



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Social and Human
Sciences Sector



Futures Literacy

Anticipation in the 21st Century

UNESCO pioneers an essential skill for reconciling humanity with complexity, putting advances in the social sciences and humanities at the service of complex societal transformations.

Images of the future inspire hope and seed despair. Sources of peace or war, aspirations, expectations, motivations, all originate from people's images of the future. Yet, even though the future is such a powerful source of today's sense of fulfilment or disappointment, we do not think very much about why and how we use it.

Since 2012 UNESCO has been collecting evidence on the many different reasons and methods people use when they imagine the future. In technical terms, these are people's 'anticipatory systems and methods'.

Hugely diverse and deeply rooted in local history and culture, anticipation is the way the future exists in the present. Enhancing people's capacity to 'use-the-future' strengthens the foundations of hope and our ability to turn uncertainty into a source of inspiration not fear.

At a practical level, on-the-ground in communities all around the world, UNESCO has been organizing Futures Literacy Laboratories that deploy action-learning and collective intelligence to co-create the meaning of sustainability, peace and inclusion where people live and work.

- ▲ **Sixty Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLLs)** in over 25 countries, co-designed by UNESCO since 2012. FLLs offer a practical, highly adaptable approach to building Futures Literacy.
- ▲ **Eight new UNESCO Chairs in Futures Studies/ Futures Literacy** established since 2014 with many more emerging around the world. Researchers, teachers and activities are building a powerful Global Futures Literacy Network.
- ▲ **One major international academic co-publication:** *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century* (open source access).
- ▲ **Dozens of partnerships** with a wide range of actors, foundations, governments, NGOs to conduct research, organize Labs and learn Futures Literacy by doing.

What UNESCO does

UNESCO Global Laboratory of Ideas: Co-creating Futures Literacy through Experimentation

UNESCO is the specialized United Nations agency responsible for fostering the creation and sharing of knowledge. This mandate rests on the assumption that activities like education, science and culture generate the knowledge needed to sustain peace. Today, in keeping with its mandate, UNESCO must continue to champion and take into account advances in human understanding of knowledge – the what, why and how of creating and using.

In the field of Futures Studies, it is agreed that the future does not exist other than as anticipatory systems and processes in the present. UNESCO has a responsibility to gather, test and diffuse such advances in human knowledge in order to contribute to creating the conditions for peace and well-being.

With Futures Literacy UNESCO is drawing attention to discoveries that change our ability to see and to do. Collaborating to co-create action-learning about the future with people in all parts of the planet has enabled UNESCO to play its role as a “global laboratory of ideas”.

UNESCO's Futures Literacy activities are focused on knowledge creation and sharing that:

- ▲ **Encourages** traditional research and teaching networks to develop Futures Literacy.
- ▲ **Engages** with partners on the ground through the co-creation of processes that explore and cultivate Futures Literacy as a capability.
- ▲ **Enables** the emergence of a Global Futures Literacy Network.
- ▲ **Fosters** learning within international and private organizations, including the UN system.
- ▲ **Creates** scientific publications in Futures Literacy such as UNESCO-Routledge co-publication *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century* (2018).

Last Future Literacy events

- *The Future of Development*
21 January 2019, UNESCO/Hanze University Training, Paris, France.
- *Next Generation Research and Innovation Policy.*
3-4 April 2019, Austrian Institute for Technology, Vienna, Austria.
- *Rethinking the Future, Science and the Sustainable Development Goals.* 5 April 2019, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria.
- *Resilience Frontiers: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*
8-12 April 2019, Songdo, Republic of Korea
- *The Future of Food and Food: Ñuble, Chile*
9 April 2019, National Council for Innovation and Development (CNID), Foundation for Agricultural Innovation (FIA), Ñuble, Chile
- *The Future of Key Sectors in Antofagasta: Mining, Agriculture, Energy.* 15 April 2019, National Council for Innovation and Development (CNID), Foundation for Agricultural Innovation (FIA), Ñuble, Chile
- *Imagining the Future of Innovation in Africa: UNESCO Africa Week.* 20-21 May 2019, UNESCO Africa Group Delegations, Paris, France
- *Utopia Lab: How can technology help the world to heal? 3-5 June 2019, Edinburgh Futures Institute, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom*
- *The Future of the Human and Social Sciences: UNESCO.* 7 June 2019, SHS UNESCO, Paris, France
- *Humans Meet Artificial Intelligence.* 10-11 June 2019, Cross-Disciplinary Research on Effectual Anticipation, Orebro University, Orebro, Sweden

Capabilities

- ▲ **60+ Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLLs)** have generated new questions and new skills on a vast range of topics, for instance: the future of Africa; the future of cultural heritage; the future of the youth to adult transition in Sierra Leone; the future of education; the future of innovation eco-systems; the future of cities; the future of sport; the future of work; the future of human settlement; the future of women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia; the future of Manabi Province in Ecuador; the future of work, etc.
- ▲ **3 year 'prototype-testing' project in Africa:** in collaboration with the OCP Foundation, UNESCO is conducting action-research into why and how people 'use-the-future.' The Imagining Africa's Futures project is conducting special FLLs to specify the design principles for a universally applicable FLL.
- ▲ **4 years of working in Finland** to explore the value of introducing Futures Literacy into the school curriculum.
- ▲ **30,000 undergraduate students to take Futures Literacy courses** at Hanze University in the Netherlands; after introducing this capability into the Masters programmes the aim is to cover the full student population.
- ▲ **80 global experts gather to consider Resilience Frontiers** (2019) at a special FLL co-designed with UNFCCC.
- ▲ **5 FLLs organized with the International Francophone Organization** on topics ranging from the future of Africa to the future of language.
- ▲ **Creating Futures Literate Governance:** A UAE-UNESCO Innovation Partnership. To create more futures-literate governance, the UAE and UNESCO apply cutting-edge action-learning and action-research techniques to the challenge of improving decision-makers' anticipatory systems and processes.

All of these initiatives and many more, with organizations ranging from Innovation Norway and Microsoft to The Rockefeller Foundation and CNID Chile, generated significant impact across four sets of variables: the understanding by participants of the future of a specific topic; the ability of participants to 'use-the-future', in other words develop their Futures Literacy; sense and make-sense of the anticipatory systems and processes of a particular group; and design processes that deploy action-learning/research to develop Futures Literacy. These activities have, in turn, impacted research, learning and community engagement with respect to the future.



Engaging with us

The UNESCO Futures Literacy team organizes activities around the world. The majority of these activities are directly co-created with partners who are involved with local communities. The list of what we call 'local champions' is very diverse, but all of the organizations have one thing in common: they are interested in **using collective intelligence to think about the future in innovative ways.**

There are many different ways to join UNESCO's emerging Global Futures Literacy Network. If you are a:

- ▲ **community organization or activist**, drop us a line to see if there are Futures Literacy Labs happening in your region – or propose to help put one together;
- ▲ **researcher**, seek out the UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies/Futures Literacy in your region or send us your research proposals and we'll help make connections;
- ▲ **potential applicant** for a UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies/Futures Literacy, contact an already existing Chair or get in touch with the team at UNESCO HQ;
- ▲ **teacher** hoping to find ways to develop and diffuse Futures Literacy through learning-by-doing and new courses at any level of the education system, just drop us a line.

All of this work is co-sponsored through in-kind contributions or shared budgets or both. UNESCO's Futures Literacy work is a joint venture. It is entrepreneurial and takes advantage of the many opportunities that occur when people think about the future together and in innovative ways. Join us!



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Sustainable
Development
Goals

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