European
Commission

Futures imagined by Greek citizens

The Future of Europe seen by EU citizens

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2024

#OURFUTURES

Joint
Research
Centre

Technical report

This JRC Technical Report is part of a series of reports published in the context of #OurFutures, a project collecting stories from EU citizens describing their desirable futures. The stories are collected in an open-data base designed by the Policy Lab: Foresight, Design & Behavioural Insights of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The project supports and inspires a collective dialogue about the future of Europe and its visions for the future.

Authors

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VOICES THAT COUNT

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Content

Abstract

What do you want the future to look like? In which future would you like to live? These are questions of high relevance for policy were at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe that ended in May 2022. This EU initiative has created a new space for debate with citizens on how to respond to the European Union's challenges and to create the Union that its citizens collectively want for the future.

However, beyond the formulation of many individual wishes for the future, we must structure these conversations to build coherent, comprehensive and desirable alternative futures that are achievable. The #OurFutures - Stories for the future of Europe initiative addresses this long-term need beyond the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It offers a simple questionnaire through an interactive multilingual platform able to cater to the 24 official languages of the European Union. It aims at collecting a large number of very short stories that express what participants would like to see in the Europe of the future.

To ensure success, the project relies on a robust methodology (powered by SenseMaker©) to exploit, in a foresight perspective, the rich material provided by participants. To avoid any bias, the analysis bases itself strictly on what the authors themselves tell by answering a few simple questions. The stories, also translated into English, are published on the Futures4Europe.eu platform.

#OurFutures is an open-ended project that will remain active for many years to collect as much material as possible. The insights that they provide will serve to generate concrete, future-oriented recommendations for EU action to build together the European Union that its citizens want.

The objective of this report is to show the potential of the tool. While coming from a very small sample of Greek citizens, these first analyses are very promising. They demonstrate that the insights that they provide can serve to generate concrete, future-oriented recommendations for EU action. The reason these results presented in this report are not compared to an average EU picture is that the number of stories available for the rest of the EU is still too low to be meaningful.

Introduction to #OurFutures

What do you want the future to look like? In which future would you like to live? These questions of high relevance for policy, were at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe that ended in May 2022. This EU initiative has created a new space for debate with citizens on how to respond to the European Union's challenges and to create the Union that its citizens collectively want for the future. However, beyond the formulation of many individual wishes for the future, we must structure these conversations to build coherent, comprehensive and desirable alternative futures that are achievable through policy action. Being able to showcase these possible futures can then provide a meaningful and constructive space for political debate in the EU with a long-term perspective.

The #OurFutures - Stories for the future of Europe initiative addresses this permanent need for a long-term perspective beyond the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It offers a simple questionnaire through an interactive multilingual platform able to cater to the 24 official languages of the European Union. It aims at collecting a large number of very short stories that express what participants would like to see in the Europe of the future (2040), with their hopes, their uncertainties and their ideas for a positive future. These stories, written by Europeans from all walks of life, remain anonymous. To ensure the capacity to make sense of this input, the project relies on a robust methodology (powered by SenseMaker®) to exploit, in a foresight perspective, the rich material provided by participants.

This methodology operates in all EU languages to maximize reach. To avoid any bias, the analysis bases itself strictly on what the authors of the stories themselves tell by answering a few simple questions. These stories, also translated into English, are published on the Futures4Europe.eu[1] platform. This makes it possible to maintain the connection with the interested participants as a group and to stimulate discussions.

#OurFutures is an open-ended project that will remain active for many years to collect as many stories as possible and monitor possible shifts in the visions and desires that participants express. Results can be analysed per country, per age group, per policy domain or other classifications. The analyses can also correlate several parameters to check whether certain values or preferences occur in specific combinations.

The objective of this report is to show the potential of the tool. While coming from a very limited sample of Greek citizens, these first analyses are very promising. They demonstrate that the insights that they provide can serve to generate concrete, future-oriented recommendations for EU action to build the European Union that its citizens want. The reason these results presented in this report are not compared to an average EU picture is that the number of stories available for the rest of the EU is still too low to be meaningful.

Dr Epaminondas Christophilopoulos, the UNESCO Chair on Futures Research from the Institute of Technology and Research in Greece, has been a strategic partner of the #OurFutures initiative during its design and initial implementation phase. He has coordinated the data collection and analysis for Greece. The effort was also supported by the Special Secretariat for Foresight in the Presidency of the Greek government.

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[1] https://www.futures4europe.eu/ourfutures

Research Methodology

The data was collected using the SenseMaker®[2] tool, enabling the large-scale capture of ideas for the future through a quantitative framework that allows the participants to be their own ethnographer. It combines the capacity to deal with large numbers of inputs with the explanatory power of narrative. The contributions analysed here were mostly collected through foresight and future-related events organised by the Greek Institute of Technology and Research. Some were collected after social media and direct mail campaigns.

The SenseMaker® harvesting tool developed for #OurFutures organises the collected input into 4 sections:

1. Collection of future images: the tool prompts participants to write a story about 2040.
2. Provision of information about the stories: such as thematic area, geographical perspective, feelings, sense of who has agency.
3. Collection of general views towards the future.
4. Collection of demographic information: gender, age, country, employment status, financial security.

Answers are mandatory and participation anonymous. The data presented here were mostly collected during the period June 2021 to May 2022 (ca 600 stories of which 247 were from Greece). Figure 1 presents the basic demographic statistics of the participants.

A large proportion of the respondents consists in students and people in employment, and most feel financially secure. Overall, the general balance between respondents is good, with only the 65+ group being under-represented.

All data and demographic information are available at:
htpps://ourfutures.dashboard.voicesthatcount.net/

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[2] https://thecynefin.co/about-sensemaker/

Financial status

- I feel secure financially
- I'm just breaking even
- It's very difficult

7%
26%
67%

Employment status

17%
0%
39%
36%
3%
5%

- Full/part-time employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Volunteer
- Retired

Gender

ND 1%
Man 48%
Woman 51%

- Man
- Woman
- ND

Age group

>65 1%
41-65 30%
12-17 43%
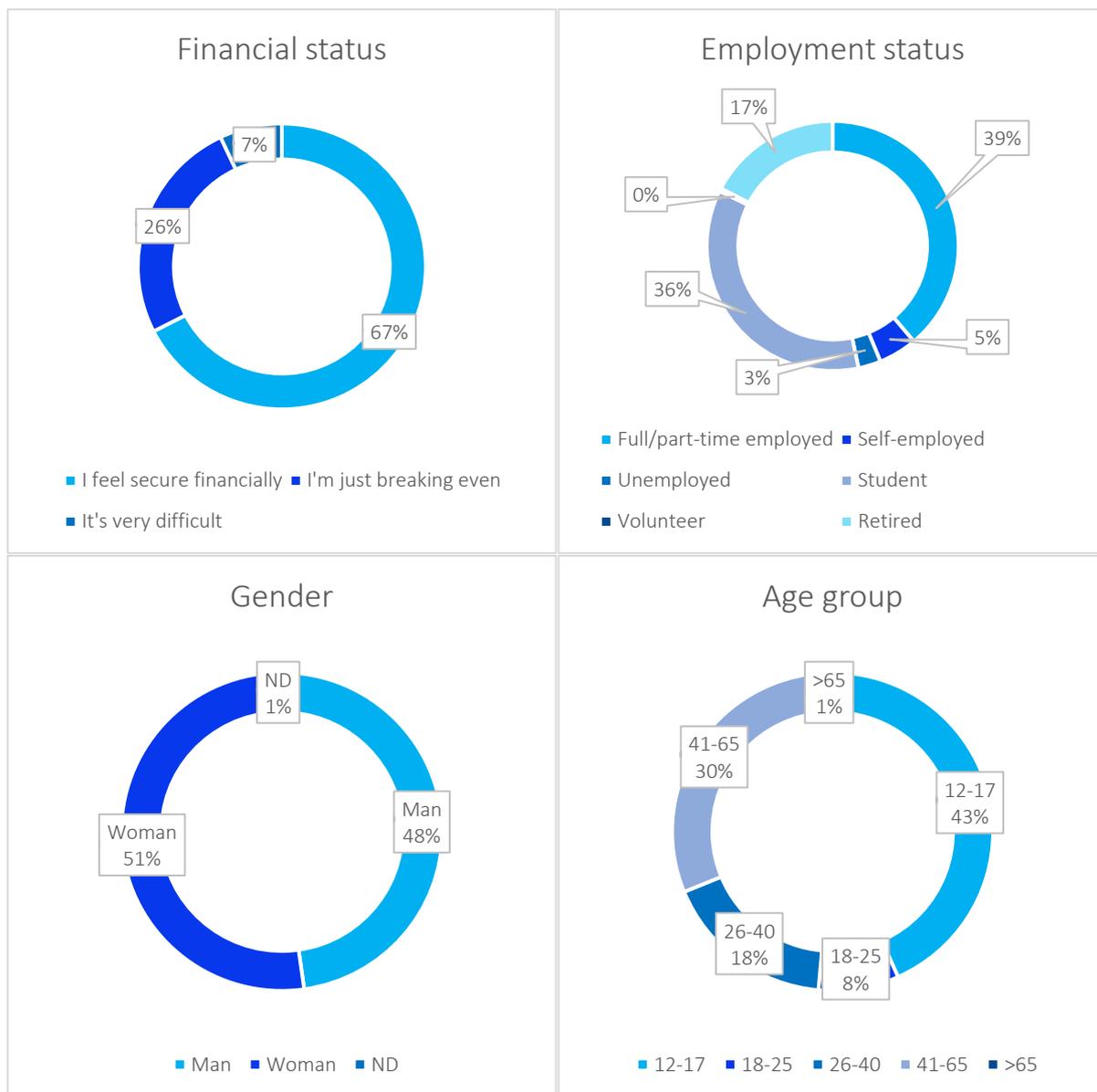26-40 18%
18-25 8%

- 12-17
- 18-25
- 26-40
- 41-65
- >65

Figure 1: Basic demographic statistics of the Greek participants in the pilot phase of #OurFutures

The Results

Participants were asked to describe images of the future and provide additional information such as the feelings related to these images or their geographical focus. It is important to underline that, to avoid any experimental or methodological bias, the analysis bases itself strictly on what the participants themselves tell through their answers to the questions they answer after having submitted their story. In other words, the participants themselves, after describing a future image, analyse it and describe the feelings they associate to it. The following graphs summarise the collected information.

The images of the future shared most commonly by the participants related to nature/climate, fairness/social justice, and health/wellbeing. Then came stories related to technology/science and living together/ community (See Figure 2). Considering the diversity of participants (age, gender, occupation, area

of residence...), the stories that were shared could be considered as an indication of the topics that are of most concern in Greek society. It is worth mentioning the extremely low number of stories related to migration/refugees in view of the high number of refugees entering Greece and how prominent this issue is in the media.

Most of the future images described by the Greek participants are associated with positive feelings, although a significant percentage have chosen to describe various dystopian future images.

Most of the future images described by the Greek participants are associated with issues of global interest. Only an extremely small fraction of stories are related to issues of European, national or local scope (see Figure 2).
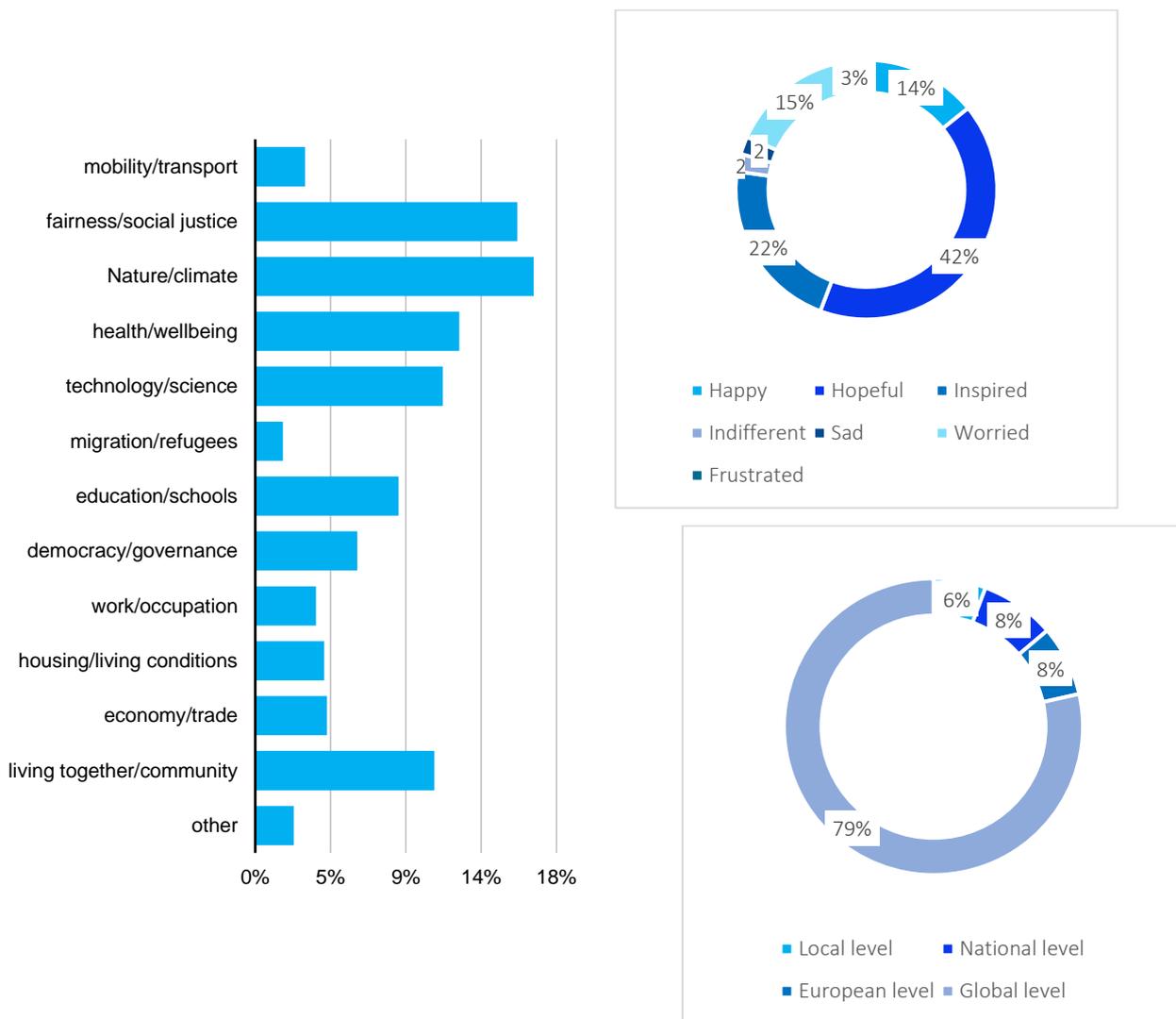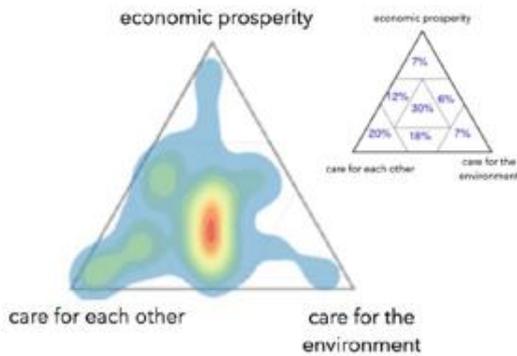

Figure 2: The stories most shared relate to nature, fairness, wellbeing and community. They mostly reflect positive feelings and are overwhelmingly influenced by issues at global level.
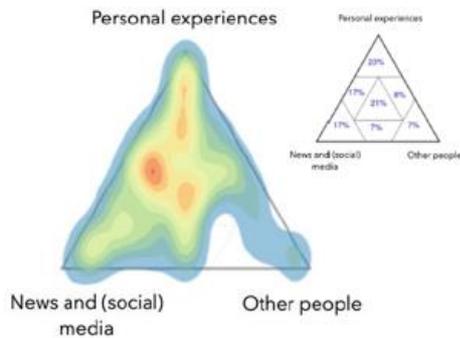
Attitude Towards the Future

In this set of questions, participants from Greece revealed their attitude towards the future. They were asked to answer by positioning a dot between three factors arranged in a triangle (triad questions). The closer the dot to a factor, the more the participant considers that this factor weighs. If the dot is placed in the middle, the participant considers that the three factors are equally important. Participants could tick "Not applicable" (N/A) if they considered that the question was not relevant to their story.

What is important for Greek participants?

According to the Greek participants, economic prosperity, care for the environment and care for each other are equally important, with a slight emphasis towards the care for each other and the environment.

What shapes our images of the future?

The personal views of the future of the Greek participants are mainly shaped by their personal experiences along with news and social media. Interaction with other people is much less important.

Who are the change makers for Greek futures?

In this interesting question participants were requested to define who is the change maker, i.e. who is(are) the actor(s) that could bring most change. While the overall response shows that all proposed actors are deemed important, there is a clear highlight of the role of citizens.

Figure 3: Answers of Greek citizens regarding what is important for them, what influences their stories most and who they believe has the most power to change things.

42%

22%

15%

9%

2% 1% 1% 2% 2% 4%

Will happen spontaneously   people will need to act

21%

20%

17%

13%

11%

3% 2% 3% 5% 4%

I can do nothing   I can do a lot
to create that future   to create that future

How do Greek participants feel about the future?

Greek participants are very much concerned about the future. They feel that people have the power to do a lot to create a positive future but this requires people to act.

38%

21%

15%

12%

7%

2% 1% 2% 2% 1%

Very concerned   Not at all concerned
about the future   about the future

Figure 4: Greek participants' opinions on capacity to act and on whether they care about the future.

The View of an Expert

#OurFutures: An optimistic message from Greece by Vivian Efthimiopoulou

Vivian Efthimiopoulou is a Greek author and influencer. The text below is her take on these pilot results.

"Greeks are very proud of their past. Even the recent, hurtful periods of modern Greek history are present in a constant passionate and heated public discourse. Nostalgia is equally strong, the lifestyle of our grandparents is idolized as an era of innocence. In the winter 2022, for example, 8 out of 100 TV series' stories were set in the past.

So, it was quite a surprise to see that the #OurFutures survey attracted such an interest, regardless of the fact that the UNESCO Team in Greece worked hard to advertise the project and the questionnaire.

*Our first observation is the class-related factor. It seems that imagining the future is a task the financially safe are the most willing to pursue while the **"togetherness"** as a catalyst in the realization of the best-case scenarios about the future is a strong political indicator. It is a message the Greek government and the EU cannot ignore.*

- *When the discussion comes to the Future it's Nature, Health and Social Justice that emerge as the most important themes of projected images. The survey took place during the pandemic which was not related only to health but the issue of social justice, the environment as well as mobility emerged.*
- *Important finding: Although Greece is the eastern border of the EU and one of the main gates of the refugee and migration waves, migration scores very low as an issue that would cause worry or concern about the future.*
- *There is no surprise in the fact that young people (18-25y) believe that it's their personal experiences which shape their future image. As people grow older, they learn to recognize most of the factors that shape their perception of the world, its future and as well as its past.*
- *The findings of the survey suggest that it may be a good idea to expose young people to the "history of futurism", to inform them on what we projected back in the 60s and 70s and what actually happened, stressing on the explanation of what we got wrong. On the other hand, and when it comes to adults and middle-aged groups, we see how important it is to promote futures literacy via the press.*
- *Governments/politicians, people in business and science, citizens groups, must take the message: people believe that it is their own responsibility to make change happen. It is striking to see how low the people who shared their stories rate the responsibility of political and financial leaders towards the future. At the same time, a very positive element is the finding that most people believe that the establishment has a large responsibility for the future, implying that people are not anti-system.*
- *Greek people accept their responsibility for the Future. A 50% acknowledge their role, personally, in shaping the image of the future.*

#OurFutures is an important exercise to help citizens realize their responsibility towards the future, and raise their standards regarding expectations from their leadership. The finding that the Future is associated with optimism is noteworthy because "Project Europe" in the Declaration of Rome is based on the core belief of the Enlightenment that the world progresses and the best is yet to come."

Selected Future Images

Here is a short subjective selection of future images for 2040 illustrating what was put forward by the Greek participants in the #OurFutures initiative. It is mostly hopeful and positive, with a lot of attention given to social issues

66 One... for each other The future I imagine has man at its centre. More specifically, in 2040 I would not want there to be a single person on the planet who is hungry. In fact, I would like all nations on all continents to allow all people to have free education and medical care. Important goods such as those mentioned are necessary for every human being and should not be degraded by any monetary compensation. In this way people will reconsider their principles and values and focus on their self-improvement by living in a world of equal treatment for all. I also imagine a world united with common goals and a common course, without the defence of supposed borders, without wars and conflicts. I imagine a world full of love and hope.

Living with dignity The safe living of all people with dignity and justice. 66

66 **Imagine...** Less inequality, more human rights, more civil rights, better education for all people, no social exclusion to anything...., better quality of life for all the people.

Fuelled by water One of the biggest issues of the 21st century is environmental and air pollution from motor vehicle fuels. From cars to airplanes etc. An ideal scenario would be that in the next 20 years the absolute fuel used would be water, or at least a fuel whose majority is water. 66

66 human-hubs in the urban city of 2040 #anthropoinvestment #socialurbanhubs #2040 #futurecity My covid experience and restriction measures, staying within the limits of my neighbourhood, made me find out more about my neighbourhood and the people next door and next street. So, waking up in 2040, puts me in a city of the future, where neighbourhoods are small social, smart, and green hubs that interconnect with each other and are knitted giving the full picture of the urban city where people talk, are active, take initiatives, share. Green roof tops and sky gardens, solar walls and windows as panels in building surfaces capturing the sun, green spaces to let us breath, green streets with places for fun or rest in the streetscape, buildings of low height so that light and air reach the ground, people strolling in the streets enjoying health and well-being, social transportation and transit, easy access to transit and services, family-essence units to live in and interact with others, recycling and reusing. In general, a city of the future for all (disabled, social minorities, different generations) with access to goods and services and a quality of everyday life.

66 Big Incredible Changes The future I want to live in is definitely a future in which people actually care about social issues, like environmental problems, unemployment, mental. 66

Learning from the past & building the future More human - to be closer to nature - to take time to live each moment - to use science to evolve without losing touch with our neighbour. 66

" A friendly world It's 2040 and it feels like ages since I was in high school. I remember people constantly facing racism, I remember prejudice dominating the world and I remember people fighting for injustice to disappear. Being black, being gay, being a female, where things out of your control that you could be judged for. I remember black people being killed by the police, I remember gay people being isolated from the world, I remember women in many parts of the world being killed for going to school. The funny thing is that the world was believed to be friendly then. It's 2040 and now I realise that the world was unfriendly and dangerous. Now it's a different situation. Now the world has taken a step forward causing changes in the legal system, even though people's mind hasn't been changed.

You got this Our pets will live longer. Now, pet oncology is a common and expanding industry. We will treat our pets with higher quality food and more advanced medical services. When it comes to pet health, it can only get better. "

" Achieve the goals for environmental sustainability The consequences of climate change are going to be more than visible in 2040. I really hope that we will manage to achieve the environmental sustainability goals so as to be safe.

Citizens in action It is Tuesday afternoon and everyone is gathered in the village library. The little ones are playing carefree in the relaxation room while the rest of the villagers start the discussions. The young people continue to write down their proposals for the utilization of the hot springs while the older ones deal with the issues of cleanliness and issues related Mendi operation of the community's primary school. Discussions are long but effective. The proposals were recorded, discussed with the state governor of the area and approved immediately. From tomorrow the residents who undertook the implementation of these projects take up work. The villagers are planning and implementing based on their needs and the bureaucratic delays are being overcome by the direct involvement of the community. "

" A romantic future I can imagine an international environment that is not affected by viruses and health problems. People will not lose their lives or be afraid of losing their lives to pandemics. On the economic level, I hope for a recovery of the economy, a satisfactory standard of living for most of the population with free and active health, education, justice, entertainment, activities, sports. In the workplace, I imagine more opportunities for young people, a higher salary sufficient for all activities of individuals without deprivation. On the social level, I imagine true gender equality, acceptance of all minorities and the destruction of racism. No more countless complaints of violence and bullying of any kind; no more femicide, no more suicides and a reduction in the rates of depression and mental disorders; on an individual level, everyone's goal should be self-improvement, no more criticism and thinking in terms of solidarity and the common good. it can only get better.

Government, Science, and Technology in service of the citizens World population under control, ecosystems no longer in danger, carbon emissions peaked and now gradually decreasing. Also, smaller governments, fully in service to the people rather than controlling people. Increased participation of citizens. Big world killers under better control. TB deaths decreased from today's 1.4m/yr to under 100k/yr. Fully personalized, skill-based education. The only way to have happy and effective education enabling children to realize their potential. Sensors everywhere, AI everywhere, in service to the people (rather than monitoring and modulating our behaviour). Pursuit of freedom everywhere instead of compliance and obedience. unknown consequences of the daily routine of the planet. "

" A happy centre In 2040 the future of the traffic issue in Greece will be different. There will be more parks and gardens in the centre of cities while roads will have been reduced. Traffic will be driven by electric cars which will be available for rent so that every citizen can park his car in a parking lot and commute with his rental car. The parking spaces will be located at the entrance to the city centre and will be available free of charge. The commuting will be done by electric bicycles, scooters and cars and the proceeds of the money from the rental of the electric vehicles will be used for the maintenance of gardens and parks. Shops will be operated with ease while shopkeepers will use alternative energy sources for their shops. Citizens will work in decentralized businesses and the city centre will be the entertainment time of their day with walks in the gardens, parks , sports activities , public libraries, free health check-ups for citizens as well as venues for speeches on issues of concern to society both economically and politically and socially. The announcement will be given action and plastic packaging will have been reduced by 80%. Citizens will be able to feed themselves from the gardens located in the centre as there will be tables and trees which will produce fruit for all citizens. There will be no homeless citizens because there will be guesthouses for them and they will meet their needs in exchange for working in them and being maintained in the best way possible. So they too will be productive and live in good conditions. As far as technology is concerned, there will be computers and mobile phones everywhere so that at any time a citizen can communicate with the outside world and get information or work in a nature and human friendly environment.

Abolition of communication borders The year is 2040 and the way people communicate has become easier than ever before. Geographical distances have now been eliminated as the use of technologies such as augmented reality allows for realistic communication on a level that approaches that of interpersonal communication. "

" Black mirror It will probably be something between using all the technology capacity as presented by scientists and even some movies combined.

Marriage free I would like people to stop getting married. This (and religion) is the cornerstone of misery in modern societies. I would like to see people select their partners whenever they want, split up whenever they want and find another again whenever they want. "

Concluding remarks and aspirations

Making a desired future happen invariably requires being able to imagine it. #OurFutures – Stories for the Future of Europe is a tool that was built for that purpose. It offers a way to millions of Europeans to help others imagine what future they want to see.

This report shows the results of efforts to collect such stories in Greece as a pilot. In spite of the harsh reality, it provides a very hopeful image both of society today and of the aspirations that people have. It also helps understand expectations of citizens regarding themselves as well as institutions. This can be very useful to inform the policy debate over the future and help politicians understand what citizens want.

Other reports under the #OurFutures initiative showcase different types of analyses made of the collected data. The database is open access, so we invite all interested researchers to contact us and use it however they see fit.

Continuing the collection of stories over a longer period and increasing the number can not only generate a richer analysis but also indicate possible changes in time. Therefore, we want to encourage the readers not only to share their (new) own stories, even if they have already done it, but also, and foremost, to convince

other people to do the same. This small deed is a way to give life to democracy and to shape collectively our common European future.

See you www.futures4europe.eu/ourfutures for the continuous construction of a positive European Union!

Read all future images at: futures4europe.eu/ourfutures

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