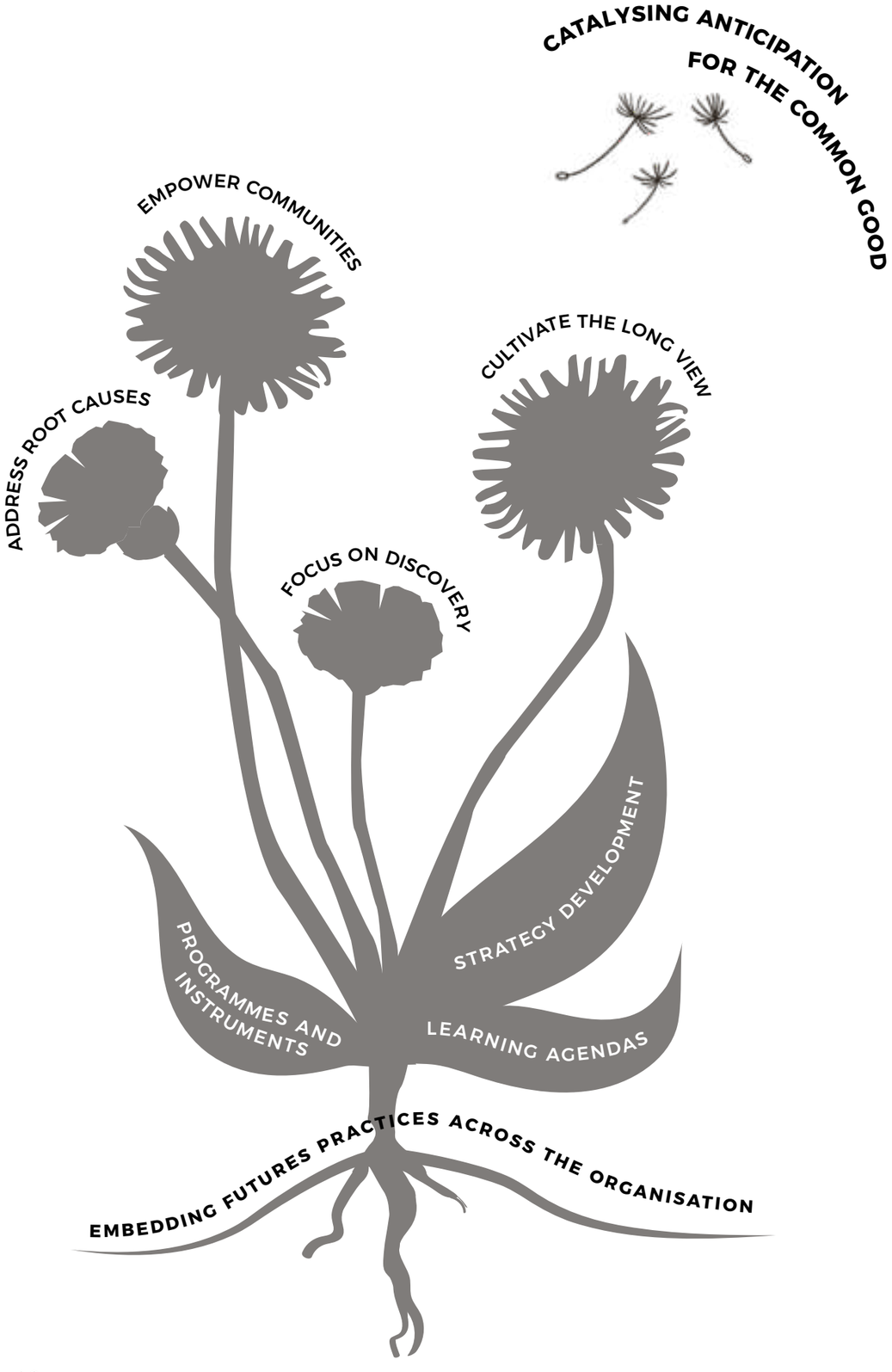
FUTURES OF PHILANTHROPY

FUTURES PHILANTHROPY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

The old world is crumbling, while the new one is yet to be born, which calls for a radical rethinking of how we approach the future and address complex challenges where cause and effect are often unclear. Today, many of the traditional frameworks we have long relied upon to navigate change do not bring the results we want to see. What is more, well-intended approaches and programmes can lead to negative, undesirable consequences and dynamics. This requires philanthropic organisations to stay open and flexible and expand the philanthropy toolbox with new, non-linear strategies and practices to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability.

Acknowledging complexity as a feature of our times, many funders and philanthropy networks are going "back to the drawing board", to reiterate the words of Rien van Gendt, philanthropy expert and practitioner[1]. While few funders have fully embraced foresight in their daily work and embarked on scenario exploration, or identification of weak signals of change, many philanthropic organisations have started experimenting with new ways of learning; developing strategies; designing programmes and funding instruments; encouraging internal cultures of curiosity and innovation; putting communities at the centre of action; engaging children and young people in decision-making; and acting for future generations. These organisations do not necessarily call this foresight, and some would even hesitate to identify these practices as novel. What is emerging, however, is a multitude of diverse, intentional, explorative approaches that we call futures philanthropy.

This part of the publication provides snapshots from a living, evolving philanthropic practice. Building on our ecosystem mapping of present-day initiatives undertaken by philanthropic organisations in the previous chapter, the following pages are devoted to core futures philanthropy principles. They are the result of a collective exploration, distilled from the Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey results and numerous ThinkLab sessions, as well as feedback loops with the philanthropic community. You will also read about some tangible examples to ignite your own thinking and exploration. What follows are the voices of philanthropy practitioners and partners who shape these principles and practices today. Towards the end, the Futures Philanthropy Self-Assessment Tool and Canvas offer playful ways to reflect on your organisation through a futures lens, how you might activate the futures philanthropy principles within your own context, and what inspires *you* to take action.



The dandelion as a metaphor for futures philanthropy and regenerative anticipation

All living organisms and systems are by nature anticipatory, characterised by "regeneration", "exaptation" and "autopoiesis".[1] Regeneration is a repair system, enabling living organisms to self-renew. Exaptation refers to the flexibility for future change, not only current conditions. As explained in "On Regenerative Anticipation", exaptation "*bears relation to emergence, not as a set of instructions but as an ability to change*".[2] Autopoiesis, or self-creation, is the capacity of the system to reproduce itself or parts of the entity.[3]

The dandelion in this publication aims to reflect the spirit of regenerative anticipation, an essential trait of all living systems. A widely distributed plant, the dandelion plays a vital role in ecosystems: not only can it adapt to extreme temperatures, low moisture and to a variety of environments, it can also protect, restore and nurture degraded soil. With the help of the wind or a child's breath, dandelion's seeds can be spread far and wide. Just like dandelions, philanthropic organisations can adapt to new environments, help nurture the soil for emerging ideas and seed alternative futures, disseminating them widely and contributing to the anticipation for the common good.

Think of this dandelion visual as a feedback loop that can help you understand how to embed a futures mindset and culture within your own context. It all starts with integrating futures practices across your organisation and the ecosystems you are part of, which can then translate into action through strategic development, programmes and instruments, and learning agendas. This is an invitation to see futures not as a space of limitation but opportunity. By addressing root causes, empowering communities, focusing on discovery and cultivating the long-term view, funders and philanthropic organisations can provide the essential nutrients for otherwise inhospitable habitats and help catalyse anticipation for the common good.

"Futures thinking is important not only for philanthropy but for the entire society. We have the facts that prove that our obsession with the past and economic growth does not provide better conditions for today or tomorrow."

-Dea Vidović, Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia

Key principles for embedding futures into philanthropic practice

ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES:
CONTRIBUTE TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Systemic approaches involve adopting a holistic view that focuses on root causes and recognises the interconnectedness of various elements within a system, rather than focusing on isolated parts. This involves context analysis of the external environment and collaborative effort with non-aligned organisations in diverse partnerships, with the aim of broadening perspectives and transforming underlying structures, power dynamics, policies and culture. This requires working within ecosystems. The role of philanthropy infrastructure organisations as catalysts of change is critical - they can steward the sector and its allies towards collective impact.

FOCUS ON DISCOVERY:
ENABLE BREAKTHROUGH INNOVATION AND A CULTURE OF EXPERIMENTATION

Breakthrough innovation and a culture of experimentation are pivotal for organisations aiming to lead transformative changes. This entails cultivating an internal environment that encourages the exploration of new methods and learning from failure. It also involves identifying and supporting radical social innovation at the periphery; a commitment to research and science; and enabling partners that actively participate in innovation ecosystems and create new knowledge and technologies.

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES:
FOSTER TRUST-BASED COLLABORATION

Central to community empowerment is prioritising local ownership and bottom-up engagement by placing the voices and needs of communities at the forefront of decision-making and programme implementation. Building long-term mutually accountable relationships includes devolving power, developing self-awareness and intentionally overcoming internal institutional barriers. It is vital to ensure that the boards are representative of the communities they serve, as this can amplify collective knowledge and strengthen advocacy on specific issues, yielding durable outcomes.

CULTIVATE THE LONG VIEW:
ACT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Embracing a long-term view and acting for future generations in philanthropy means prioritising sustained impacts and future outcomes over immediate results. This approach requires a forward-looking mindset, where current decisions and actions are evaluated based on their potential impact on future generations. This shift in funding principles entails transitioning from annual budgeting to multi-year funding for increased flexibility, alongside fostering transparency and inclusivity in decision-making for programming and grants.

Through these principles we delve into the common areas of philanthropic practice: strategy development; programmes and instruments; and forward-looking learning agendas. Ultimately, this enables and supports how futures thinking and foresight inform the trajectory of philanthropic organisations towards anticipation for the common good.

"Facts and data alone do not drive the agenda, it is hope that inspires people"

– Ieva Morica, Dots Foundation for an Open Society, Latvia

Strategy development

Strategy development can be deeply enriched by futures practices. While foresight refrains from predicting outcomes, it empowers philanthropic organisations in context analysis efforts to embrace an adaptive stance towards change, positioning long-term perspectives as strategic imperatives. Beyond mere forecasting, foresight, and systems change can catalyse transformation across human, organisational, social, and worldview dimensions, enabling organisations to navigate intricate futures and drive innovation for long-term impact. Embedding futures thinking into governance and decision-making processes allows organisations to move away from established, often tiresome, strategy development cycles focusing on clearly defined outcomes, roles and KPIs. Futures philanthropy looks into an agile and iterative strategy that embraces a long-term vision, while allowing adaptability to evolving needs and continuous learning.

Illustrating the implementation of long-term strategic choices is **THE BIKUBEN FOUNDATION** in Denmark. The foundation's approach to realising systemic change is based on a synergetic interaction between the foundation's mission and identified societal issues in Denmark, such as homelessness among young people. By collaborating with civil society organisations, government bodies, and other stakeholders, the Bikuben Foundation supports initiatives with long-term horizons; develops multifaceted strategies, including funding innovative housing solutions; advocating for policy changes; and supports programmes that address underlying causes. The code of practice emphasises its commitment to not just work on isolated projects. Instead, it highlights the importance of being proactive in identifying new focus areas. This involves active collaboration with the professional field, as well as collecting and producing the new knowledge needed to take forward-looking decisions.

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF MESSINA, situated in a deprived region of Italy marked by the pervasive presence of organised crime, is committed to the fight against poverty and exclusion in its territory by co-shaping new social and economic paradigms. The foundation's long-term dedication is reflected in its 10-year strategic framework, which spearheads economic development that is not extractive, but rather sustainable toward the environment, and brings about an "integral human development". By bringing together non-homogenous knowledge and lenses from a tapestry of sciences and people's lived experience, the foundation applies Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and acts at the intersection of social innovation, climate, arts, and applied scientific research by testing possible solutions in "clusters of innovation" at the local level.

Programmes and instruments

Integrating long-term views and systemic approaches into programme design and instruments is an evolving philanthropic practice aimed at proactively anticipating and responding in real time to emerging needs as well as to future potential, ensuring that interventions stay both relevant and impactful. Some organisations such as the Mercator Foundation Switzerland leverage structured foresight methods to achieve these results (see case study Dare to Anticipate), while others realign their strategies based on extensive evaluation processes and feedback loops with partners, highlighting the value of trust-based, flexible and core funding that spans a long-term horizon – five or more years. The following examples illustrate what forms long-term commitment can take and how funders are creating novel practices, paving the way for other philanthropic organisations to test solutions that would not only be effective in the short term but also transformative in the long run.

An example of applying a futures orientation to grantmaking is the **ROMANIAN-AMERICAN FOUNDATION**. The foundation's mission centres around strengthening and promoting a sustainable market and democratic society in Romania, focusing on rural economy; technology and innovation; and civic engagement while strategically partnering with leaders that share its long-term commitment and mission to make an impact in the fields it works in. The foundation also prioritises long-term strategic grantmaking, such as 10-year funding commitments, aiming to create lasting change and fostering strong partnerships with local communities. In addition, the Romanian-American Foundation offers project-related investments to support qualified organisations in Romania aligned with its mission, wherein the capital used in these investments is repaid, thus recycling invested funds into new philanthropic endeavours.[1]

THE ROBERT BOSCH FOUNDATION is dedicated to working towards a just and sustainable future by addressing current challenges in health, education and global issues such as democracy, climate change, and migration. The foundation is non-profit, independent, and non-partisan and is rooted in the legacy of its founder Robert Bosch. It not only offers funding to projects and programmes, but also offers non-restricted, flexible, and trust-based support to organisations, and encourages the early development of ideas tackling complex social issues. Launching new funding instruments in 2022, based on the principles of trust and flexibility, the foundation aims to enhance the capabilities of partners to innovate and create lasting impact. The foundation continuously explores innovative approaches to amplify its work by closely collaborating with partners, re-examining its funding portfolio, and aligning with future developments, needs, and aspirations. Since 2022, the foundation has allocated €12.5 million to emergency assistance in Ukraine and is now pivoting towards long-term support to Ukrainian civil society for sustainable recovery.

Future-oriented learning agendas

Learning agendas are emerging knowledge management systems in philanthropy, representing a more dynamic approach to evaluation and impact measurement. Rather than solely focusing on achievements, they emphasise understanding long-term implications and future impacts of philanthropic efforts, while absorbing learnings internally. This involves crafting specific learning questions, research and information processes, and adopting a futures-approach to knowledge management that spans various teams and thematic areas within an organisation. By doing so, learning agendas facilitate a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of both the successes and areas for improvement, guiding more effective and strategic future actions. This forward-looking approach ensures continuous learning and adaptation, aligning with the evolving needs and challenges.

Philanthropic organisations can draw inspiration from the **OAK FOUNDATION,** which deploys adaptable, forward-looking strategic learning agendas to guide it in identifying knowledge gaps and unforeseen challenges, emphasising an "outside-in" approach. This strategy ensures proactive, rather than reactive, responses to changes, fostering a holistic view to avoid a narrow focus on immediate issues, and encouraging a wider perspective to foresee interconnected social challenges. Organisations must continuously reevaluate and adapt their learning agendas in response to dynamic sector needs. A forward-looking learning agenda acts as a strategic guide, empowering philanthropic organisations to anticipate and shape future developments, thereby enabling them to evolve from reactive entities to proactive agents of change.

THE BOTNAR FOUNDATION is dedicated to creating a better future for youth through the transformation of urban environments to promote sustainable development and the well-being of young people. At the heart of the foundation's approach lies a commitment to learning, evaluation, and adaptation. It views strategy as a form of discovery and seeks to understand the impact it makes, to whom and how. In pursuit of this, the foundation introduced the functions of the Chief Learning Officer and Strategic Learning Manager in 2017 to align strategic learning and evaluation processes with its objectives. These two roles established a learning agenda based on organisational theories of change and identifying priority learning questions. This in turn, supports the staff in designing tailored learning and evaluation strategies for specific programmes, refining programmatic and funding approaches for optimal impact.[2,3]

Embedding futures practice across the organisation

By integrating these principles which inform strategy development, programme design, and learning agendas, philanthropy can significantly enhance futures literacy across the organisation. Central to this enhancement is the focus on internal culture, resource allocation, and structural governance. Fostering a forward-thinking and adaptable internal culture is imperative. This entails instilling a futures mindset among staff, where uncertainty is viewed not as an obstacle but rather an opportunity for the evolving context and strategic planning. Achieving this requires investment in staff capabilities through targeted training to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate future possibilities effectively. Additionally, organisational structures and governance mechanisms must be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, facilitating a proactive approach to future challenges and opportunities. Futures-literate organisations are capable of grasping the elements shaping the future, proactively adapting to its dynamic external environment, developing programmes resilient to diverse scenarios, and identifying stakeholders critical for achieving long-term objectives. Through these concerted efforts, philanthropy can enhance its ability to anticipate, adapt to, and work with the future landscape effectively to inform present actions. (see "A Guide to Using the Future" on page 14).

Catalysing anticipation for the common good

The core dimension of a futures philanthropic practice includes catalysing anticipatory capacities within civil society and communities. While many front-line organisations grapple with short-term needs versus a long-term approach, philanthropy can play a critical role that marries robust crisis-response mechanisms to less developed anticipatory capacities among civil society organisations. This also includes reimagining the world we live in today. Philanthropic and civil society organisations can become a transformative force that empowers people to imagine better futures and have the agency to act upon them, which is the essence of challenging current assumptions and "decolonising futures".

The 2022 study "Anticipating Futures for Civil Society Operating Space" by the International Civil Society Centre reveals the context in which civil society organisations are operating today, confronted by a confluence of pressures – from the erosion of liberal democracy and digital authoritarianism to climate crises, and the backlash against civil liberties compounded by systemic issues such as fiscal crises and the securitisation of civic spaces FOOTNOTE. Philanthropy, in this context, emerges not just as a financial resource but as a catalyst that facilitates bridging today and tomorrow. An evolving funding practice can be considered "futures-ready" when it factors in the organisational adaptability of its partners, planning for unforeseen events, cross-sector collaboration, and collective thinking within the sector. There is also a need for more resources aimed at developing futures thinking capacities among civil society organisations. These are the five pillars, on which anticipatory capacity in the civil society sector can be built on:[4]

1. **APPLICATION OF FORESIGHT IN THE PRACTICE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS.**
2. **DEVELOPING THE SKILLS FOR SHIFTING THE NARRATIVES ABOUT THE FUTURE.**
3. **BUILDING COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCE AROUND EMERGING TRENDS.**
4. **REIMAGINING RELATIONSHIPS AND REBUILDING SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT REDISTRIBUTING RESOURCES AND POWER FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL.**
5. **REBUILDING SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE FOR FORESIGHT-BASED ACTION.**

JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION can be considered a cross-cutting example by embedding key futures principles into its organisational fabric and developing anticipatory capacities among its partners and communities. The foundation's vision is to support and speed up the transition to a more equitable and just future, free from poverty, where people and the planet can flourish. While remaining embedded in today and continuing to address the urgent needs in these times of the cost-of-living crisis, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation believes that "the future will be shaped by what we choose to pay attention to in the present." Thus, it is the foundation's long-term strategic outlook and iterative future-building that provides fertile ground for realising transformative work and supporting experimentation on the ground. Through its Emerging Futures initiative, launched in 2021, it supports "Imagination Infrastructures" aimed at empowering local communities and networks to deepen collective imagination practice.

Streamlining anticipatory capacities in the philanthropic and civil society sectors is an ambitious mission, which requires a concerted effort from the field and an ecosystem approach. **PEX**, a community of over 350 philanthropy infrastructure practitioners representing more than 80 thematic, regional, local, national, European, and global funders networks and philanthropy infrastructure organisations, aspires to practise new paradigms in philanthropy and provide space for new ways of working, learning, and organising. PEX helps advance the agenda of the European philanthropy ecosystem as a whole by generating a bird's eye view of sector developments and producing ripple effects across philanthropy and funder networks. This is the story of the European Philanthropy Coalition for Climate – from a seed planted by the UK's Association of Charitable Foundations at the PEXforum in Madrid in 2020, it transformed into a global movement of 700 foundations across six continents with a shared commitment to meaningful climate action, spearheaded and hosted by WINGS.

IN SUMMARY, philanthropy can play a catalytic role in building and sharing skills and knowledge and advancing anticipation for the common good. By supporting civil society organisations in reimagining and co-creating the future, philanthropy can contribute to the creation of a more resilient, responsive, and inclusive civic space, at a time when it is most needed. This support transcends mere financial help. It involves engaging in authentic partnerships to ensure civil society remains a dynamic and proactive force in a rapidly evolving world.

"Doing things that are proven - this is not the role of philanthropy"

- Markus Hipp, Together Foundation, Germany

ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES:

CONTRIBUTE TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

ESSAYS BY:
MERCATOR FOUNDATION SWITZERLAND
FONDATION DE FRANCE
LAUDES FOUNDATION

“In order to create deep and long-term impact we will have to develop more systemic strategies. We must move from symptoms to causes, from projects to processes, and from solitary grantmaking to collective and systems level impact.”

From "Building ecosystems of change"
By David Hesse, Andrew Holland, and Joséphine von Mitschke-Collande,
Mercator Foundation Switzerland

Building ecosystems of change

David Hesse, Andrew Holland, and Joséphine von Mitschke-Collande
Mercator Foundation Switzerland

The world looks bleak in 2024, and things may get bleaker still. The effects of climate change force millions to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. The loss of biodiversity affects our health and well-being. Violent conflict and authoritarianism are on the rise, and Europe seems ill-prepared. New technologies are changing the way we work and learn but may prove hard to control. Widening gaps in wealth and opportunities are fuelling discontent and polarisation.

Questioning our established ways and methods

Call it a polycrisis, call it a mess. If we philanthropic organisations really aim to make a difference and work for a better tomorrow, we must question our established ways and methods. Funders should certainly continue to address urgent challenges and provide immediate relief, but in order to create deep and long-term impact we will have to develop more systemic strategies. We must move from symptoms to causes, from projects to processes, and from solitary grantmaking to collective and systems level impact.

The concepts of collective impact and systems change have gained traction in the past decade. However, philanthropy has yet to fully embrace the importance of collaborating for impact.[1,2] Funders can play a vital role in enabling frameworks and spaces that allow for cooperation between sectors and countries. Such cooperation may include strategic partnerships, networking, co-learning, capacity building, and collective action. Foundations and philanthropic organisations are well positioned to provide a neutral ground for a variety of stakeholders to come together. We can empower ecosystems – and build ecosystems of change.

Taking a systems-level approach

Mercator Foundation Switzerland has taken up a systems-level approach. We often go beyond "giving money" as we strive to initiate and sustain cross-sectoral collective action processes. Our aim is to develop lasting and widely supported initiatives, multi-lever and multi-stakeholder approaches in which civil society, business, the public sector, the arts, finance, and academia really pull together.

The transnational hub Faktor D,[3] for instance, was initiated in response to the erosion of democratic culture in the established democracies of Europe. A group of grantmaking foundations from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland launched the hub to promote strategic collaboration among pro-democratic forces. Between February 2021 and June 2022, some 150 stakeholders participated, representing NGOs, political activism, the arts, academia, the media, politics, public administration, labour unions, and funders.

Another example is Gender*Rollen,[4] a multi-stakeholder initiative in Switzerland that aims to promote equal opportunities for children and young adults, unhindered by gender stereotypes. The initiative is unique in that it invites a wide range of sectors (sports, education, care work, parenting, health, political activism, science, the arts, literature, media, government) – and in that it provides a space for their different and often diverging perspectives. Together, the stakeholders have built an ecosystem out of which new and systemic impulses can evolve to lastingly improve young people's lives. The process was kickstarted and funded by Mercator Foundation Switzerland which assumed the role of a convenor and catalyst.

What we have learned (so far)

Empowering ecosystems of change takes time. The journey has just begun. Here is what we have learned so far about the process:

1: ECOSYSTEMS EVOLVE. Embarking upon a co-creative process requires patience, nerve, and tolerance for ambiguity and fuzziness. There is no established path, no guidebook. You can never quite know where the journey will take you. That is ok.

2: OPENNESS DEMANDS COURAGE. Grantmakers need to be prepared to take risks, to fail, learn, and fail better. Foundations will need a courageous board and a team that seeks to travel new and untested routes.

3: SYSTEMS-LEVEL THINKING REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY. Ecosystems of change cannot be built behind closed doors. Funders must address existing power asymmetries and be prepared to share their power to decide and act. Systemic impact will never happen top-down.

4: ECOSYSTEMS NEED TO INCLUDE A DIVERSE RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS – and unlikely allies, too. Finding them requires scouting beyond our comfort zones. We must leave the office; we must listen and engage. And we must engage in discussion and work with organisations that may have very little in common with us.

5: BUILDING ECOSYSTEMS REQUIRES AGILITY. Opportunities will be more important than set plans. We must be able to shift, change, and jump fast if needed. Strategic foresight can help us to anticipate and respond to what is emerging. We may want to cultivate a culture of serendipity in which things are allowed to happen.

6. CULTIVATING REFLECTION AND SENSEMAKING IS CRUCIAL. Preconceived concepts of societal change and impact should be questioned among all stakeholders. Funding strategies will benefit from iterative approaches.

7: ECOSYSTEMS DEMAND NEW ROLES FOR GRANTMAKERS. We move away from projects and on to alliances, processes, and organisations. Grantmakers can initiate collective action processes and provide or hold a space to reflect, cooperate, and create.

8: ECOSYSTEMS OF CHANGE NEED VISIONS. Engaging in futures literacy – reflecting on possible futures and scenarios – can help us to use the future to see the present in a fresh light and to discover new ways of action.

9: ECOSYSTEMS NEED A FRESH UNDERSTANDING OF IMPACT. Short-term strategies built to generate quick-fix impact will fail. Technocratic impact measurement will prevent us from seeing deep and long-term changes over time. New approaches of assessing impact will focus on strategic learnings.

10: ECOSYSTEMS NEED "HUMBITION". Stakeholders should have ambition to create real change, but they should remain humble and recognise their limitations and the system's complexities. The world is not a machine that can be fixed.

Embracing intersectionality:

Redefining philanthropy for holistic impact

Maja Spanu
Fondation de France

Over the past few years, the term "intersectionality" has gained prominence in philanthropy and has become an integral part of discussions internationally. For a long time, the concept was relatively marginal (if not marginalised), used mostly by academic and activist communities. Things look rather different today with intersectionality being used by a range of actors globally, including governments and, notably, philanthropic actors.

The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as "*the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage*".[1] While this looks like a straightforward definition, the increasing recognition of the value of intersectionality is met with concurrent resistance across sectors, including philanthropy, along two streams of critique. Some fear that an intersectional approach may lead to identity politics undermining social cohesion and further fragmenting societies. Others worry that some categories – in particular race and gender – overshadow class as the fundamental category to view inequality. However, these critiques overlook a core dimension of intersectionality, namely that no prominence is given to any identity over others; that, quite the contrary, these are categories that must be combined to fully grasp the intricate origins of inequalities. Such critiques may then well be the reflection of a "buzzy" term needing further unpacking.

Intersectionality is not a mere trend. It is an instrument embedded in legal and social analysis that requires thorough comprehension to unleash its full potential. So, what precisely is intersectionality? Why is it crucial for the future of philanthropy as we think of our practice in the years to come? How do we apply it? In what follows, I sketch what I hope are compelling answers to these questions.

Defining intersectionality

The term was coined in 1989 by American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw who defined intersectionality as "*a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves (…) and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking*"[2]. While its roots lie in black feminism, over time its usage has greatly expanded. Intersectionality has become an analytical tool to comprehend more or less visible power relations and to view with greater nuance the world around us, its past and current social dynamics. Class, gender, race, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and immigrant or civil status – intersectionality reveals how these categories overlap in people's lived experiences and produce specific forms of exclusion or stratification. It thus gets to the roots of inequalities and discrimination[3].

A key assumption of intersectionality is that contexts matter. Intersectional lenses help to grasp specific contexts with greater nuance, including their histories and the more contemporary dynamics that characterise them. Lived experiences of individuals and communities, in particular marginalised ones, become central, and these are put into perspective with dominant narratives and understandings. Embracing an intersectional frame means adopting a humble, holistic vision of society that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the world and experiences around us. The value of intersectionality lies in the granularity it brings.

Why is intersectionality useful for philanthropy?

The pandemic exacerbated long-standing injustices and highlighted socio-economic, gender, and racial inequalities, coinciding with a widespread loss of trust in democratic institutions. Civil society organisations and movements are calling for greater social justice and for a commitment by all stakeholders of public life to structural change. In this context, philanthropy is increasingly taking the time and courage to reflect on the complex issues societies face. We hear talk about systemic approaches and trust-based philanthropy, yet these are not just empty words or neutral choices. They imply rethinking our postures and work. So, what is the link with intersectionality? Why should we consider it for our practice ahead?

I suggest three reasons. The first lies in the value of intersectionality to better grasp the world around us and the communities we serve. Intersectionality allows embracing the subtleties and the root causes of problems to then participate in consolidating more equal and sustainable environments. Second, because philanthropy has a unique positionality at the interplay among multiple stakeholders – civil society, academia, policy, and the private sector – it can bring to their attention issues and the experiences of communities that may otherwise be overlooked. Third, considering philanthropy's core purpose, if promoting inclusion and striving for greater equality are key ambitions, we need to fully comprehend all experiences to address our societies' concerns and find solutions *with* these communities.

How to apply intersectionality in philanthropic work, concretely?

How, then, do we translate the insights from the above discussion into philanthropic practice? I have discussed how intersectionality provides a fine-grained understanding of issues, helping philanthropy respond with the most pertinent solutions. Two additional aspects merit attention.

First, a word on grantmaking. As intersectionality entails thinking about equity and power-readjustment, it involves placing communities at the centre through the co-design of approaches and programmes or, more straightforwardly, in decision-making. To what areas of concern are funds allocated? What are the types of organisations receiving them? Participatory approaches to grantmaking can be powerful means to ensure that groups with intersecting characteristics, particularly marginalised ones, take part in decisions concerning them. Intersectionality also speaks to how funding is allocated. Flexible funding further empowers local organisations to decide how to allocate received funds. Indeed, intersectionality is not only about philanthropy comprehending the deep causes of inequalities and histories of exclusion, though this is key: It is also, fundamentally, about *redressing* inequalities by promoting social change at all levels.

This leads me to the second point, as intersectional thinking is also about looking introspectively at how we work and questioning organisational cultures. Calling into question power dynamics *out there* entails, if only for coherence, also examining how *we* function as organisations. How are decisions taken internally, and are those taking decisions making efforts to consider the wide array of positions that exist? Does everyone feel as included as possible in our organisations, irrespective of their paths and roles? Intersectionality prompts reflexivity encouraging us to question our own positions, values, assumptions, and experiences, and how these shape our work. While challenging, these steps are essential as we, as a sector, keep seeking appropriate solutions to address societies' structural needs.

Unintended consequences of philanthropy:

Navigating internal risks and impact assessment

Katy Hartley

Laudes Foundation, the Netherlands

In recognising our role in society, we in philanthropy aim to be aware of the potential effects and repercussions of our actions. But as we strive to understand the positive changes we support through our partners, do we truly see the bigger picture? Are we as intentional as we think when considering broader impact?

When reflecting on the effects of our efforts, the first internal step for a philanthropy organisation is to establish a measurement system to assess impact. Such a measurement system can serve as a valuable tool for gauging change, evaluating the "return on investment" with partners. It can provide tangible evidence of success, or support partners in acknowledging failure.

Despite these efforts to measure what happens "afterwards", foundations pay less attention to explicitly addressing unintended consequences that arise from supporting the change they aim for. Before a grant is made, or a programme starts, can funders predict what else might happen due to their interventions?

One illustration is the introduction of cane toads in Australia. In 1935, these toads were brought to Queensland with the aim of mitigating the cane beetle population, which posed a threat to sugar cane. The rationale was that the toads would consume the beetles and safeguard the crops. However, the cane toads proved ineffective in controlling the beetles, as they were naturally adapted to a different prey. Consequently, the toads blossomed without natural predators. The toads outcompeted indigenous species leading to declines in native wildlife populations and disruptions to natural ecosystems.

Another example is the "War on Drugs" in the US. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government implemented policies aimed at combatting drug abuse and trafficking. While the intentions were to reduce drug-related crimes and improve public health, there were major unintended consequences:

- **MASS INCARCERATION**: The emphasis on punitive measures, especially for non-violent drug offences, substantially increased incarceration rates, disproportionately affecting minority communities and contributing to social inequalities.
- **CRIMINALISATION AND STIGMATISATION**: The campaign criminalised and stigmatised drug users, treating addiction as a criminal issue rather than a public health concern. This hindered efforts to provide treatment.
- **EMPOWERMENT OF DRUG CARTELS**: Strict law enforcement and border control measures intended to curb drug trafficking paradoxically empowered drug cartels. The lucrative illicit drug market provided financial incentives for organised crime.
- **UNINTENDED ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES**: The allocation of significant resources to law enforcement diverted funds from social programmes and treatment. The creation of a lucrative black market for drugs fuelled underground economies.

Although these examples are outlined with perfect hindsight, should we consciously choose a different approach to mitigating unintended repercussions?

Why is it challenging to explore unintended consequences in an ever-changing context?

Since our launch in January 2020, Laudes Foundation has supported over 300 partners to address the intertwined challenges of climate breakdown and deepening inequality. Guided by evidence and living in a polycrisis involving climate, nature, geopolitics, economic downturn, and polarisation – we have now narrowed our strategy to inspiring and challenging just transitions in industries.

Our emphasis on "just transition" aligns with the International Labour Organisation's definition: greening the economy in a fair and inclusive manner, creating decent work opportunities, and leaving no one behind. We strategically support actions to inspire and bring about just transitions in key industries (food, fashion, finance, and the built environment) for positive impacts on the economy, people, climate and nature.

Amid the evolving context, high-emitting industries are beginning to shift practices when it comes to climate and nature, but this transition poses challenges. Companies navigate an unpredictable physical world threatened by climate change, and they must consider the impacts on their workforce. In this era of generative artificial intelligence, where data is abundant and interpretable, predicting unintended consequences is challenging and could delay action.

Two examples illustrate unintended consequences in navigating trade-offs among climate, nature, and people:

Possible consequences of prioritising climate over people

Similarly, if workers are not deeply involved in a decarbonisation approach there is a risk that jobs will be lost and social inequality will rise. If people lose jobs in energy-intensive sectors, without retraining, this can lead to high unemployment and social unrest. In net job terms, the green transition may result in more jobs, but they may be in a different region or require an alternative skill set, leading to structural unemployment.

In the fashion industry, apparel factories in Bangladesh that are likely to be under sea level due to climate change have already been identified, but less evident is what happens if the fashion suppliers move production to a different country leaving thousands of apparel workers without jobs? In the context of a country like Bangladesh, does that inform the choice to work on social protection rather than cooling of extreme heat in factories?

Putting our approach into practice

At Laudes, we have taken measures to navigate these complexities:

1. UNDERSTANDING INTERCONNECTIONS: We created an Economic System Map to grasp how the economy works[1]. This helps us assess issues within our programmes, and identify knowledge gaps and intervention points.

2. TRANSPARENT DECISION-MAKING: Developing our 5-year strategy in 2022 involved consulting over 300 stakeholders. We have published our choices in our interactive theory of change, encouraging feedback[2].

3. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: We collaborate with other foundations and alliances to bridge our knowledge of climate, nature, and people. Regular interactions with partners, including a strategic retreat, deepen our understanding of issues.

4. PROACTIVE FUTURING: We have committed to spending more time on understanding societal trends. We also have experimented with artificial intelligence.

5. ADAPTABILITY VS. ACCOUNTABILITY: Navigating this dynamism requires thoughtful decisions. Striking a balance between partner continuity and adaptability is challenging, but necessary when having unintended consequences in mind.

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES:

FOSTER TRUST-BASED COLLABORATION

ESSAYS BY:
TRAG FOUNDATION
COLLECTIVE ABUNDANCE

“Imagine a world where philanthropy is not a top-down benevolence but a collaborative endeavour that empowers communities to define their own needs and aspirations.”

From "Decolonising philanthropy: Advancing equity, legitimacy and transparency"
By Samie Blasingame, Collective Abundance, Germany

New paradigms of engagement and participation: Embracing bottom-up approaches for social empowerment

Marija Mitrović
Trag Foundation, Serbia

In October 2022, as the world was struggling with the combined effects of the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the expansion of the war in Ukraine, I was part of a discussion on global trends in community philanthropy when the question "How are your communities dealing with these sudden crises?" came my way. I felt stopped in my tracks, not because I had little to say, but because I could not remember when communities in my region were not facing adversity, making this a way of life rather than a temporary disruption of the otherwise forward trajectory.

I looked around the room and saw this was a shared destiny among many communities across the globe. Wars, civil unrest, political upheavals, abuse of power, social crisis, economic collapses, migrations, severe mistreatment of natural resources alongside unavailability of adequate educational, health, and social services – these things have affected community lives since long before many of us were born. In addition, we can add a lack of access to cultural, recreational or other contexts so essential to our individual and collective well-being.

Making the way for transformation

Not every community reacts to these challenges in the same way. Some are more proactive – they self-organise, rally assets, create social movements, and demand change. Others are more reactive, even paralysed, expecting the issues to either sort themselves out or be taken care of by governments as perceived caretakers and problem-solvers on the national and local levels. When this doesn't happen, it leads to a shift in which the communities have to fend for themselves or, to put it better, look out for each other and invest in collective power to make way for transformation.

Community-based and community-led civil society organisations and movements play a significant role in this process. Organisations base their work on shared values and a broader vision of the "greater good", leading to a more permanent involvement. The movements usually emerge around a particular issue affecting their immediate surroundings, inspiring a more ad hoc approach and more significant levels of civic engagement. Both tie essential threads of the community together while facing unwavering pressure, de-legitimisation, and discreditation from the powerholders, who frequently label them as "traitors" and "foreign mercenaries", to further accentuate the perception of the artificial distance from the citizens that they serve.

On funding practices

The sensitive issue of funding also comes into play in the quest of civil society organisations to expand the levels of citizen engagement and build bridges across their deeply polarised communities. Many in the philanthropic world would casually say that "it isn't about the money", but funding isn't irrelevant either. In many countries, public funding is virtually inaccessible to authentic civil society organisations and informal groups due to its continuous non-transparent distribution to so-called GONGOs, established only as a front for laundering funds back to the governments and the ruling political parties.

In addition to this, international funding is becoming increasingly bureaucratic and challenging to obtain, especially for grass-roots initiatives. In many cases, this type of funding tends to be overly prescriptive and often directed toward issues identified far from the localities it is meant to support. Attempts by the civil society actors to align with funders' priorities lead to an even greater disconnect from their core missions and constituencies. The continuous decrease of non-restricted and operational funding, combined with the increase in procedural demands and a touch of mistrust, also causes a significant brain drain from the sector, leaving us with the question: Are we still allies, or is this way of funding another modality of shrinking space we are all on a quest to diminish?

The undying power of community philanthropy

This power imbalance leads many to look beyond the road frequently travelled. Instead of waiting for others to decide and steer the wheel in various self-serving directions, communities turn to their own devices and the undying power of community philanthropy. It is nothing new to say that every community has the capacity, knowledge, and power to take ownership of the issues in its surroundings and drive its development forward. We know that each community member has something to contribute, be it money, ideas, knowledge, time or contacts. These can greatly help when addressing any relevant matter or contextual change that requires a timely and comprehensive course of action.

The importance of these community assets was most visibly seen as every corner of the world was stricken by one global crisis after another. During the Covid-19 pandemic, centralised systems consistently failed to identify effective solutions to numerous challenges that the communities faced. International funders were also at a loss, needing time to adjust their approaches as our lives turned upside down. Communities had to find a way to stay afloat, and the only way was to turn to community organising, as it proved to be the only rapid, agile, and needs-based response to these complex and all-pervasive circumstances. Continuing on this path, communities are now usually the first to rally around many pressing matters, be it refugee care, pollution or general safety.

"Reset to factory settings"

With this in mind, one can only speak about the future of philanthropy as a future where we, first and foremost, need to "reset to factory settings", look around at what we are dealing with and look beyond the courses of action that many are accustomed to. In my region, this has been most effectively addressed by the community foundations that provide solid ground for our philanthropy infrastructure. Despite contextual challenges, they continue to successfully strengthen community philanthropy by combining local resources with local needs, inspiring citizens to connect, build trust, engage, regain faith in the power of joint action and steer it towards their initiatives or advocacy efforts directed at those who have institutional means to create a better life for all.

In other regions, this role is taken by local movements, resource organisations, or other modalities of engagement, all once again emphasising that the new world requires new solutions calling for a participative, bottom-up approach, and collaboration on all levels, with a steady focus on local ownership, assets and trust to create change that we are all anxiously hoping to achieve.

Decolonising philanthropy:
Advancing equity, legitimacy, and transparency

Samie Blasingame
Collective Abundance, Germany

As an organiser who has been recently called on to engage more deeply with the philanthropic sector, I hold an instinctual and clear vision of what it means to decolonise it. Much of this vision, and the ideas I hold in relation to it, come from my work building Collective Abundance[1] with other climate and social justice organisers across Europe.

At Collective Abundance we work to strengthen the climate justice movement in Europe by redistributing funds and decision-making power[2] to grass-roots organisers. At the same time, we engage funders in co-learning processes as they work to overcome institutional barriers and ingrained practices that block them from funding differently.

This is no easy task. Historically, philanthropy has often been wielded as a tool for the powerful to exert influence over marginalised communities, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and reinforcing existing socio-political hierarchies. Time is ripe for a paradigm shift.

Philanthrocapitalism and the status quo

The positive perception of philanthropy and its efforts to "do good" in the world are largely exaggerated when we consider how it both relies on and benefits from capitalist systems for its own sustainability. The fact that an average of just 5% of a typical foundation's wealth is granted per year is one example of this.[3] That wealthy individuals tend to give towards elite schools and cultural institutions that they and their descendants benefit from is another.[4]

As Edgar Villanueva, a well-known social justice philanthropy expert, has been quoted saying: "*Philanthropy worships the status quo.*" But the status quo of the white-supremacist, imperialist, capitalist patriarchy that dominates societal relations is exceedingly harmful. As such, it is important to consider the ways in which the established Western philanthropic model of philanthrocapitalism may be inadvertently perpetuating harm.[5]

Imagine a world where philanthropy is not a top-down benevolence but a collaborative endeavour that empowers communities to define their own needs and aspirations. As Villanueva also reminds us: "*We forget that we gave money its meaning and its power. And because money itself is neutral, it should and can be a tool of love, used to facilitate relationships, to help us thrive.*"

Trust-based relationships and equity

The road to decolonising philanthropy is fraught with challenges, resistance, and the need for introspection. It requires confronting the historical injustices perpetuated by philanthropy, acknowledging complicity, and taking meaningful steps towards restitution. This may involve redistributing resources, ceding decision-making power, and actively dismantling structures that maintain inequality in the present day. Any relationship between funders and grantees that is not rooted in this understanding risks being disingenuous and transactional.

In my experience, the trust that exists in my relationships with funders depends on their ability to acknowledge this reality and commit to rectifying it to the extent they are able. This reflects the shift in philanthropy from paternalism to active solidarity. Holding philanthropic leaders and donors accountable to educating themselves and pushing perceived boundaries is a critical first step in this journey.

Legitimacy defined by communities themselves

While philanthropy indeed holds a responsibility to correct the historical wrongs it has benefitted from, it by no means holds the decision-making power for the solutions that may be needed. By devolving decision-making power and amplifying frontline voices, philanthropy has the chance to become a tool for long-term empowerment rather than short-sighted paternalism.

One crucial aspect of this transformation is the acknowledgment that Western models of philanthropy are not universally applicable. Different cultures and communities have unique needs and ways of addressing them, rooted in their own rich histories and traditions. Imagine how transformational it would be if funders liberated their funding requirements in all the ways necessary to allow communities the freedom to determine, in their diverse and distinctive ways, how best to allocate resources.

Collective Abundance, as an organiser-led intermediary in the climate justice funding space, refers the legitimacy of our funding process to our grantees at every stage possible. We have one main ask – that these groups come together to discuss what climate justice means to them and what it looks like in their country's context, and to use that collective understanding as a basis for how they decide how to fund themselves. Beyond this, our only role is to relieve as many of the burdens of accessing funds from our grantees as possible and implement their decisions regarding the process as they relay them to us.

Transparency for whom?

Transparency must become the cornerstone of this transformed philanthropic landscape. Equally important is a reassessment of metrics for success. Traditional indicators such as GDP growth or the number of projects implemented may not capture the true impact on the lives of individuals and communities. A shift towards holistic measurements that consider cultural well-being, community resilience, and individual empowerment becomes paramount. Success is not defined by external standards but emerges organically from the aspirations and values of the communities being served.

At Collective Abundance we are clear that our goal is to strengthen the climate justice movement. The results of our process and our collaboration with our grantees will be assessed by their own metrics: Did they achieve what they wished to achieve? In which ways were they able to and what may have inhibited them? Where could we, as intermediaries, be more supportive next time? All these reflections will be communicated to our funders in a way that suits us both, and to the public in a way that contributes to our collective learning in the space of decolonising philanthropy.

In conclusion

Decolonised philanthropy is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour; it is a nuanced and context-specific process. It necessitates listening, learning, and adapting approaches to the unique needs of each community. This requires an investment in long-term relationships built on trust and mutual respect, rather than short-term projects driven by immediate outcomes.

As we weave a new narrative for philanthropy, let equity, transparency and the legitimacy of communal knowledge be the guiding threads. The journey may be challenging, but the destination – a world where philanthropy exists only as a force for empowerment, justice, and positive change – is undeniably worth the effort.

FOCUS ON DISCOVERY:

ENABLE BREAKTHROUGH INNOVATION AND A CULTURE OF EXPERIMENTATION

ESSAYS BY:
FONDAZIONE COMPAGNIA DI SAN PAOLO
FAMTASTISCH FOUNDATION

"One could even argue that the mission of philanthropy is to experiment and test at the frontier, looking beyond the spectrum of what is known and building the conditions for further innovation. This necessitates a willingness to risk making mistakes (but always learning from them)."

From "Experimenting at the frontiers: Looking beyond the known and enabling breakthrough innovation"
By Alberto Anfossi, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy

Experimenting at the frontiers:
Looking beyond the known and enabling breakthrough innovation

Alberto Anfossi
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy

Should philanthropy do more to support basic research, breakthrough innovation and, in general, the "culture of knowledge"? Philanthropy's "comfort zone" may not currently lie in these areas, but instead in funding the application and transfer of innovative solutions to broader society. However, strategic grantmaking activities carried out by foundations and philanthropic organisations for frontier projects in the fields of science, technology, and the digital realm are needed now more than ever. This is especially true when considering the financial constraints on government budgets which have become increasingly challenging in recent years, notably in Europe.

Bridging the gap between ideas and society-changing innovation

In a world characterised by permanent and disruptive change, where the future is not a linear projection of the past, we absolutely need a new mindset and an open approach to emerging phenomena. Philanthropy, thanks to its unique ability to integrate patient capital, its commitment to the common good, and its multidisciplinary skills, can operate as an impact generator. It can thereby become an enabler of developments that coexist with, and if possible, anticipate, the great transitions of our time.

Ideas need nurturing before they can flourish into projects, products, and services. Without basic research, the innovation pipeline will rapidly dry out. Without new scientific discoveries or radically new models or paradigms in science, there will be no solutions to the crucial problems society faces. The role of philanthropy in bridging the gap between ideas and society-changing innovation is a significant added value which can help address the challenges of the modern era and positively impact the common good.

Enabling the conditions for experimentation

One could even argue that the mission of philanthropy is to experiment and test at the frontier, looking beyond the spectrum of what is known and building the conditions for further innovation. This necessitates a willingness to risk making mistakes (but always learning from them).

For this reason, the interest and commitment of some enlightened philanthropic actors to support breakthrough innovations in quantum computing or artificial intelligence should not come as a surprise. The more the boundaries of technology are pushed, the more essential it is for philanthropy to start developing both a new language and approach. The availability of "sapiens machines" equipped with enormous computing power and processing resources calls for an ethical and human-centric approach capable of promoting all the pillars of philanthropic intervention: inclusion, well-being, health, education, culture, and environment.

Innovation for the common good

History teaches us that innovations with great impact must be accompanied and guided by vision and responsibility. Two examples can be highlighted to illustrate this point, the first one showing the positive side of this principle: Since 1993, when CERN decided to make its code freely available without asking for any royalties, access to the World Wide Web has been open and free. This decision was based on the belief that the web's user-friendliness would quickly make it the most widespread technology for exchanging data. Less than two decades later, in 2012, access to the internet was recognised by the UN as a fundamental right of humanity, enabling the exercising of and access to other basic rights such as the right to work, social security, education, and healthcare.

On the more negative side, when disruptive innovations are mainly influenced by economic motives or industrial strategies, the risks of inequality are significantly higher. Consider the market for semiconductors, which are core components used to produce all types of chips found in electronic devices.

The availability and access to the raw materials needed to make them (which include lithium, rare earths, graphite, and cobalt) generate significant social and environmental concerns, due to factors such as the concentration of supplies, geopolitical tensions, trade restrictions between major economies, and supply chain crises. One could also highlight how the dominance of nuclear technology has completely shaped the post-Second World War geopolitical equilibria up to our time.

This is why the role of philanthropy remains to stimulate debate; support the dissemination of evidence about emerging challenges; promote knowledge and awareness; and provide both scientific advice and evidence to empower decision-making processes (Europe has a long tradition in science diplomacy). This task should be approached with a proactive attitude, to make sure that discoveries and subsequent technologies are aimed at the common good, and that they remain neutral and open.

Why philanthropy needs to collaborate systemically

The uncertainty and complexity of current megatrends are so great that action by a single philanthropic actor is not enough. The sector at large will need to come together in a systemic network that can effectively leverage the allocated funds in a way that maximises its impact and efficiency while fostering de-risking.

Collaboration among philanthropic institutions can assume different forms. Examples include pooling donor resources, aligning strategies to promote common goals, exchanging technical-scientific expertise, and experimenting with innovative grantmaking and investing tools, including a combination of both modalities (blended finance).

Moreover, philanthropy must interact with other actors in the research and innovation ecosystem, starting with major European institutions and their most effective instruments, the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Innovation Council (EIC). Engaging in collaborations with such institutions can support high-risk and high-impact breakthrough innovations in areas crucial for our future, including climate change, cancer research, environment, energy, society, and population ageing.

Putting resources in service of the four transitions of our time

Philanthropy must act in service of the four top transitions of our time (environmental, digital, social, and cultural). To achieve this purpose, philanthropy can and must become the "home" of research and innovation for the common good. To make this happen, we need philanthropic institutions and leaders capable of establishing real and long-standing strategies. They should be equipped to navigate difficult waters that might include minimal or no immediate results, failures, and inefficiencies, all the while recognising that this is the sole viable route to human progress.

How next gen funders are rethinking philanthropy

Michael and Franz Viegener

Famtastisch Foundation, Germany

As members of the young generation of philanthropists, we are faced with the challenge of finding a path between tradition and innovation. We must decide how to honour the legacy of the past while creating a legacy of our own, as The Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors put it.

In attempting to create this new legacy, our generation grapples with a series of fundamental questions, including how we can achieve profound systemic change and reduce injustices, and how philanthropic funds can serve a higher purpose for the benefit of the next generation.

Since we established the "Famtastisch" Foundation six years ago, which aims to enable future generations to live a healthy life on our planet, we have been figuring out how exactly we can honour and learn from existing practices while at the same time adding our own thoughts and values. We can not yet say whether we will ultimately succeed.

Our approach to philanthropy

What characterises and guides us as a foundation is a strong commitment to shared values and a willingness to constantly adapt our work. We regularly question ourselves, and retrospective sessions are a fixed item in our calendar. Our goal is to practice philanthropy in a way that listens carefully instead of giving directions, that relies on trust instead of formal reporting, and that constantly reflects on its role.

For us, it is about more than just investing money in a good cause. We want to consciously contribute to systemic change. Philanthropic funds have huge potential because they are the freest capital in the world. What does that mean for philanthropic use? In our opinion, there are three aspects that we should consider:

1. It is important to see and use philanthropic funds as risk capital. We are neither tied to political cycles nor shareholder groups with an economic interest. We should take advantage of this to support brave people with bold ideas, pay attention to non-attention, and dedicate ourselves to a higher purpose that serves everyone.

2. We try to implement an entrepreneurial approach. We do not plan things out perfectly before starting them. Beginning with a vision that deeply resonates with us, we prefer to learn as we progress.

3. We aim to work in true partnerships. We are aware that there will always be a hierarchical divide between funders and grantees. Still, we can look at this relationship as an equal partnership in which each party brings in their values, strengths, and skills to serve a common goal. From the funder's side, this may involve providing capital, networks or training, and knowledge. Grantees, on the other hand, represent passion and creative power, thirst for action, and great expertise.

Principles that guide our work

When it comes to cooperation, both within our portfolio and with external partners, we have identified some key factors that are relevant for a new era of philanthropy.

1. TRUST BUILDING

We consider trust as the key ingredient for a successful relationship, whether internally, with our funded organisations, or with our funding partners. Trust requires authentic, open, and empathic personal relationships. Key practices that foster trust include showing a genuine interest in people and conducting on-site visits to the organisations as well as participation in their events. At the same time, it is also essential to be open about our own mistakes or insecurities. In our daily funding practice, building trust also necessitates that we do away with control mechanisms such as close-meshed reports or specified budgets. Instead, we carry out periodic check-ins. As with traditional reporting processes, these also deal with current issues in the organisations, but they do not require social entrepreneurs to provide justification for their work. In our partnerships, we acknowledge that paths will change along the way and that we can handle uncertainties.

We must be patient with ourselves and acknowledge that this transition is a step-by-step process.

2. INVESTING IN LEARNING, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND WELL-BEING

We always try to think from the perspective of social enterprises, and capacity building plays a major role in the collaboration with our partners. We support sustainable structures in which beneficiaries can realise their potential, and we host workshops ourselves or invest in coaches. The personal well-being of individuals in the organisations we work with is fundamental for us. The importance of mental health and well-being is confirmed by the Philea Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey, which identifies these as two of the biggest future vulnerabilities that require philanthropy's attention in the next decade. Some time ago, we realised that some team members in one of our organisations were not doing well. As a result, we set up a well-being budget, which can be used for the benefit of individuals or the collective. This could be a personal coaching session, a drawing class or a team retreat. This may only be a first step, and we know that we have more work to do, but the honest conversation we had with this organisation, in which they showed their vulnerability, shows us that we were on the right track.

3. BREAKING DOWN ESTABLISHED PROJECT LOGICS AND BEING FLEXIBLE

We recently made an internal commitment to rethink philanthropic funding, to move away from traditional project funding and instead work more holistically. Even if we do not yet know exactly what this will ultimately look like, one learning we have had is that common expectations about the impact of foundations, especially in a project logic, are often unrealistic. If we want to address root causes and work for lasting, profound change, we should not apply impact goals that are too narrow or KPIs that are too specific. We are more convinced of a strong common vision and joint considerations on the strategic approach. At the same time, we acknowledge that there will for sure be strategic shifts within the implementation. To allow an agile and flexible way of working, we prefer an unrestricted funding approach, and a commitment to long-term funding after an initial funding phase. The aim of the initial phase is to establish a basis of trust and to better understand the organization´s vision. The subsequent long-term funding is our ambition. We recently made progress toward this goal with the launch of the first unrestricted funding in our portfolio. We are delighted about this, but it also brings changes to the day-to-day work of our team. When we fund in an unrestricted way, our roles as staff at the foundation also change, which means leaving our familiar working areas and our comfort zones. While reflecting on our actions, we notice that we still stick to old patterns. We need to be patient with ourselves and acknowledge that this transition is a step-by-step process.

What's next

Finally, we would like to come back to the question of how we, as a new generation of philanthropists, can protect the legacy of those more experienced while reinventing ourselves at the same time. In our view, what truly characterises us as the new generation of philanthropy is that we do not think about organisations, we think about people. Interpersonal relationships are just as important to us as professional work. And we are less afraid of making mistakes since we see them as opportunities to develop ourselves further. There is one thing we would like to encourage philanthropists to do, whether next gen or long-established: To always question themselves, which will ensure that they can have a philanthropic impact. On that note, we will end this text with a question for you: When was the last time you questioned your path, and what came out of it?

CULTIVATE THE LONG VIEW:

ACT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

ESSAYS BY:
THE GOOD LOBBY
PORTICUS

“Enabling philanthropy for the future means at least two things: building courageously on philanthropy’s strengths vis-á-vis other societal forces and putting it to an honest test against the best possible version of itself.”

From "What is enabling futures philanthropy?"
By Ondřej Liška, Porticus, The Netherlands

Philanthropy's commitment to the future

Alberto Alemanno
The Good Lobby, Spain

Historically one of the distinctive features of philanthropy has been its capacity to remain engaged in the long term. Yet foundations increasingly grapple with how they can ensure that funding and partnership decisions made today are fit for the future. Here's a call to the philanthropic sector to renew its original commitment to the future.

The interests of future generations remain neglected

Due to a strong bias towards presentism in our current modes of governance, the concerns of future generations are rarely taken into account – despite the existence in some cases of youth advisory bodies or other representative instruments. Already in 1987, the Brundtland Commission's report, "Our Common Future", pointed out that, "Future generations do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions." It is no surprise that because future generations are politically disenfranchised and not listed among the relevant "stakeholders" routinely consulted by governments, their interests are not secured in the social contract.

Even conventional economic evaluation and policy analysis and methods discriminate against the interests of future generations. As a result, they remain neglected in governance – be at the local, national, or international level – which instead continues to give priority to present net benefits at the costs of future ones. Paradoxically, this short-term bias appears particularly acute in democratic regimes characterised by short electoral cycles, which are by design not only time-bound but also expected to respond to citizens' immediate concerns. This is bad news for future generations, whose lives depend on careful, well-planned responses to existential risks.

Why philanthropy needs to embrace the long term

Contrary to its original, characteristic long-term ambition, the philanthropic sector is no exception to the trend of neglecting the long term. While as a matter of principle one might expect philanthropy to address the lack of representation of future generations, there are only a few foundations that are willing to fill this gap. It is true that philanthropic efforts focus not only on immediate needs and crisis response but also on strategic and forward-thinking interventions to address root causes and create enduring change. Yet, ironically, foundations continue to find it difficult to make funding decisions that will meet the needs of the future.

Today philanthropy's self-imposed evaluation methods on the impact it seeks tend to prioritise the short and medium terms over the long one. Philanthropy's obsession with metrics such as KPIs reduces the chances for grantees to operate for – and attain – long-term transformations. More critically, as is clearly seen in Philea's Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey, foundations are deeply embedded in "short-termism" – being themselves the expression of dominant economic and social systems as embodied by conservative boards, elitism, and preferences for mainstream topics.

Hence there is not only a need for philanthropy to rethink its own approach to the long term in its programmes and activities – by systematically imagining and crafting alternative scenarios and solutions for a more equitable and sustainable world – but also to seize the opportunity to structurally alter the short-termism embedded in our systems. To do this, philanthropy must build futures literacy capacity not only within its own sector but also beyond.

This seems especially needed both within governments and civil society at large: Care for future generations is common across cultures and has been for centuries, but our institutions lack the tools to systematically design future-proof policies.

Establishing a new ecosystem of institutions to guard the interests of future generations

One of the most substantive approaches to structurally remedying today's neglect of future generations' interests would be the establishment of a new ecosystem of institutions that would act as guardians of future people. This is exactly what the Gulbenkian Foundation successfully pioneered in Portugal (see the case study New Social Contract on page 96). Over a period of five years, it convened a major multistakeholder process that led to the design and successful incorporation of an intergenerational fairness framework into government and its institutions.

There are many examples of future generations institutions that philanthropies and public authorities can learn from. In Europe, countries such as Finland, Hungary, Malta, and Sweden have such dedicated bodies, as does Wales in the UK. Outside of Europe, there is also Canada, Israel, and Uruguay. At the international level, the UN is considering appointing a special envoy for future generations. The latter would repurpose the UN Trusteeship Council (originally created to oversee decolonisation) into a future-oriented body, and this may lead to the negotiation of a Declaration on Future Generations that could give future people legal standing. At the EU level, European Commission Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič has been convening a Ministers of the Future meeting. This suggests that the foundations for a new, dedicated institution might already be laid.

Enhancing anticipation for the common good

Yet future generations institutions are far from being mainstream and, like any major social and political innovation, they encounter the resistance of existing short-term oriented systems within governments and society at large. As societies become more concerned with their impact on future generations, there is a unique opportunity for the European philanthropic sector to step in. For philanthropy the future generations agenda is about reconciling itself with its original long-term perspective by committing to embed futures thinking and foresight not only within itself but also within civil society and governments across the world to enhance anticipation for the common good.

#FitForFutureGenerations

Future generations rely on us to live in a Europe fit for them. Our legacy is what we create for the future. Join #FitForFutureGenerations - a campaign by European think tanks, foundations, associations and nonprofits. A call to develop an interinstitutional declaration on the rights of Future generations, to nominate an EU commissioner with a broad, horizontal portfolio and acting as first vice-president; to set up an impact assessment within the better regulation guidelines.

What is enabling futures philanthropy?

A plea to embrace protopia

Ondřej Liška

Porticus, the Netherlands

Philanthropy exists within the same social, economic and power relations which it intends to fix. The rapidly changing societal context is causing foundations and donors to reflect on their own role and adjust their mission and strategy.

Enabling philanthropy for the future means at least two things: building courageously on philanthropy's strengths vis-á-vis other societal forces, and putting philanthropy to an honest test against the best possible version of itself.

Looking farther, adapting faster

Foundations have been spending time and capital on reviewing structures and strategies to adapt to new VUCA realities (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity). Some have managed to reinvent themselves by moving towards more participative and core-funding oriented models. For others, attempts to innovate have led to internal change fatigue. Due to the growing speed of societal changes, it is become necessary to build a daring vision and values for a long-term direction *as well as* to adopt a strategy with a much higher degree of flexibility.

The speed and quality of embedding new practices in philanthropy are very much determined by the proximity of boards and staff to each other. It is therefore crucial to foster and deepen the connection between them. Honest debates between boards and staff about impact, risks and costs of innovation are hard, but necessary.

If we want to enable more innovative and risk-taking philanthropy, the challenge is to foster multifaceted growth of engaged professionals. Philanthropy needs more rigorous data analysts, who are also empathic storytellers, listeners and reflective leaders *at the same time*. Which university programme offers curriculum that combines fine arts with data crunching or anthropology with management?

Transgressing silos

Philanthropy often aspires to bring systems change, which often involves policy transformation on a large scale. This requires adopting holistic approaches and transgressing silos. In both policymaking and philanthropy, new practices are emerging, for instance designing policies around a holistic concept of well-being rather than GDP growth.

Philea's Exploring 21st Century Philanthropy survey conducted in 2023 showed that the most urgent problems of the coming decade are of a highly polyvalent nature: climate migration, biodiversity loss, mental health and well-being, spatial segregation and inequality, or the impact of artificial intelligence.

It is therefore not only grantees who should be encouraged to apply systems thinking and transversal approaches, it is also philanthropy boards and staff who need to be exposed to cross-disciplinary perspectives..

Failing and learning quickly

Most foundations have expanded their lens from an input/output logic to measuring *impact*. But as the famous saying goes, not everything that can be measured counts, and not everything that counts can be measured. Settling for narrative approaches could create an illusion of satisfaction and false success, whereas drilling hard on data might miss the transformation of mindsets.

Some foundations have listened and introduced lighter and more targeted ways to collect data and have shifted the emphasis towards *learning*. Doing so means much more than operational adjustment. It is an organisational and individual mindset change which translates into a new cultural pattern. Foundations are rarely the change-makers. It is the civil society organisations who are. Only when foundations learn from their partners, embrace their strategies and create space for voices that are missed by established politics do they become part of civil society, strengthen democracy and are therefore seen as legitimate.

Tracking impact *in order* to learn and course correct is one of the most important sources of legitimation of philanthropy. Only when society sees evidence that there ia an honest feedback loop practised by the privileged, do the privileged deserve the space to exert influence on the lives of people, communities and states. By doing so *honestly* and *transparently*, philanthropy contributes to trust in society.

Working better together

Innovative models of collaboration that enable joint learning and aim to reduce bureaucracy for grantees have emerged on the horizon, but more is needed to realise their promise. For instance, the Network of European Foundations (NEF) serves as a practical platform for collaborations among like-minded donors. It hosts various pooled funds such as European AI and Society Fund, and Civitates, a funders' collaborative that focuses on strengthening democracy and solidarity in Europe.

But donors collaboratives bring new challenges. Joining forces also means more chairs in the room, more energy spent on alignment, more stakeholder management. There is a growing consensus that, in fact, a *much bigger scale* and more *innovative forms* of collaboration (such as collective impact method) in philanthropy are needed.

Are we ready to imagine hundreds of small and big donors around Europe working together to tackle the biggest challenges of our times? What kind of governance would such an effort need to allow for maximum participation while remaining effective at the same time? Which elements of power is philanthropy ready to give up, or rather share, to achieve more together?

Creating new institutions based on old designs will most likely not bring new results. Instead of building new formal, and therefore somewhat rigid structures, a new kind of "*swarm philanthropy*" is needed, characterised by nimbleness, consistency, and power of scale.

Power to imagination

Utopias, despite their bad reputation, have an important function: They serve as idealistic experiments that test our ability to imagine a different order of things and to act for a better reality now.

The environmental catastrophe towards which we're heading can be prevented only by an unprecedented mobilisation of collective imagination and will to make our institutions and economy more just and sustainable. Such mobilisation will happen if we bravely turn the tide of popular dystopian thinking and rejuvenate utopian imagination that creates *new options* for our future instead of a single daunting version of it.

Protopia is a future reality that is not perfect, but actively built by the best knowledge and wisdom we already have, anchored in principles such as inclusiveness, peace, and sustainability. The role of philanthropy is to build bridges to these potential collective futures by imagining and building prototypes of them. In other words, by becoming protopian. Future philanthropy that leads along these lines, does not bring better life to people and planet (only) out of generosity, but because of an unquenchable thirst for justice and humanity.

CASE STUDY: ASSIFERO

THE FUTURE CHAIR OF YOUTH AGENCY

How Assifero calls for meaningful child and youth participation in European philanthropy

Children and youth can no longer be solely an "issue" that philanthropy acts upon: Their voices must be meaningfully engaged in everything we do. To accelerate this cultural and institutional change, the Italian association of grantmaking foundations and private institutional philanthropy, Assifero, invites Italian and European philanthropic organisations to leave an empty chair at every board meeting or panel discussion to symbolise the absence of children and youth in decision-making and public discourse, and as a reminder of our impact on future generations. The Future Chair initiative aims to spark change in decision-making processes and inspire philanthropic organisations to embrace meaningful child and youth participation in philanthropy.

THE ISSUE

"Children are our present and our future," but does this "future" have a say in the decisions about tomorrow that we make today? We live in a culture characterised by "adultism", with a prevailing assumption that children and youth lack relevant experience and are not entitled to make decisions and act in ways that adults can. How do we enable philanthropy to embrace new perspectives, become more inclusive, get closer to those it serves, and pivot to a new mindset where intergenerational dialogue is at the heart of every decision?

THE CONTEXT

With an aging population in Europe, the proportion of young people is diminishing. In Italy, young people (15-29 years) represent only 15% of the population.[1] However, even this low proportion is not reflected in their representation in decision-making processes in philanthropy. According to a 2023 survey conducted by Assifero and students from Bocconi University, a paltry 5% of Italian philanthropic organisations have board members below the age of 50. Across the sample, 81% of board members were between 50 and 65 years old, and 14% were between the ages of 65 and 80.[2] While 37 out of 38 respondent foundations have young people among the "beneficiaries" of their activities and programmes, current efforts to enable their participation in programme design and decision-making are assessed as moderate.

THE PATH FORWARD

Children and young people have full rights to bring knowledge, skills and unbiased perspectives to the table today. Philanthropy can benefit from meaningfully engaging them to address root causes of societal challenges more effectively. Young people are experts with lived experience and imagination who can be part of solutions, not only on the topics concerning their age group (e.g. digital or climate) but any major challenge society is facing. To mainstream this approach in the Italian foundation sector and across Europe, Assifero has launched the Future Chair initiative.

THE METHOD

Future Chair is a commitment with a set of principles that encourages foundations to act on meaningful engagement of children and young people in philanthropy. From creating dedicated spaces for dialogue, to ensuring action on young people's recommendations, the commitment acknowledges the diversity of philanthropic organisations and meets foundations where they are on their journey toward meaningful youth participation.

Developed by young people and launched in March 2023, the commitment has 56 signatories, among which are Italian private and family, corporate and community foundations. The ways in which the signatories live up to the principles of the commitment are diverse: It can be through a Youth Bank where young people design and manage calls for proposals, an approach adopted by Fondazione Monza e Brianza; or by putting young people in the driver's seat of devising the future of their locality, as practised by Fondazione Wanda di Ferdinando in collaboration with Wayouth; or by intentionally rethinking foundations' decision-making processes, which is the case of the Youth Advisory Board of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.[3,4,5,6]

Future Chair is a call to action to both foundations and philanthropy networks. For foundations and philanthropic organisations – to start their inner transformation by meaningfully including children and youth in decision making-processes. For philanthropy networks – to unveil their role as agents of change, enablers and multipliers of social change by walking the talk and encouraging a more equitable practice among their constituencies.

SIX PRINCIPLES

- Promote and create spaces for dialogue and debate
- Remove obstacles and ensure enabling conditions
- Promote a culture of active listening at all levels
- Take into account the views and ideas of young people and follow up
- Communicate progress
- Promote principles

READ FULL CALL TO ACTION

PART 3

FUTURES OF EUROPE

WHAT IF? EUROPE'S POSSIBLE FUTURES

The Europe we know today will not exist in 2050. Future changes are likely to challenge the continent's identity and geography. These changes will be fuelled by historical patterns, current events and emerging trends, some known, others not. In this section, we delve into the shifting landscape of the European continent, paradoxically marked by crisis but also opportunity. This analysis explores the drivers of change influencing societal shifts, sustainability priorities and technological progress, all deemed vital for philanthropic action today. It invites speculation and “what if” questions on the possible pathways for philanthropy to develop adaptive strategies and navigate this dynamic landscape, while fostering resilience, innovation and meaningful impact across the changing continent.

Looking back to see forward

In order to better envision the future, it can be helpful to look back. Consider Europe fifty years ago: dictatorships still prevailed in countries that are now fully-fledged democracies. Spain was under Franco's rule, Portugal was a newly formed democracy after Salazar’s death in 1970, and Greece’s military junta had just been toppled. Towards the north of the continent, countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland had joined the European Economic Community (EEC), an organisation with only nine members at the time. The relinquishment of vast colonial territories by nations such as France and the United Kingdom profoundly reshaped Europe's geopolitical landscape, casting long shadows into the future. Aspiring for regional and geopolitical security from either the United States or the Soviet Union, was akin to a fever dream - an intellectual exercise left to idealists. While many today consider the continent to be one of the most digitally adept regions in the world, back then it existed in the shadow of the technological prowess of global superpowers.

Today, that version of Europe no longer exists. Fifty years from now, we will likely look back and not recognise today’s landscape. If Europe in the second half of the 20th century was coming to terms with of two world wars, then we are currently living through a historical ‘hinge-point’. While the European Union is actively and explicitly engaging in internal enlargement discussions, Europe’s destiny will be largely shaped by external forces and the restructuring of international fault lines. Amid the ongoing Russian warn on Ukraine, the rise of the Global South, the upheaval of any internal demographic certainty, and existential threats from climate change, the question lies in how the continent’s diverse, many peoples will respond to these challenges to create a resilient Europe, with a strong positioning in the world. In an increasingly poly-nodal world order, perhaps the nascently emerging and deeply transformative journey of an interdependent Europe can find reassurance in the Chinese word for crisis Weiji (危机) which also means opportunity.

Redefining global powers

Poly-nodality, unlike multipolarity, acknowledges the role of the relational influence of a multitude of actors, such as states, cities and municipalities, in inevitably shaping any region’s position in a future world order.[1]

Since 2016, twice as many countries have shifted towards authoritarianism compared to those moving towards democracy. Polarisation is continuously intensifying, undermining respect for opposition and pluralism, while autocratic leaders exploit misinformation and the discourse of what is presented as "traditional values", suppress civil society and curtail media freedom.

Here, international fault lines cross and connect while retaining their independence, mutual interdependence, and by extension de *jure* equality between each other. This change in the global status quo is marked by widespread dissatisfaction with post-WWII institutions, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. An Atlantic Council study reveals that 98% of experts doubt the UN's ability to address core challenges, with only 16.9% expressing confidence in the United Nations Security Council, as it fails to reflect both the current and emerging global landscape.[2] Attitudes are similarly negative towards the IMF, which is viewed as solidifying inequalities between the Global South and the Global North. The expanding BRICS coalition demonstrates how regional discontent with what is perceived as neocolonial universalism results in effectual backlashes, through initiatives like New Development Bank or China's Belt & Road Initiative. These will strengthen and further any eventual poly-nodal world order, and force Europe, a vulnerable, dependent, and currently value-driven region to move beyond dependency or independency.

In a future world of middle powers, Europe might need to be strategically interdependent; a balanced approach that steers clear of both the risks associated with strategic autonomy, which could potentially fragment and isolate Europe, and with complete alignment with the US within an anti-China coalition.[3] European foreign policy will have to focus on preparing for a world of political coexistence and competition. Europe must refrain from presuming it can alter the governance systems of other nations and, as a result, must acknowledge that coexistence with them is key. Instead of striving to render the world secure for democracy, Europe's objective could be to ensure the security of European democracies on a global scale. Europe will have to reassess its current self-image as a global bastion of universal values too. While Europe is certainly at the forefront of change on issues such as regulatory governance, peace faring objectives, and data privacy today, the prowess it holds on a global stage will not be by virtue of Europe as a value-driven power, but because of its competitive advantage in those fields.

The following themes ask 'what shapes a future European society?' through a variety of critical signposts identified through horizon-scanning, research, interviews and Think-Lab sessions with the philanthropic community.

- *First, is the character of its people - the shape they take and the ideas they hold.*
- *Second, is what its people are indebted to – the forces and limits of the natural environment.*
- *And third, the disruptive potential of technology - its ability to mesmerise change as well as creative destruction.*

Shifting demographics and social dynamics

Since the early 20th century, the world has undergone unprecedented population growth, propelled by high fertility rates coupled with increasing life expectancy, and declining infant mortality. Projections expect that the world population will likely peak at around 11 billion by the end of the century.[4] The world would be made up of two camps: one with a growing and one with a shrinking population - with Europe emerging as a leader to the latter.[5] Once referred to as the "Old Continent", Europe's nickname is becoming literal, with its median population age standing at 42 years. While Europe currently constitutes almost one-tenth of the world's population, projections for 2100 suggest a 6% decline, making the continent home to only 4% of the global population.[6] The region, however, is expected to maintain its substantial economic influence, as that 4% will likely continue to control a significant portion of global wealth.

In contrast, population growth is expected to largely occur in the Global South, particularly in Africa, which currently holds the youngest population worldwide, with 70% being under 30. By 2100, Africa's population is projected to soar to 4.3 billion, nearly quadrupling its current number and making up one third of the global population. Additionally, India's population is anticipated to increase by a quarter billion by mid-century, before seeing a sharp decline thereafter. Still, by 2100 more than 8 out of 10 people are expected to live in either Africa or Asia, with the former hosting some of the world's largest urban areas.[7,8]

The movement of populations, and in particular of environmental migrants will further impact global and European dynamics. With certain parts of the world expected to experience unliveable temperatures exceeding 50°C, the UN estimates up to 1 billion environmental migrants in the next 30 years, which would move global demographics towards different directions.[9] Future world maps may have to be turned upside down to reflect these social and demographic shifts. As the axes of influence relocate below the equator, new collaborative frameworks with the Global South and non-Western rising states will be necessary to navigate evolving geopolitical landscapes.

WHAT IF every European citizen had access to an Ideas Funding under the condition that it had to promote peace and societal well-being?

WHAT IF the growing power of cities, regions, companies, and transnational movements create new forms of territoriality and locality and change our understanding of the nation state? What could be the role of the philanthropic sector in this transition?

Democracy at a crossroads

The world is increasingly becoming less democratic. The number of electoral democracies dropped from 96 in 2016 to 90 in 2022, while liberal democracies declined from 44 in 2009 to 32 in 2022. This trend reveals the concerning reality that fewer people currently enjoy democratic rights.[10] Since 2016, twice as many countries have shifted towards authoritarianism compared to those moving towards democracy. Polarisation is continuously intensifying, undermining respect for opposition and pluralism, while autocratic leaders exploit misinformation and the discourse of what is presented as "traditional values", suppress civil society and curtail media freedom.[11] Europe, a perceived bastion of democratic values, is not invulnerable to this global democratic erosion, where extremist and illiberal political parties are seemingly becoming normalised.

During the pandemic, Europe experienced unprecedented border closures and protectionist measures impacting not only economic indices but also revealing humanitarian concerns in the region.[12] Despite economic recovery, ongoing geopolitical crises and the domino effect of inflation have widened disparities among European countries. Heightened political polarisation and inequalities have fuelled nationalism and radical far-right leaders in Europe by creating more illiberal democracies all over the region, starting with the Visegrad countries and expanding towards the West. More and more European states, while not directly fitting into the criteria of illiberal democracies, are witnessing a shift towards right-wing extremism entering the category of "flawed democracies". This change cultivates a divisive "us versus them" rhetoric, perpetuating inequalities, straining Europe's commitment to an inclusive moral compass and aggravating the already vulnerable position of groups like Europeans of colour or refugees.[13,14]

Whilst the exact reasons for democratic backsliding are complex and hard to pinpoint, the rising levels of inequality and economic polarisation that the pandemic revealed and exacerbated at both citizen and regional level, go against the ethos of democracy and its vital component of inter-citizen trust. According to the Global Inequality Lab, overall inequality has increased since the 1980s and is expected to continue its upward climb until 2050 if not addressed and monitored properly.[15] Within this reality, if the current illiberal status quo is perpetuated we could likely see democracies becoming less "full" even in regions with strong democratic foundations like Europe.

WHAT IF the resurgence of nationalism and far-right extremism propels philanthropy networks and foundations into the role of guardians, stitching the social fabric back together to uphold the backbone of civil society against the tide of division?

WHAT IF democracy evolves into a real-time participatory system, where citizens vote on issues directly through enabled digital infrastructure, drastically reducing the need for traditional representatives and transforming legislative processes?

As challenges mount, societal anxieties, uncertainties and discontent have reached a tipping point, calling for a renewed social contract and well-being metrics beyond the GDP.

Media freedom and plurality

In today's polarising climate, critical components of democracy, such as media freedom and alternative sources of information have also suffered setbacks. Beyond the lack of trust in established institutions and mainstream media, there is a deep fragmentation of the public sphere. Echo chambers and filter bubbles share unreliable information or promulgate political propaganda undermining media freedom and public discourse. Traditional media lack income from advertising, while facing new competition from blogs, influencers, and other digital platforms.[16] While the internet and digital media have diversified news and information sources, they often share unchecked, biased, and potentially misleading material, creating challenges in discerning truth from fiction.[17]

The rise of misinformation, including AI-related risks such as deep fakes, further exacerbate media freedom, while eroding public trust and distorting reality. Despite these obstacles, media freedom, including public interest journalism and media plurality, lies at the heart of democracy. Specifically, it provides citizens with diverse and valuable information, facilitates democratic participation and dialogue by amplifying marginalised voices, and ultimately fosters a healthy public sphere based on independent journalistic content.[18,19]

Addressing these challenges to fortify media and democracy as a whole, will require a multifaceted approach. As the newfound power that digital media hold is not expected to wane in the future, their influence in maintaining or weakening democracy will be detrimental.[20] Regulatory frameworks and initiatives, such as the European Media Freedom Act, will be essential to reversing worrying trends of declining media freedom and pluralism in Europe.[21] Another initiative is Pluralis, backed by philanthropic organisations and media houses, which invests in news and media companies that provide independent, quality reporting in regions where media plurality is at risk. Increased public-private partnerships, investments and concerted efforts to reverse the decline of quality reporting and media independence will be needed in the future.

Democracies thrive when there is pressure from below and the future of a democratic Europe depends on fortifying three crucial elements: free media, elections and the civic sector, which can serve as watchdogs over executive authority.[22] In the same vein, citizen participation, advocacy, and safeguarding those vital institutions have historically countered such trends and protected democracy in times of threat.[23]

WHAT IF governments and philanthropic organisations would hand out quality media subscriptions for free to young people, aged between 16 and 20 years old?

WHAT IF philanthropy unites against runamok deep fakes, an amplifying threat to eroding public trust and security, through sophisticated detection tools to differentiate between authentic and manipulated content?

A new social contract and well-being metrics

Amidst geopolitical shifts, technological advancements and demographic transformations, the need for a renewed European social contract is becoming increasingly evident. The post-war European narrative, once groundbreaking due to its notions on welfare state and social protection, fails to capture Europe's current needs and challenges and its evolving position in the post-pandemic world.[24] As challenges mount, societal anxieties, uncertainties and discontent have reached a tipping point, calling for a renewed social contract and well-being metrics beyond the GDP.

The scale of today's challenges urges European states and institutions to address the acute social crisis while transitioning to a climate neutral economy. Recognising the need for revising existing European policies, there is a call for a renewed, inclusive, and equitable social contract.[25] This contract will aim to create an economy that prioritises people and the planet over profit, aligned with citizen demands while reflecting the needs of present and future generations.[26] Emphasising that the green transition should go hand in hand with social fairness, policies should expedite environmental transition while addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting inclusion, fundamental rights, and poverty alleviation at European, regional and national levels.[27] However, the lag in social and ecological transitions, coupled with the absence of European institutions creates space for the civic sector to act. In shaping the new social contract, civil society assumes a critical role by representing marginalised groups and upholding democratic and sustainable processes, while promoting social cohesion and building trust in institutions where it is lacking.[28]

However, the efficacy of a new social contract also relies on reassessing the ways in which national prosperity is measured beyond outdated metrics like the GDP. The misconception that economic growth is synonymous to welfare, underscores the limitations of exclusively measuring with the GDP, as it fails to encompass other vital societal aspects of progress, such as environmental sustainability, income equality and political freedom.[29] Rather than a single "all inclusive" indicator replacing the GDP, a more nuanced and multifaceted approach should be adopted by forging and reimagining new and existing measures. The UN's Beyond GDP framework, emphasises solidarity, transformation, and innovation for universal well-being, incorporating the elements of resilience, participatory governance, and ethical economies. Several countries are already adopting alternative indices to gauge overall well-being, such as the Better Life Index, which measures aspects like housing, jobs, education, and civic engagement or the Happy Planet Index, which includes ecological footprint and life expectancy.[30] Instead of one complex indicator, 10 to 20 concise metrics aligned with existing indicators and SDGs would ensure more inclusive and effective measurements and consequent decision-making.[31]

WHAT IF the successful implementation of a new social contract in Europe, centred on social, digital and green transitions creates opportunities for greater involvement of non-profits and civil society catalysing citizens shaping a more inclusive and equitable society within the next decade?

WHAT IF the very foundations of Europe's understanding of wealth and income and, consequently, inequality, shift and make way for new ways of measuring progress and well-being, manifesting in the introduction of nuanced policy frameworks that prioritise factors beyond economic growth?

POCKET OF THE FUTURE

zukunft.bahnhof - prototype of a locally empowered citizenship

zukunft.bahnhof, or future.station, is a local innovative initiative that aims to recreate regenerative and communal living in the train station area of Lichtensteig, a small town only one hour away from Zurich. With its bottom-up approach, this Swiss foundation, established by the Belgian funder Jan Colruyt, is creating a place where civil society sets an example for a sustainable socio-political and economic model of the future. The zukunft.bahnhof is an open living, working, and learning place that brings different people and generations together to co-create a common vision that accounts for the future. It focuses on system change with regeneration, entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, and collaboration at the core towards a society suitable for the coming generations. This model can become a prototype of locally empowered citizenship and reinvented democracy fit for the 21st century.

Navigating global ecological challenges

The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record since 1880.[34] Data show that the 10 warmest years in history all have occurred since 2010, with 2023 boasting extreme weather conditions which are considered the most severe long-term global risk.[35,36] This alarming trend does not seem to be slowing down. Decades of harmful industrial and agricultural processes and poor waste management have increased the concentration of greenhouse emissions in the atmosphere, leading to projections that the planet will reach the threshold of +1.5 degrees by 2030.[37]

Climate change's impact extends beyond weather and average global temperatures, posing significant risks to ecosystems, crop yields, fresh water availability, biodiversity, and land use on global, regional and local scales. Wildlife loss projections indicate that about 90% of the wildlife existing 50 years ago will face extinction by 2040, while crop yields in 2050 are expected to be 7% below estimated yields without climate change. In addition, fresh water use has been outpacing population growth with 33 countries at risk of facing severe water stress by 2040.[38]

Within this context, Europe is also expected to face a surge in extreme weather events. Wildfires, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and other natural disasters are becoming disturbingly common, as the region is warming twice as fast as the global average and standing at about 2.2°C above pre-industrial times. As a result of rising temperatures, Europe is on track to becoming a hot continent where Brussels will feel akin to Ankara and Rome to Riyadh by the middle of the century.[39]

Although carbon dioxide can linger in the atmosphere for centuries due to past inaction, immediate efforts to curb future temperature rise could contribute to reducing global warming - at least for future generations. Despite required responses to climate change falling short, there is a growing widespread acknowledgement of the impacts of global warming, leading to gradual acceptance of difficult mitigation actions to reduce emissions. While current political systems are still not embracing the radical transformations required for change, momentum is steadily building with growing awareness and initiatives. The binding Paris Agreement, endorsed by 196 parties underscores the imperative to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This further fortifies the necessity of global cooperation in confronting looming global emergencies, as individual states cannot address such challenges in isolation.[40] Decisive and collective action can mitigate the risk of irreversible climate change and its devastating consequences, like extreme heat, droughts, floods, and food shortage and safeguard the vulnerable populations affected.[41]

On a regional level, Europe has been a leader in international climate diplomacy and environmental initiatives, like the EU's European Green Deal - an unprecedented and influential blueprint to paving the way towards a sustainable future.[42] Striving to remain a forerunner in climate policy and align with the Paris Agreement standards, Europe's ambitious long-term plans aim for a 55% emissions cut by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050.[43] While strides have been made in reducing fossil fuel dependence, Europe may fall short of some of its objectives to become the first climate neutral continent, remaining among the top global greenhouse gas emitters.[44,45] However, it is not lack of initiative that challenges Europe's environmental goals. The region's internal polarisation and clashing interests between national governments as well as groups of the population impacted by the green transition and its high costs, impede the local implementation of an otherwise robust region-wide climate policy. This suggests a need for rigorous guidance within the continent to facilitate more effective and binding decision-making, ensuring a balance between the immediate needs of individual states and Europe as a whole, while also aligning their long-term aspirations.

WHAT IF Atlantic meridional overturning circulation dramatically and abruptly changed due to the input of freshwater in the North Atlantic, as already modelled by scientists, resulting in a cooling of the Northern Hemisphere that would be detrimental to Northwestern Europe?

WHAT IF parts of the living world, such as forests, lakes, or nature in general were afforded legal rights similar to human rights? How could philanthropy defend those rights, like the right of ecosystems, natural communities or species to exist?

Regional inequalities in climate change

Although climate change is bound to affect the entire world population, regions like the Middle East or Africa are expected to experience a temperature increase 1.5 times greater than the global average, deepening environmental as well as social inequalities between different parts of the world.[46] Even in a smaller region like Europe, the narrative is similar: certain European citizens will feel the effects of environmental degradation more acutely than others, magnifying existing inequalities between the North and the South of the continent. As a matter of fact, southern Europe is expected to suffer more significantly, with a potential annual GDP loss exceeding 2.5% compared to 1.7% loss in the North, in a worst case scenario of a 3°C temperature rise across the continent.[47]

Increased temperatures will be encountered more profoundly in urban areas, highlighting the importance of urban planning and durable infrastructure in the face of extreme weather. However, European urban environments were not designed with climate change in mind, lacking suitable buildings to protect residents from overheating or adequate drainage systems during heavy rainfall. Once again, this situation disproportionally affects lower-income individuals and groups, often residing in more affordable yet less resilient housing.[48,49]

In addition, Europe's ageing populations will be particularly vulnerable due to reduced mobility and health issues, further exacerbating regional disparities between countries. Mediterranean countries in particular face heightened risks, as they are faced with more frequent droughts, wildfires, and heatwaves. Beyond the pronounced impact of extreme weather conditions in the South, these countries are expected to meet more severe environmental and economic challenges than their northern counterparts. This discrepancy, due to their lower average socio-economic status and higher proportions of elderly populations, further deepens the wedge between the North and South. Notably, these inequalities are seldom addressed in European policy and practice, revealing cracks in the continent's efforts to protect its more vulnerable groups.[50]

WHAT IF instead of region-wide standardised climate policies, Europe implemented tailored and targeted policies and investments with local actors to address city-specific impacts and climate threats through community philanthropy?

WHAT IF Europe's cohesion policies succeed in bridging a North-South divide? Would addressing systemic, socio-economic inequalities lead to a greater possibility of Europe realising its climate goals by 2050? How would this shift then reshape the continent's social fabric and transition towards sustainability?

POCKET OF THE FUTURE

Gigatonne - Tackling the climate crisis in 60 months

Gigatonne is a disruptive initiative that aims to shift the direction of the climate crisis within 60 months, by abating one billion tonnes of CO^2 emissions per year, while benefiting one billion of the poorest families in the Global South. It is a bottom-up approach, based on scientific modelling and evidence, empowering local communities through training and funding to implement solutions that reduce emission.[51] Diverse teams around the world are mobilised to deliver tangible results by testing and implementing emission-cutting prototypes. By partnering with local governments, businesses and organisations, the teams not only tackle emissions but also improve food and energy security, create jobs and alleviate poverty. Ultimately, Gigatonne's aim is to demonstrate a viable pathway towards reducing global emissions by one gigatonne of CO^2 per year, showcasing evidence of real progress instead of commitments; all while engaging and benefiting the most vulnerable communities.[52]

Emerging technologies

As a historical driving force of human progress, technological developments will accelerate and determine many aspects of our lives, by paving the way for novel solutions. Quantum and spatial computing, biotech and artificial intelligence are key technological developments that may significantly affect Europe's future in the long-term reflecting our inseparable ties to data. [53]

Tomorrow's problems, often requiring alternative solutions that transcend our brains, are likely to be addressed head on by Europe through quantum technologies. The advent of fully functional quantum computers has the potential to revolutionise computing, addressing intricate problems for humanity. In the long-term, these developments could enable predictive simulations in life sciences and climate change, for instance through quantum sensors integrated into healthcare devices. The proliferation of a "quantum internet", could also democratise secure quantum communication, offering privacy benefits in data handling.[54] Despite uncertainties regarding Europe's ability to fully control quantum technology's effects to align with the region's values, innovation strategies such as the Novo Nordisk Foundation's joint venture with the Niels Bohr Institute to develop the world's first fully-functional quantum computer, show potential success.[55]

Despite the metaverse's current reputation as falling prey to hype cycles, in a 2023 CIFS led expert panel 90% of respondents thought that educational institutions would likely offer services via the metaverse by 2030. It was also suggested that the average person will spend an average of 5.6 hours/day in the metaverse by 2030.[56] Depending on the extent of regional control of the metaverse, Europe will likely steer towards a scenario which is both proprietary and open: a level of governance from a central authority will likely exist, but will nonetheless promote the European values of privacy and transparency through having certain open source characteristics.[57] While the metaverse could democratise many aspects of society, such as education, entertainment and healthcare, the potential consequences of citizens living in near total digital immersion will have to be addressed. The widespread integration of AR and VR in European society could threaten shared reality, necessitating safeguards and controls to maintain societal cohesion and prevent the manipulation of individuals for commercial or political gains, especially if a majority of content in the metaverse is AI-generated.[58]

Although Europe missed the starting gun for the AI race, with risk tolerant tech giants in the US and China taking the lead, its role as a setter of international and regulatory standards positions it as a forum for researching the ethical and practical implications of widespread AI adoption. Advanced AI developments spell several long-term challenges for Europe. In the WEF's Global Risks Perception Survey, 27% of experts believe the consequences of advanced AI on individuals, businesses, and ecosystems can be "extremely severe", including misinformation, cyberattacks, bias, and AI's integration into warfare. These risks may escalate if AI deployment prioritises monopoly and profit maximisation over the long-term well-being of future generations. Luckily, by positioning itself as an AI regulator rather than innovator, Europe is less vulnerable to internal AI risks despite potential economic losses due to its relatively small AI industry. [59,60]

WHAT IF a non-extractive AI standard for the common good was developed, aimed at enhancing well-being and guiding towards the optimal design of impactful campaigns and programmes by demonstrating the most effective strategies?

WHAT IF quantum computing and AI enhanced new data collection and analysis possibilities to provide real-life information on societal progress and challenges across Europe and thus activate citizens to take action and encourage participation in democratic processes leading to change?

Digital divide

As digital technologies have permeated almost every aspect of our lives, internet access is a necessary tool for social participation. The pandemic highlighted the critical role of connectivity in a functional society, from work and education to communication and commerce. Yet, a staggering one-third of the world's population remains without internet access and over a half lacked high-speed broadband as of 2022.[61] The digital divide is starkly pronounced in developing regions of the Global South, like Sub-Saharan Africa where internet penetration stands at a mere 25%.[62]

This reliance on connectivity underscores the recognition of internet access as a human right, a concept gaining significant traction globally. Beyond mere communication, the internet serves as a valuable vehicle for accessing essential information, resources, job opportunities, and most importantly for ensuring freedom of expression and social engagement.[63] The UN in 2016 solidified this stance by acknowledging internet access as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasising its inseparable connection to other fundamental rights.[64] However, the resolution is not enforceable and imposing universal access to the internet across various regions remains a challenge, due to geographical and socio-economic barriers along with internet shutdowns and online censorship.

In the more digitally adept Europe, the Council of Europe has recommended "internet access as an essential requirement for exercising rights" among its Member States.[65] Some countries like Finland, Greece, and Estonia have explicitly or implicitly enshrined some degree of access in their legislation or through related rights.[66] However, over 10 million Europeans are unable to afford connectivity despite a high internet penetration rate of 89%.[67] Older individuals in rural areas and those of lower socio-economic backgrounds are being excluded from digital interconnectedness the most, exacerbating social and economic inequalities.[68] These disparities vary across European countries based on socio-economic factors, with the Balkans having the highest shares of people unable to afford internet, while Nordic countries claim the lowest share at 1%.[69] The digital divide extends beyond access to digital means, encompassing aspects like digital literacy, infrastructure quality, and content access, posing a potential threat to an already fragile European unity if left untreated.

WHAT IF digital platforms such as social networks, search engines, digital map services were recognised as an essential public infrastructure serving common good and not allowed to make profit through ads or data use?

WHAT IF philanthropy takes the lead in securing robust digital infrastructure for civil society organisations, aiming to bridge the digital divide by equipping these groups with the tools and connectivity they need to empower and serve their communities more effectively in the digital age?

POCKET OF THE FUTURE

The Mozilla Foundation - Movement for internet health

The Mozilla Foundation stands as a champion for an open and accessible internet, attempting to bridge the digital divide by establishing it as a public resource, where everyone has equal access and opportunity.[70] At the core of Mozilla's mission is advocating tech for good, fuelling "a movement for internet health". Mozilla works across disciplines and technologies to uphold privacy and inclusivity, safeguard digital rights and build a healthy and diverse digital ecosystem, challenging Big Tech dominance.[71] By rallying and empowering citizens and connecting leaders and activists, the organisation shapes the agenda by publishing open-source research. Since 2019, Mozilla has been dedicated to developing trustworthy AI with built-in privacy and fairness, in order to ensure enrichment in the lives of users rather than harm.[72] In short, Mozilla is shaping a digital landscape that prioritises people's well-being, through openness, inclusivity and responsible tech use.

The case for futures thinking in philanthropy

Europe is called to navigate increasingly complex paths with various forces pulling it to opposing directions in areas like democracy, climate change and technological development. In the spaces where Europe's multilateral nature hinders action, philanthropic organisations will need to take centre stage. However, being merely reactive to crises will not suffice. European philanthropic organisations will have to align their visions and goals in accordance to their local context and complement and support the European vision where it is lacking.

In this journey towards shaping a better future for the region and its people, foresight emerges as a valuable tool. European countries and institutions are already bolstering their foresight capacities, embedding it into their policies or having dedicated units guiding the transition towards a greener and fairer Europe by anticipation, preparation and strategic redirection[73]. Philanthropic organisations, being pivotal to European cohesion, cannot lag behind in the exploration of a desirable future for the continent. Instead, they should embrace foresight in order to understand their position in an evolving Europe, identify emerging opportunities and challenges and contribute to neglected areas where European policy falls short. Philanthropy can be an essential force contributing to the anticipation for the common good as a mindset, a culture that will help us navigate the dynamically changing continent and grant us with the ability to always rise to the challenges of our times.

Philanthropy can be an essential force contributing to the anticipation for the common good as a mindset, a culture that will help us navigate the dynamically changing continent and grant us with the ability to always rise to the challenges of our times.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

It is impossible to predict exactly the number of people born in the future. Yet, current population projections indicate immense numbers, if we avoid major existential threats. Even surviving for just 200,000 thousand more years would give us a staggering number of humans succeeding us. In these vast numbers, Europe's position remains uncertain. However, taking a more modest projection towards 2100, we have a clearer image of where Europe stands in the world. In a world of 11.2 billion people, Europe's population is expected to be a mere 420 million, representing less than 4% of the global population.

- Circle represents 8 billion people
- Rombhus represents 100 million people

Each row of dots represent the lives of

256

BILLION people

3143

circles represent all people who might be born in the next 200 000 years

EUROPE 4%

of global population

420 mil. people

8,1 BILLION

All the people alive today

109 BILLION

All the people who have lived and died

All the people expected to be alive in 2100

11.2

BILLION people

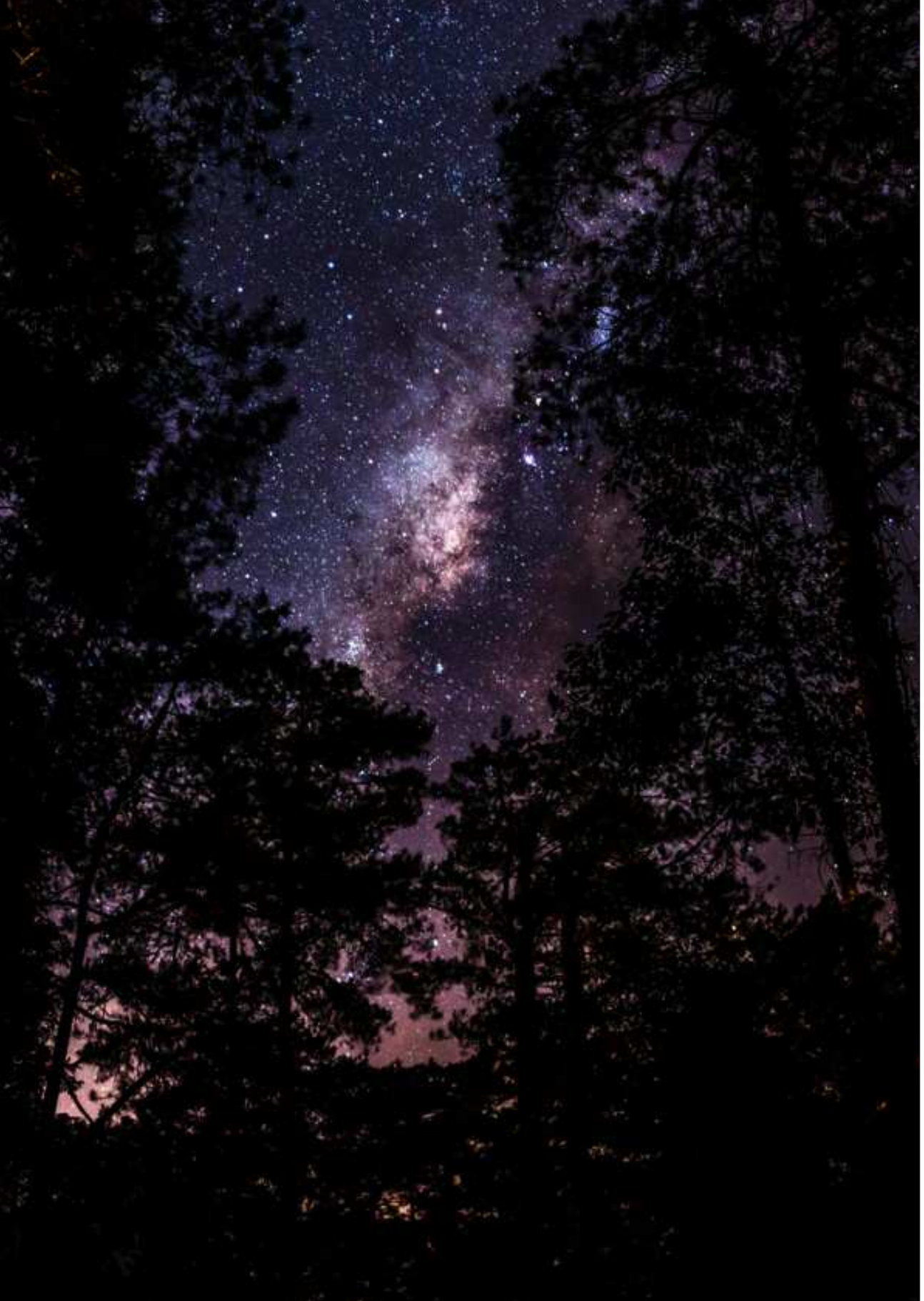
PAST **PRESENT** **2100**

200,000

years from today: as many years into the future as humanity has existed so far

FAR FUTURE

United Nations, "World population projected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050, and 11.2 billion in 2100".
Eurostat, "EU's population projected to drop by 6% by 2100", Europa, 2023.
Max Roser, "Longtermism: The future is vast – what does this mean for our own life?", Our World in Data, 2022.
Modified by FARSIGHT



INTERVIEW WITH PETER TURCHIN, COMPLEXITY SCIENTIST

Complex dynamics do not need to have complex causes

"There is no such thing as a 'typical collapse'. Like Tolstoy's Anna Karenina: every unhappy family is unhappy in their own way, and every collapse is actually a collapse in a different way," says Peter Turchin, complexity scientist and author of "The End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites and the Path of Political Disintegration" in an interview with Hanna Stähle, Philea's Head of Foresight and Innovation, discussing the causes of crises past and present, and the importance of better forecasting them in the future.

Could you please tell us about yourself? What shaped you as an individual, and your values?

I grew up in the Soviet Union, a country that does not exist anymore. My father was part of the human rights movement and we ended up in the United States because he was essentially exiled. Initially, my interests were in theoretical biology, where I gained my PhD. I was working as a complexity scientist focusing on population dynamics, but about 10 or 15 years into my career, I decided that I wanted to study more challenging systems and I switched from studying biological systems to social systems.

What have you found from analysing thousands of years of society and states dealing with crises?

We focused mostly on the last 5,000 years, when complex societies, organised states, appeared. One important trend over these 5,000 years is that the states have taken over the world. What we have found is that states tend to perform adequately and functionally for some time, but then inevitably, come "end times": times of instability, social breakdown and even utter collapse. The question then becomes: What is it about complex societies that don't allow them to continue working in a functional way forever?

What is the essence of complexity science?

Complexity science is a collection of different kinds of tools, primarily mathematical, computational and statistical. The United States, for example, is a complex system with different actors interacting with each other. The essence of a complexity systems approach is to take a look at how various parts interact and then try to simplify things. Complex dynamics doesn't need to have complex causes, you actually want to generate simpler models and ways to understand them.

In your book, you say that we need to move away from studying inequalities to studying instability…

Yes, everybody talks inequality - but it is a very abstract thing. Inequality cannot really be a driver… what people feel is what becomes a driver. There are several factors impacting inequality, but let's start with the first one. We call it popular immiseration, [in other words where] the well-being of a large proportion of the population is stagnating or even declining. This well-being has many dimensions: there is economic well-being such as wages and incomes, but also biological well-being such as life expectancy, and freedom from disease, or even height, a very sensitive indicator of declining living standards.

Beyond popular immiseration, you also speak about elite overproduction. Could you touch upon that?

Elites are simply a small proportion of the population who concentrate social power in their hands. Social power is our ability to influence other people's behaviours. There are four types of power: coercion or military power, economic, administrative, and ideological power. A small proportion of the population that controls power is a necessary condition for complex societies to function. We need elites [and] hierarchies because that's how humans cooperate and how governments can increase the well-being of their populations. However, sometimes in human history, there are periods when cooperation among the elites starts to break down because there are too many aspirants, "elite wannabes".

Some competition for power positions is good because it allows more able people to rise to positions. But when there are too many elite wannabes, the competition becomes counterproductive. And this is not when the better people rise, but people who are willing to break rules. When there is elite overproduction, of people competing for such positions, that is when cooperative [and] social norms that govern societies, start to break down.

What were the biggest signs for you that this was actually happening?

In the United States, starting in the 1970s, the wages of workers suddenly did not grow together with their productivity and GDP per capita as they had before - their GDP per capita continued to increase, but the wages stagnated and even declined. That had three different consequences. First of all, it resulted in immiseration, and we can measure it by looking at biological factors, [such as] the average life expectancy.

The second consequence was that this money, which did not get paid as worker wages, went to economic elites. This created conditions for a "wealth pump", which was taking wealth from the majority of the population and giving it to the 1%. Suddenly, you see the numbers of uber-wealthy, explode. The problem is that many of these people have wanted to convert their economic power into political power. So, they ran for office.

The third factor is that the majority of the population is losing ground, which creates the push factor for many of them to get out of this immiseration. How do you do that? You get a college degree, [which] has become devalued. So now you need to get an advanced degree. We have a huge overproduction of people with advanced degrees. In the United States, we are overproducing lawyers, with three times as many lawyers graduating as there are jobs for them. So many become dissident leaders undermining the stability of the United States.

What is your take on what is happening in Europe – and is there enough data?

Yes, there is enough data, but it has to be collected and organised. Many European states followed the same road to crisis as the US, but they stepped on it at different times. Maybe Europe on average is 20 years behind the United States, which is actually good because it gives us more time to figure out how [to] defuse the crisis. If we measure instability in terms of anti-government demonstrations, or violent riots, that reminds us that this is now happening very frequently.

If you look at the data 10 years ago, the numbers of both anti-government demonstrations and violent riots started to increase dramatically. In terms of the drivers, one way of looking at the overproduction of wealth holders is to simply look at how the numbers of billionaires on the Forbes list increase. For example, Sweden used to have 4 billionaires [in 2001], now it has 40.

How did the number increase?

Over the last generation, it is a worldwide phenomenon, the numbers of uber-wealthy people have been growing everywhere but not at the same rate. So, Sweden actually has more billionaires, than the US, per capita.

One issue you're not addressing explicitly in your book is the issue of the climate crisis. And just recently, Geoff Mulgan has published an article writing about the billionaire class - as a social group, as a force. And he's also writing about overconsumption as a problem. What is your take on that?

Preliminary analyses show that climate shocks tend not to be deep drivers but triggering forces. What happens is that the forces [of] immiseration and elite overproduction are undermining the resilience of our societies to external shocks, such as the climate crisis.

One of the signs that societies are losing resilience is that the degree of social cooperation goes down. As social cooperation declines, our ability as societies to deal with climate change becomes undermined. We understand the causes and how to deal with them, but we cannot do that collectively because of the lack of cooperation, [as a] result of those deep social forces.

So, what can we do?

There is bad and good news. The bad news is that most of the time, there is some kind of social breakdown. There is no such thing as a "typical collapse". Like Tolstoy's Anna Karenina: every unhappy family is unhappy in their own way and every collapse is actually a collapse in a different way. The good news is that we have historical examples where the elites cooperated amongst themselves and the population and have resolved crises. The elites need to shut down the wealth pump, [which is] difficult to do because they must forego their short-term interest.

If you look at Europe today, and you shared the good news that we're perhaps 20 years behind the United States, we seem to have a bit more time even though it seems like everything is literally collapsing. And there is a lot of discontent…

Yes, there is a lot of discontent, but it would be too much to say that everything is collapsing. Things are not as dire as they have been. That actually focuses people's attention on the crisis and [its] causes. The most important thing is to shut down the wealth pump, [and] find ways for the 90% to get back to growing together with the overall productivity.

How is it in line with the climate crisis?
Where a lot of people started discussing a model of economic degrowth?

I think degrowth is a non-starter because it is easy for wealthy countries to say to the rest of the world "stop growing", but they will not. Until recently, there was a strong correlation between energy consumption and economic growth, but it started to break down. We see in many countries that they have economic growth without fossil fuel consumption. We know all the technologies to get as much energy as we need, without pumping carbon into the atmosphere. The relationship between GDP and energy has been also breaking down. So, there is no need for us to focus on degrowth, [but] smart growth, the green economy.

What are you passionate about?

I'm passionate about stopping people from killing each other. Everybody talks about global climate. I agree that it is an existential threat to humanity, but the second existential threat to humanity is warfare. As we speak, several new wars [are] going on killing hundreds of thousands of people. This problem can be solved only at the level of humanity as a whole. You need a global organisation that will have enough power to discipline different members of the international community.

Scenarios where philanthropy can act

James Magowan

European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI), Northern Ireland

We are caught up in the present, which has been shaped by the past. Engaging in scenario thinking can help us become unstuck. It can lift us out of the here and now and by exploring a range of possibilities, it can open minds and stimulate creative and innovative thinking. This can help us prepare to act effectively in the future and, if possible, to "backcast", to inform decision-making on action that can be taken now, to prevent a scenario from arising, to reduce its impact or to help ensure recovery.

The basis for the scenario discussion held at Philea's EuroPhilantopics in November 2023 to explore "Partnering for Democracy, Equality and Climate" and discuss Europe's future and potential actions philanthropy could take in collaboration with policymakers and civil society, was Peter Turchin's historical analysis found in "The End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites and the Path of Political Disintegration". It highlights the causes and consequences of "wealth pumps" in wealthy economies that enrich well placed elites and immiserate everyone else who respond with devastating backlashes that affect their societies with discord and, at worst, civil war.

The scenarios were developed based on two critical uncertainties: **ON THE VERTICAL AXIS**, will resources be equitably distributed across various social strata, or will they become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a select few?

ON THE HORIZONTAL AXIS, how will Europe's future unfold: will we see a trend towards greater integration among European nations, or will the region move towards fragmentation and disintegration? At Philea's EuroPhilantopics, four groups were invited to discuss the social breakdown scenario, a dystopian future where Europe is facing disintegration and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few as a challenge to address the burning question - what can philanthropy do? What was particularly interesting was how much the responses across the groups had in common. These revolved around three dimensions:

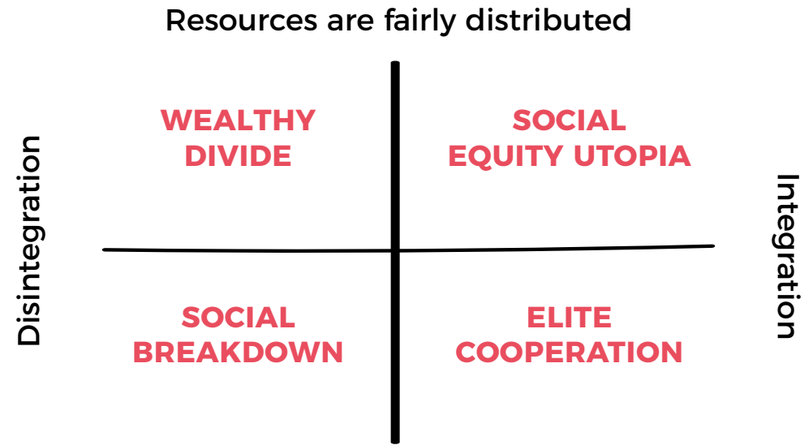
- **Rebuilding trust and repairing social and civil society fabric:** through investing in social capital and supporting community organising and civic education. Some of the preventative actions suggested included investing in general operational support for civil society organisations, networks, and movements that work to engage citizens and increase solidarity at local level and encouraging engagement between elites and counter-elites. Ideas extended however to conflict prevention and mediation, at local level through, for example, investment in a "peace force";

- **Shifting from a narrative of despair:** by "holding the line", ensuring that communication channels are kept alive, safeguarding independent media and investigative journalism, and investing in political and community leadership and in charismatic individuals and opinion leaders to reverse the gloomy narrative around social collapse and to promote a hope-based vision of social cohesion;

- **Tackling immiseration:** by empowering citizens and civil society organisations to stand up for themselves and claim their right to basic needs. This included supporting participatory processes but also the use of strategic litigation and action where appropriate, for example in relation to the provision of social housing.

Scenario thinking is an essential tool to inform strategic planning for philanthropic institutions, offering insights into fundamental challenges such as resource constraints as well as potentials of niche interventions made possible by independence and leverage. By engaging in this process, your philanthropic organisation can better inform the most effective pathways for allocation of its resources, ensuring that its efforts are directed towards areas of greatest need and potential impact.

How will the different future scenarios potentially impact your organisation?



WEALTHY DIVIDE

Resources are fairly distributed + disintegration

This scenario represents a Europe where wealth is fairly distributed but where national interests take precedence over pan-European cooperation. The elites are divided, with some supporting climate action while others prioritise their financial interests. Civil society organisations operate independently within their national boundaries to maintain equitable economic policies. The EU seeks to mediate between factions but faces significant challenges due to political polarisation and elite conflicts.

SOCIAL EQUITY UTOPIA

Resources are fairly distributed + integration

In this scenario, Europe successfully balances both wealth distribution and integration. European nations collectively work to ensure that wealth is fairly distributed. Robust social welfare systems and progressive taxation are in place to reduce income disparities. However, democracy is backsliding, with increasing polarisation and threats to democratic norms and institutions. Climate disasters and technological advances complicate the situation. Civil society organisations actively engage to protect democratic values and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

Resources concentrate in the hands of a few + disintegration

Extreme wealth is concentrated among a small elite, while the continent is grappling with environmental and economic disparities. Climate-related conflicts and disasters unfold, leading to societal upheaval. Civil unrest is common and increasingly violent across Europe. The elites are divided, each protecting their vested interests. Civil society organisations operate in a polarised environment, working to bridge social and economic gaps and promote climate resilience.

ELITE COOPERATION

Resources concentrate in the hands of a few + integration

In this scenario, wealth is concentrated among a few elites who control substantial economic resources. A series of wars break out due to resource competition, territorial disputes and political tensions. Severe droughts and extreme weather events further exacerbate the challenges facing the continent. This scenario envisions a Europe at a critical crossroads, where the concentration of wealth, elite conflicts, wars, climate disasters, civil society activism and EU intervention all come into play.

CASE STUDY: GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

How the Gulbenkian Foundation is advancing intergenerational fairness

Sustainability is closely linked to intergenerational fairness, a social contract that advances the just distribution of resources between current and future generations, according to the Portugal-based Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Future generations have the right to live in a healthy, vibrant environment and have access to adequate food, clean water, and safe housing. Yet they cannot vote. They have no decision-making or financial power. They are not at the table when policy is being designed. They have no voice in public debate.

THE ISSUE

Fair policy and distribution of resources for all generations is an issue of concern for both policymakers and the public. Policy is always rooted in the present, while the rights of young people and future generations are not always the highest priority. There is a need for a more holistic approach to address the interests of young people and future generations.

THE CONTEXT

Changing demographics, economic challenges, environmental pollution, and the climate crisis are placing heavy burdens on the next generations and are weakening the once commonly held assumption that they will be better off than their parents.

THE PATH FORWARD

Foundations should raise awareness about intergenerational fairness, promote research to offer adequate data and insights, think about the long-term impact of their own decisions, focus on prevention, and work in cooperation with local communities, policymakers, and young people.

The Gulbenkian Foundation has identified sustainability as a core pillar of its strategy and promotes intergenerational fairness through studies and collaborations to develop a framework and an Intergenerational Fairness Index. The foundation also made a major decision to entirely divest from fossil fuels by removing €636.1 million from oil and gas investments.

The foundation's research in 2018 significantly contributed to enriching the widely unexplored field of studies of intergenerational fairness and has sparked public debates on how policy can embrace a long-term view to include future generations. Eventually the foundation placed intergenerational fairness on the national agenda and inspired a wide range of key players to think and act long-term, including the Portuguese government and the Bank of Portugal. Internally, the foundation has aimed at aligning its processes with its values and goals, improving sustainability practices, and committing to address the climate crisis.

THE METHOD

To ensure sustainability, societal well-being and fair opportunities for all, a long-term view is needed instead of short-termist thinking and planning. A practical approach to critically look into policies' impacts over the long-term is the Framework for Intergenerational Fairness - a tool for systematic and impartial assessment of public policies in terms of their impact on all generations, present and future, to identify potential intergenerational imbalances.

This tool attempts to identify the diverse consequences of any public policy on people's lives and the environment they live in, in the short, medium, and long term. Recognising that the future is uncertain, it tests the policy in different future scenarios to ensure it is resilient to change. It includes five flexible stages that may be applied to any kind of policy or strategic decision.

READ FULL CASE STUDY

1. DIAGNOSTIC

It captures key information about the policy, scans for ways the policy may be unfair and builds a timeline of short, medium and long-term issues, identifying those which require further analysis. In some cases, the assessment can stop here.

2. IMPACT

It dives deep into the toughest questions, using available qualitative and quantitative data, expert modelling and participative sessions to explore chains of intended and unintended impacts on generations over time.

3. SCENARIOS

It stress-tests the assessment against different alternative futures scenarios, making recommendations to ensure the policy is robust in an uncertain environment

4. PROCESS

It examines how the policy was designed and/or enacted. Were intergenerational issues considered? Diverse perspectives actively sought? Did the process itself create unfairness?

5. CONCLUSIONS

It summarises the findings and recommendations in a simple and easy way to communicate.

PART 4

FUTURES PHILANTHROPY TOOLS

APPLYING FUTURES PHILANTHROPY

Picture your own organisation as a canvas awaiting the brushstrokes of transformation; *you will get to decide what the colours of change are.*

Embedding futures philanthropy into your organisation demands a deep dive into your current operations and a willingness to envision new ways of working. The examples provided in the previous parts might inspire possible ways forward for funders, networks and philanthropy practitioners alike. Applying these examples to your own context requires the adoption of new tools and a different mindset.

Our approaches must evolve, embracing flexibility and innovation, broadening our toolkit to include practices tailored to our unique challenges and aspirations. The journey begins with introspection. By questioning the status quo of the contexts in which we act, we can envision better possible futures within our own sphere of action. In this part we invite you to reflect on your organisation's present state and where you desire it to be in the future. The tools provided are designed to embed futures philanthropy within your context, to spark imagination, and inspire organisational change.

Start with the Futures Philanthropy Assessment, a tool for self-reflection, that seeks to assess and balance established and futures philanthropy practices, followed by the Futures Philanthropy Canvas, a framework that will allow you to start transferring futures practices to your specific context, which you finally can assess against the Futures Philanthropy Overview.

These insights will enable you to move from introspection to action, and from aspiration to reality and action towards catalysing *anticipation for the common good.*

FUTURES PHILANTHROPY ASSESSMENT

A tool for self-reflection

This self-reflection tool is intended to provoke, challenge and expand your organisation's approach to futures-oriented philanthropy, inspiring you to consider how your vision, strategies and actions align with the evolving demands of our times. From examining the adaptability of your long-term vision to the integration of futures thinking and foresight in your everyday processes, the indicators below can help you ask questions about your own context, goals and objectives.

Use this instrument to gauge your current philanthropic standpoint and to explore new avenues for development. Contemplate how your organisation can not only maintain its foundational strengths such as robust context analysis and project management, but also evolve to enhance its influence in a dynamic landscape.

ESTABLISHED PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE	PHILANTHROPIC STRATEGY & CULTURE	FUTURES PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE
1 Orientation towards established strategy development cycles and good practices, based on robust planning, clearly defined outcomes, roles and KPIs, adaptable on a yearly basis	**Strategy development**	Agile, iterative strategy that focuses on a long-term vision while allowing adaptability to evolving needs, novel practices emerge as a result, outcomes and roles are not always clearly defined
2 Prioritisation of the most relevant objectives and concentration on urgent needs, following extensive consultations and analyses with various stakeholders, assessing impact of philanthropic programmes on current generations	**Goal orientation and time horizons**	Balancing urgent needs with long-term aspirations and anticipating and planning for future possibilities, assessing intended and unintended impact of philanthropic programmes on current and future generations
3 Evaluative, more retrospective, insights are generated within specific programmes and activities	**Learning agendas**	Dynamic learning, more oriented towards possible future action, based on continuous, cross-organisational exchange
4 Decisions are made based on existing knowledge and external expertise, cause and effect are clear, lean governance and decision-making	**Governance and decision-making process**	Deliberative and distributed decision-making, acknowledgement of complexity, cause and effect are unknown, this takes time and resources

ESTABLISHED PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE	PHILANTHROPIC STRATEGY & CULTURE	FUTURES PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE
5 Independent operational mode with situational involvement of communities and partners in specific programmes	**Systemic approaches and collaboration**	Emphasis on systems thinking and ongoing, trust-based collaboration with communities and partners
6 Clearly defined, area-specific and project-oriented programming focusing on short-term and mid-term time horizons, time-bound project funding	**Programme design and funding practices**	Holistic programme design focusing on the long-term horizon, flexible funding practices spanning five years and more
7 Stability and focus on innovation as an outcome, preference for clear risk management and mitigation	**Culture of innovation and experimentation**	Encouragement of experimentation and creative problem-solving, spaces to develop and test ideas across the organisation, innovation as a process, openness to uncertainty, higher risk tolerance
8 Foresight is occasionally used to design strategy or specific interventions, external expertise is required	**Resource allocation to foresight**	Foresight is part of organisational culture, resources are invested to build futures thinking internally and externally

FUTURES PHILANTHROPY CANVAS

This is a framework to help you reflect on embedding futures practice within your own organisation and contributing to anticipation for the common good. At the core of futures philanthropy lie four guiding principles: **address root causes** by contributing to systemic change; **empower communities** by fostering trust-based collaboration; **focus on discovery** by enabling innovation and a culture of experimentation; and **cultivate the long view** by acting for future generations. These will serve as key pillars to sustain your organisation's journey towards a more resilient, adaptable and anticipatory stance, one that is not only prepared for future challenges but also dedicated to shaping a thriving and equitable tomorrow.

ADOPTING FORWARD-THINKING MINDSETS AND TOOLS: What mindsets do you already cultivate within your organisation to avoid being captive to the immediate present? What tools have you employed to anticipate future risks and opportunities and foster imagination? What would help you to embrace flexibility, adaptability and a long-term vision – in 5, 10 and 30 years to come?
(Find inspiration in "A Guide to Using the Future" on page 14)

Write your reflection:

ACTIVATING FUTURES PHILANTHROPY PRINCIPLES: What principles are already embedded in your own organisation and how? What are the ways you can activate these principles? Where can you take action now?
(Find inspiration in: Futures philanthropy principles and practices on page 38)

Write your reflection:

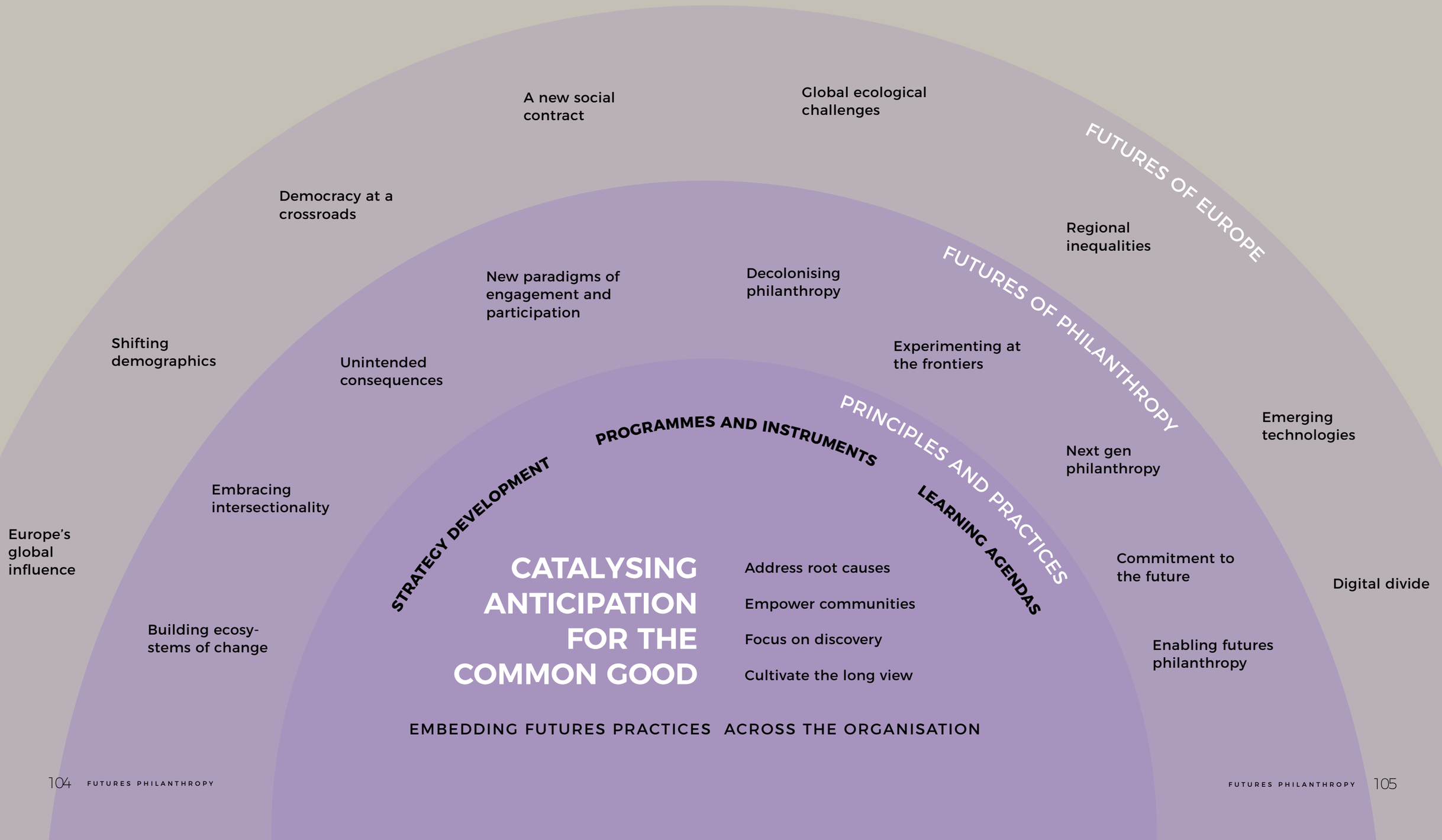
EMBEDDING FUTURES ACROSS YOUR PHILANTHROPIC ORGANISATION - STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS, LEARNING AGENDAS: How does your organisation make sure it is aware of socio-economic, environmental and political developments to ground your activities in real-world contexts and to foresee potential shifts? How does futures thinking inform your organisation's strategy development, design of programmes and instruments? Do you hold a space to create and share learning agendas across the organisation, evaluating both achievements of your actions and possible future trajectories?
(Find inspiration in: Futures philanthropy principles and practices on page 38)

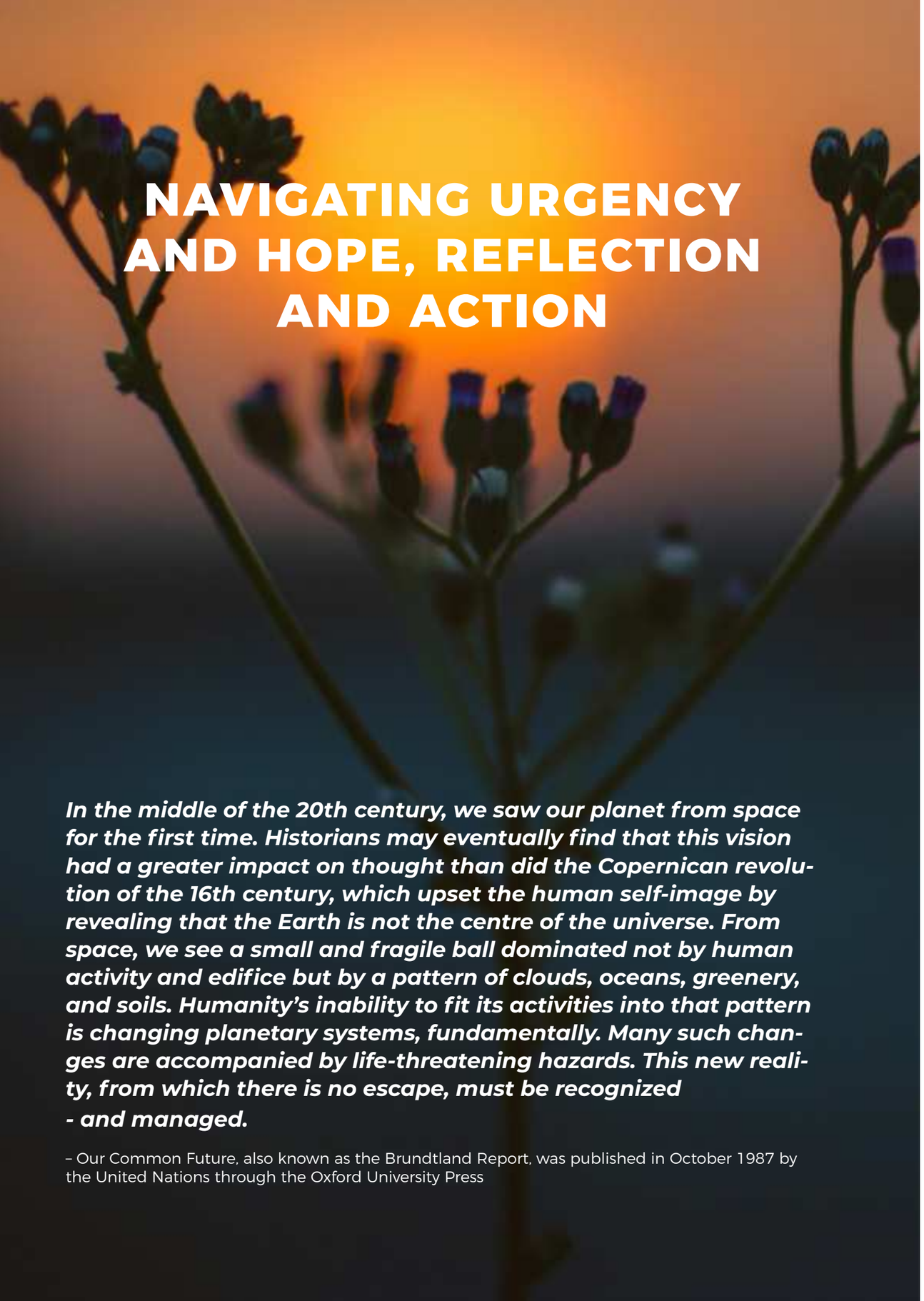
Write your reflection:

CATALYSING ANTICIPATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD: What is your unique contribution to the future? How can your organisation help enhance futures thinking in the philanthropic and civil society sectors and co-create positive lasting change? What are your possible allies on this journey?
(Find inspiration in "A Guide to Using the Future" on page 14)

Write your reflection:

FUTURES PHILANTHROPY OVERVIEW





NAVIGATING URGENCY AND HOPE, REFLECTION AND ACTION

In the middle of the 20th century, we saw our planet from space for the first time. Historians may eventually find that this vision had a greater impact on thought than did the Copernican revolution of the 16th century, which upset the human self-image by revealing that the Earth is not the centre of the universe. From space, we see a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activity and edifice but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. Humanity's inability to fit its activities into that pattern is changing planetary systems, fundamentally. Many such changes are accompanied by life-threatening hazards. This new reality, from which there is no escape, must be recognized - and managed.

– Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report, was published in October 1987 by the United Nations through the Oxford University Press

This reality, anticipated more than 30 years ago, is where we find ourselves today. Our worldviews, our current ways of working, thinking and being do not align with the challenges we are facing. There is a planetary crisis and a triple alienation - from nature, from one another, and from oneself.[1]

It is no longer enough to manage our reality. We need to prepare the conditions for embracing change and creating alternatives already today. Philanthropy can inspire change and help build this much needed collective capacity not only to react to the current challenges, but also to develop a flexibility to adapt, anticipate, and proactively shape better futures for communities and the planet. It is less about knowing exactly how the context will change in the coming decades, but about the mindsets and principles of how we encounter the unknown and how we make decisions today.

This publication centres a message of hope and aspiration for European philanthropy. By bringing together foresight and philanthropic practice we can charter new pathways for philanthropy to live up to its potential of being forward-looking, risk-taking, and innovative. By developing a futures mindset and culture, we can collectively address the complex challenges of our times. What if we saw the future not as a space of risks and crises, but as a realm of possibilities? What if we did not approach the planetary crisis as the end of humanity, but as an urgent call to action to reimagine our relationship with nature and each other? What if we asked more "what if" questions in our daily work and life?

As we look towards the future, the call to action is clear: to join a movement of visionaries, practitioners, and innovators dedicated to realising the unmet potential of philanthropy and foresight. Futures philanthropy is an invitation to share learnings, embark on joint initiatives, and participate in programmes designed to elevate the civic society and philanthropy sector at large.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to you, our reader, for engaging with this vision of futures philanthropy. Your interest and willingness to explore the boundaries of what philanthropy can achieve, are what make this journey not only possible, but incredibly rewarding. Our special thanks to Joe Elborn of the Evens Foundation and David Hesse of Mercator Foundation Switzerland, for being part of the editorial team for challenging us with your questions and ideas and doing the "hard work" alongside us. We wish to acknowledge the extended network of contributors, members of the Futures Philanthropy and PEX communities, interview partners, survey respondents, colleagues, and friends who have generously shared insights, experiences, and practices with us. Your dedication, your groundbreaking work, and your aspirations to arrive at a collective understanding of where philanthropy's action is needed today and in the future have been nothing but inspiring. It is through this collective effort and shared vision that we can continue to build an expanding futures philanthropy movement of practitioners whose efforts are not only responsive but anticipatory and truly transformative.

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#FuturesPhilanthropy

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US AND EXPLORE POTENTIAL PATHWAYS FOR COLLABORATION

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Philea nurtures a diverse and inclusive ecosystem of foundations, philanthropic organisations and networks in over 30 countries that work for the common good. With individual and national-level infrastructure organisations as members, it unites over 7,500 public-benefit foundations that seek to improve life for people and communities in Europe and around the world. Philea galvanises collective action and amplifies the voice of European philanthropy, and in all it does, it is committed to enhancing trust, collaboration, transparency, innovation, inclusion and diversity.

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The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS) is an independent, non-profit think tank established in 1969. We have more than 50 years of global experience and contributions to the field, working with organisations across the public, private, academic, and civic sectors, as well as with the general public. Our purpose is to help people and organisations imagine, work with, and shape their future. The future belongs to no one, yet to everyone. Our vision is a futures literate world where everyone has the right and mandate to engage with the future, participate, and visualise change, so they can create the best possible future for themselves, society, and the planet.

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