

CITIES AS ARENAS OF POLITICAL INNOVATION
IN THE STRENGTHENING OF DELIBERATIVE AND
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE LOOK LIKE?

Future Scenarios Report

JUNE 2023

EUARENAS investigates the ways in which social movements coupled with local government reform initiatives, manifesting themselves in local-level experiments, create momentum for political change that include more inclusive and participatory forms of governance.



For more information:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Executive Summary

Democracy across Europe has experienced immense challenge, change and uncertainty in recent years (Canal 2014; European Commission & Merkel; 2019) - from the rise of populism to decreasing levels of public trust in governance institutions and processes, to the war in Ukraine. Set against the backdrop of these issues, EUARENAS has been investigating how cities and urban spaces can strengthen legitimacy, identification and engagement within the democratic public sphere. Specifically, EUARENAS has been exploring how participation and deliberation in democracy and decision-making can be increased, and how voices and communities who are excluded from such arenas can be more actively involved.

Foresight is one of the research strands present in EUARENAS. In this project, foresight is both a tool for understanding democratic innovations as they emerge, and for engaging citizens and other actors in such innovations within the participatory and deliberative realms. Mixed method approaches to foresight that incorporate a diversity of activities such as media discourse analysis, lived experience storytelling, social media analysis, three horizons mapping, driver-mapping, scenario and visioning exercises and policy stress-testing have been used in EUARENAS to investigate and hypothesise over future trends and scenarios in participatory democracies. This report - deliverable 5.4 - is the final output from this foresight work and synthesises the varied research activities' core findings.

From this work, a number of **opportunities and challenges for local democracy** have been identified. The core ones are thematically summarised in Table 1.0 below.

Table 1.0: Opportunities and challenges for local democracy

Theme	Challenges	Opportunities
Inclusion and Exclusion	<p>Lack of opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes.</p> <p>Lack of opportunities for migrant and non-citizen communities to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes.</p>	<p>Education around grassroots democracy and less traditional methods of participation to increase awareness of how these can influence change.</p> <p>Funding for initiatives that provide a platform for minoritised groups (e.g., migrant communities), to have their voices listened to and acted upon.</p>
Structures and Relationships	<p>Lack of collaboration between grassroots initiatives and formal democratic institutions</p> <p>Conflict between old, hierarchical power structures and emerging horizontal or grassroots power structures</p> <p>Lack of trust in existing governance structures and institutions</p>	<p>The emergence of, and appetite for citizen change-making processes that can influence and inform traditional decision-making processes</p> <p>Formalised collaboration between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities</p>
Changes in Society and Communities	<p>Polarisation of political views</p> <p>Influence of digital technologies on what/how 'information' is produced and shared</p> <p>The busy nature of everyday people's lives, (i.e., working hours, care-giving commitments, commutes etc.) coupled with the level of energy and commitment required to understand and engage with democracy and politics is a barrier that is often overlooked</p>	<p>Creating spaces for dialogue and networking for people with divergent perspectives - focusing on understanding rather than consensus</p> <p>Increasing digital literacy of the public and counter disinformation through education around critical thinking skills</p> <p>Utilising technological advances and everyday digital tools as conduits for democratic engagement - enabling people to participate at times suitable for them.</p>

External/Wider Contextual Factors	Impact of COVID-19 and exacerbation of existing inequalities	Increasing media literacy of the public and embrace digital technologies as a mean of encouraging people to access a range of media outlets
	Environmental crisis and exacerbation of existing inequalities	
	War in/invasion of Ukraine	Strengthen media pluralism through exploitation of digital technologies as a means of diversifying the voices present in media and the content that is created
	Media ownership and relationship with political systems	

An understanding of the current state of play has been used to create (largely preferred) future visions for local democracies in Europe. Some **common elements of these future visions** are:

- Sustainable, long-term thinking
- Valuing difference and diversity
- Embracing the natural environment
- Being pro-actively inclusive and dismantling oppressive structures
- Rehumanising our cities - value-based working that centralises humanity, empathy, trust and transparency

The **core changes** with different domains that need to take place in order to move towards this vision of future democracies in cities as summarised in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Key changes needed to strengthen participation in local democracy in Europe

Policy/Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for engaging people and communities who are not currently heard and/or visible in decision-making realms are City-wide and embedded in all layers of governance and decision-making structures • There are ways for people without citizenship to meaningfully take part in democratic life • People aged 16+ are able to vote • Policies are developed that are life-long, socially progressive and are focused on the long-term
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an ombudsman-style role focused on resident involvement in local decision-making • There is transparency and clarity in decision-making and decision-making is focused on the long-term • There is a culture of listening to communities and divergent and diverse perspectives are involved in those dialogues • Specialist, external support is used where needed to help facilitate change • Trust is built with communities by (1) taking and making visible concrete actions from citizen engagement activities, (2) reducing thresholds to accessing the local administration (i.e., less bureaucracy) and (3) further localising decision-making (i.e., more decisions made at a neighbourhood level where applicable)
Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local volunteering infrastructure is used to mobilise communities in the democratic sphere • NGOs become a recognised actor in local decision-making arenas • Funding is directed towards activism, education & locally-led projects • NGOs are given a mandate and responsibilities for engaging with diverse groups in society to reduce the silos and the gaps between them

Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spaces where residents usually access - particularly those who are currently unheard or least visible in local democracy and decision-making - are regularly used as spaces for democratic activities• Public spaces are adapted to local community needs and collaborative design is used to evolve neighbourhoods
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communities to be confident in identifying external ideas that can support them to address local issues and how such ideas can be transferred to their area• Communities value different experiences and perspectives, and people with different protected characters and background work together frequently• Adoption and promotion eco-systemic thinking
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology to be used overcome barriers to participation such as age, time and language skills with care taken to ensure such interventions do not reinforce exclusion
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial cost to individuals and local civil society for engagement in local civic action, decision-making and democracy need to be addressed systematically• Decisions made to benefit 'markets' should not have unintended or long-term negative social implications

From this work, we propose the following **recommendations** for Cities wanting to strive towards more equitable local democracies:

1. Address structural barriers to participation
2. Build relationships of trust
3. Invest in formal and civic education
4. Make decisions for the long-term

A more equitable, inclusive local democracy landscape is not too far in the distance for us to conceive it being possible. In fact, **the future is now** – the seeds to create it are already being planted, they just need nurturing by:

- Scaling and mainstreaming existing pilot or niche practices that are working locally – whether that be participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies or other smaller-scale projects – so that these become the new 'status quo'
- Adopting test and learn approaches to promote experimentation and on-going learning – this will enable ongoing innovation and be responsive to society's needs
- Finding ways to celebrate and connect-up the small changes that are taking place - this will help people see that progress is being made, even when it feels like things are changing too slow

To see the **EUARENAS City of the Future**, [click here](#).

Narratives of Impact



Over three years, a consortium of 5 European NGOs have been creating:

1. A 'Using Digital Storytelling for Impact and Change Measurement' Report – State of play analysis
2. A toolkit for working with stories to measure impact – aimed at a civil society/educators' audience
3. A set of video guides aimed at disseminating different digital storytelling impact creating and measurement methods – aimed at a civil society/educators' audience



Outputs can be downloaded from the project's website:
<https://narrativesofimpact.com>

Erasmus+ programme
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INTRODUCTION



2. Introduction

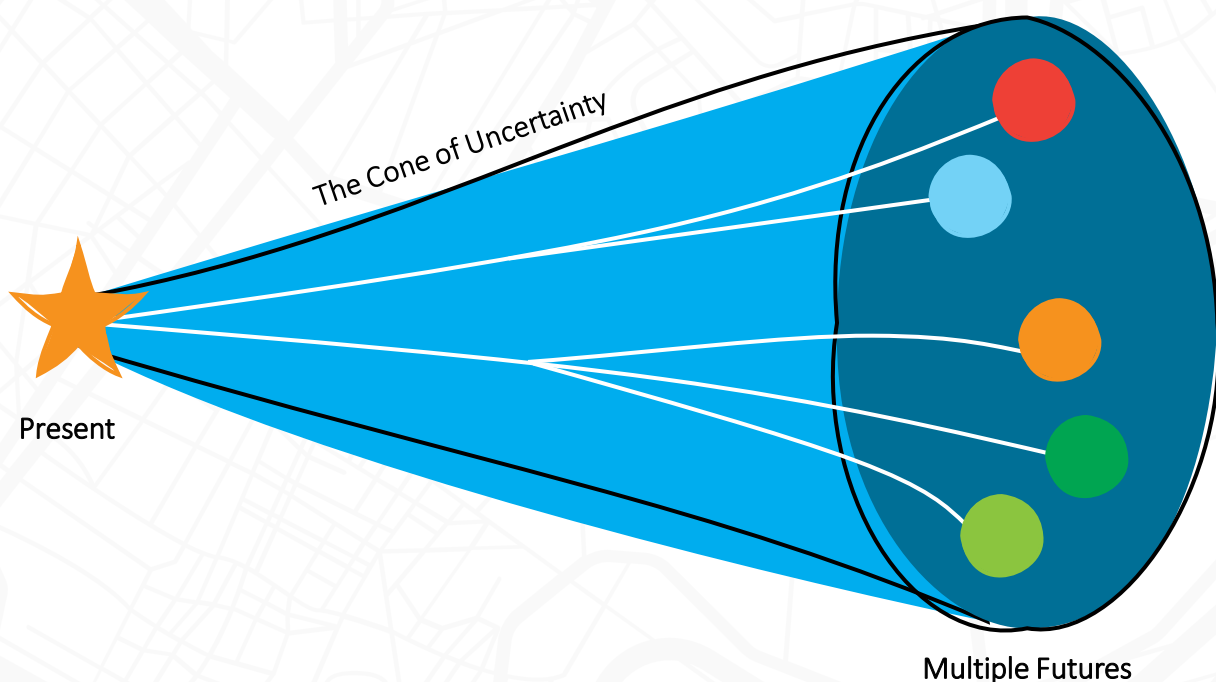
Democracy across Europe has experienced immense challenge, change and uncertainty in recent years (Canal 2014; European Commission & Merkel; 2019) - from the rise of populism to decreasing levels of public trust in governance institutions and processes, to the war in Ukraine. The COVID-19 pandemic has played a role in exacerbating certain issues with democracy due to its widening of deep-rooted inequalities; evidence indicates that unequal societies have lower rates of both social and civic participation (including lower engagement with political parties) (Lancee and Van de Werfhorst, 2012). Furthermore, higher rates of income inequality have been linked to lower levels of voter turnout (Geys, 2006; Solt, 2008; Solt, 2010). It is clear we need to re-think what democratic participation looks like and, as Elstub and Escoba suggest, “reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in governance processes by increasing opportunities for participation, deliberation and influence” (2021: 14). This inclusion must extend to those communities that are the most marginalised and the least visible; it must include people who have the least power and resources in society. It is only through this reimagining and by enabling this shift that social, economic, and epistemic justice might be achieved. Hence, the need for foresight.

The Future is Now

Foresight - or future thinking methods - provide us with the tools to think about the future and to use the insights and ideas that emerge to model and respond to potential prospective circumstances (Voros, 2003). It is important to see foresight activities not as ‘prophecy’ or ‘prediction’, but as a systematic and action-driven way in which we can create and shape the future of our world (Competence Centre on Foresight, 2021). Foresight is not about predicting a singular, correct version of our future, but instead embodies epistemological pluralism in action as it supports the creation of visions for the future (OECD, 2019; Inayatullah, 2010). In an ever-changing world, it asks us to think about our future, what challenges are on the horizon, and how we can address them to achieve shared outcomes.

In a context of increasing uncertainty and complexity, foresight and future thinking techniques can act as a key tool in the innovation of policy development, bringing citizens and decision-makers together to define solutions about our shared futures (Fox, 2020). It provides policy-makers in particular with the skills and tools to work with uncertainty and develop robust policies that respond to possible futures (see Figure 2.0) and support long-term development (UK Government Office for Science, 2022).

Figure 2.1: Cone of Uncertainty, UK Government Office for Science (2022)



As Mulgan (2020) outlines, today's uncertainty and bleakness make it increasingly hard to imagine positive futures, yet despite this his work calls the enhancement of our 'social and public imagination'. According to Mulgan (ibid), fostering social imagination within publics offers scope to once again make communities key actors in the making of their history and, through this, reduce fear and loss of agency. Future-thinking techniques can play a vital role in participatory democratic practice, moving policymaking away from technocratic practices and into emancipatory endeavours (ibid). The work conducted as part of **EUARENAS** situates itself within this arena, as well as the emerging framing of 'foresight 3.0' by Ravetz et al (2023), as a process for "collective anticipatory intelligence" that "involves mutual learning, co-innovation and co-production, between a wider stakeholder community", linking to notions of wise societies (Ravetz, 2020; Goede, 2011).

EUARENAS and Foresight

EUARENAS responds to a major European challenge - the need to strengthen legitimacy, identification and engagement within the democratic public sphere. The project investigates the ways that social movements, coupled with local reform initiatives that manifest themselves in local-level experiments, create momentum for political change that includes more inclusive and participatory forms of governance. It nurtures active citizenship, social agendas and political life through citizen participation and democratic innovations in European cities through a range of traditional, applied and mixed methodology research approaches.

Foresight and future-thinking approaches are one of the research strands present in **EUARENAS** via Work Package 5 (WP5). Foresight, is both a tool for understanding democratic innovations as they emerge, and for engaging citizens and other actors in such innovations within the participatory and deliberative realms. WP5 uses mixed method approaches to foresight to investigate and hypothesise over future trends and scenarios in participatory democracies. Its core objectives are to:

1. Use a hybrid methodological approach to foresight research in order to investigate and hypothesise over future trends in democratic processes.
2. Develop practical methodological guides on approaches to conducting foresight research in order to create future social scenarios.
3. Create both a conceptual synthesis of the learning from the foresight research and visions of future equitable and inclusive democratic scenarios to inform wider project findings.

This report - deliverable 5.4 - is the final output of WP5.

About the report

This report presents the insights from the foresight activities undertaken in **EUARENAS** as part of WP5 and uses them to produce future scenarios for democracy. The objectives of the report are to:

1. *Synthesise* the learning from across the **EUARENAS** foresight research activities, which focus on the future trajectories of democracy across Europe
2. *Develop* future scenarios for how participation in democracy can be enhanced within cities in Europe
3. *Explore* what changes are needed to enable the creation of a more equitable and inclusive democratic landscape in Europe

The report is structured via a set of core chapters that cover:

- **Method**: An overview of the methodologies used to determine the findings in this report.
- **Change is on the horizon**: An overview of the 'state of play' in democracy in various locations in Europe and a synthesis of present-day signals for future trajectories in democracy ascertained from the foresight research activities conducted in **EUARENAS**

- Future Scenarios: A presentation of future visions of cities as spaces for strengthening engagement and participation in democracy
- From Vision to Implementation: A synthesis of the key insights from the report and core recommendations for how a more equitable and inclusive local democracies can be created

Following these are sections containing links to supporting materials mentioned in the report and a reference list of cited materials.

The core insights and recommendations in this report will be utilised to develop policy briefs within the **EUARENAS** project. To do this, further policy stress-testing activities such as ‘wind-tunnelling’ will take place. The authors of this report would like to thank all participants involved in the various research activities that have taken place; without this participation and generous input of ideas, insights and time, this report would not have been possible.

What is a dialogue interview?

Dialogue interviews don't have a list of questions. Instead they are like conversations between two people. The conversation should be directed by the storyteller so that they set the agenda. The Community Reporter helps to facilitate that conversation.

Opening question (i.e. a conversation starter) which enables the storyteller to start to tell their story / E.G. **What has been your own experience of democracy - on a local, national or European level?**

The Community Reporter recording the story may ask any questions within this storytelling which naturally occurs to them / E.G. **Why did you listen to at that meeting?**

The conversation comes to a natural end, and the recording stops.



METHODS

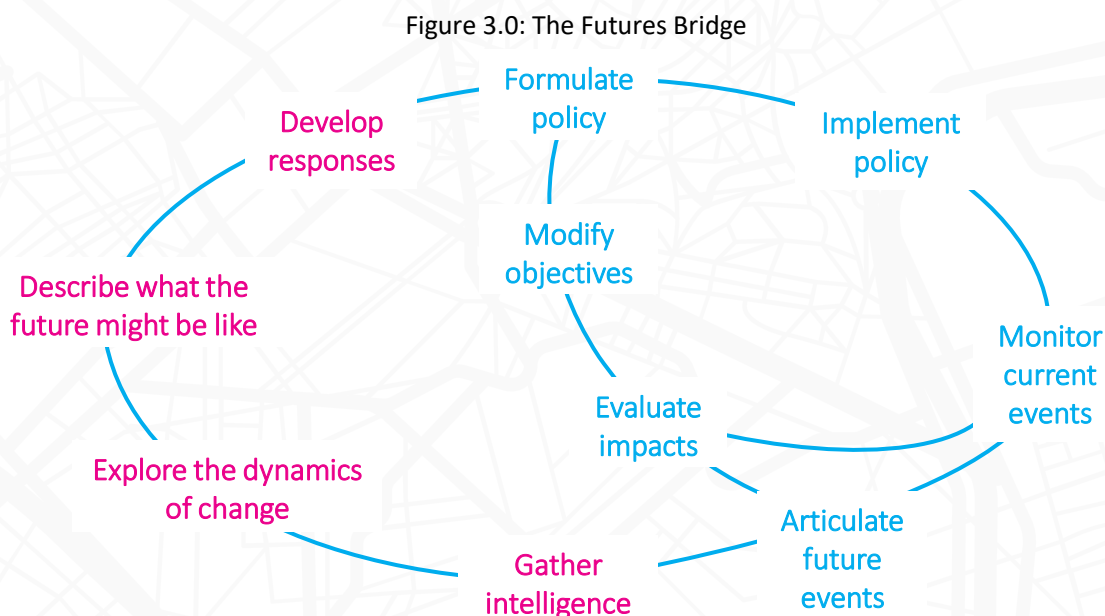


3. Method

Foresight provides participatory methods for supporting people and organisations – from citizens to policy makers - to gather intelligence that can enable the building of medium-to-long-term scenarios about the future and develop plans for how these can be created. There is no singular approach to foresight and techniques for future thinking are varied. Nesta - a UK-based innovation agency - have positioned thinking about the future into phases - understanding, exploring and imagining (Nesta, n.d.). These phases broadly underpin the approach to foresight being taken both within this guide and the wider future thinking work in **EUARENAS**. We define these phases as being:

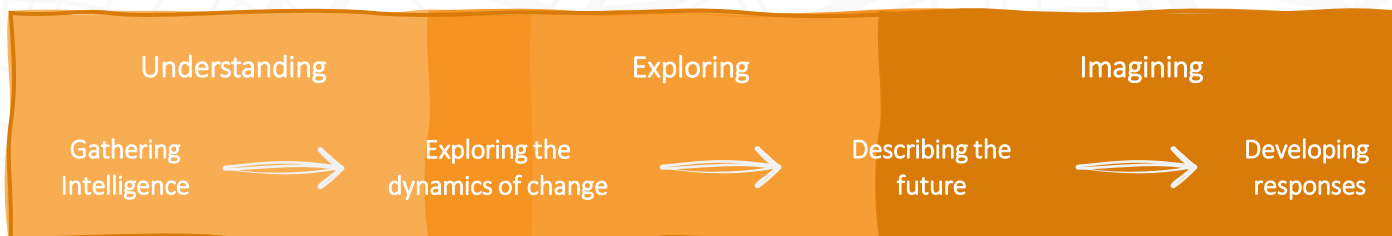
1. Understanding: Looking at the current environment and identifying insights about society.
2. Exploring: Examining present day insights and recognising the signals about the future in them.
3. Imagining: Creating visions of the future and plans for how they can be achieved.

Given foresight’s uses within policy development and innovation (Shallowe et al, 2020; Makridakis, 2004; OECD, 2019), it is useful to think about the aforementioned phases alongside The Futures Bridge model (UK Government Office for Science, 2017) that outlines four key future thinking actions and their relationship to a policy development cycle as depicted in Figure 3.0.



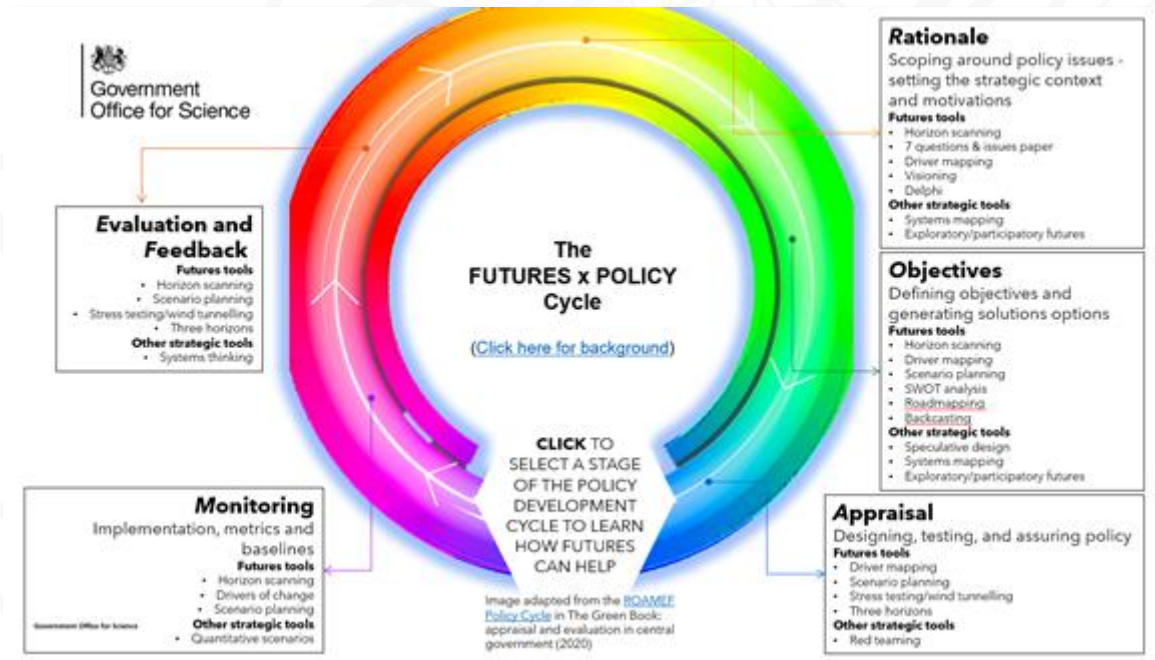
A combination of the above is how we have approached foresight work within **EUARENAS**. Figure 3.1 represents this approach.

Figure 3.1: **EUARENAS** Overarching Foresight Approach



Furthermore, as Peter McGowran’s (2021) mapping of future-thinking techniques onto the ROAMEF Policy Cycle (HM Treasury, 2020) (see Figure 3.2) demonstrates, foresight is a tool that is apt for every stage of the policy development journey - from creating a rationale for a policy and identifying policy need, to evaluating the policy and appraising whether or not it is fit for purpose for future challenges. This flexibility makes it apt for adoption in the **EUARENAS** project.

Figure 3.2: McGowran's (2021) The Futures x Policy Cycle



In **EUARENAS**, the foresight research was divided into four phases; (1) Media Discourses, (2) Lived Experience Storytelling, (3) Social Media and (4) Future Scenario Workshops. Phases 1 and 2 were in the domains of 'Understanding' and 'Exploring'. Phases 3 and 4 encapsulated 'Understanding', 'Exploring' and 'Imagining'. This chapter outlines the specific methods adopted in each phase and concludes with a summary of the specific activities and participants of each phase.

Foresight Research Phase 1: Media Discourses

The media is both a window into, and a shaper of, the ideologies and behaviours of society, and by looking at the discourses within it we can identify signals about our future. Discourse analysis asks us to think of language - written, spoken and visual - not just as a description of our world but as an active actor in shaping what society is (Hardy and Philips, 2004). It is both a way of viewing the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) and a recreation - or re-presentation - of the social, political and cultural sphere (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). Understanding discourses - like those represented in our media - enables us to understand how such meanings come to be and, potentially, how they can be changed (Hardy and Philips, 2004).

Within our first set of foresight activities, we combined media discourse analysis with future-thinking approaches, enabling researchers within **EUARENAS** to use media discourses as source material for signals about our future and to explore the drivers of change in society connected to democracy. To do this, five local level studies were undertaken in the UK, Finland, Poland, Germany and Italy in which:

- Researchers identified and collated examples of current affairs and news-based content from 'traditional' media such as the press (i.e. online/offline magazines and newspapers) and broadcast journalism (i.e. television and radio).
- Researchers used guidelines and templates to conduct a layered discourse and textual analysis that looks at what topics were present in the media content, *how* these topics are presented and *why* they are being presented in the way that they are.
- Researchers recruited citizens to participate in a collective sense-making workshop that provided space for the citizens to interact with the media content identified, and contribute to the textual and discourse analysis. The workshops largely focused on engaging demographics who have perceived barriers to engagement in democracy.

- An analysis report based on the results of the research teams’ own analyses and the collective sense-making session was produced for each location. A template and guidelines were used to produce this report.

This process was repeated at a pan-European level with media content aimed at pan-European audiences utilised as the core stimuli, and collective sense-making happening with member of the **EUARENAS** consortium and external participants across the domains of policy, services and research. Figure 3.3 depicts this process.

Figure 3.3: Media discourses and foresight research activities process



Table 3.0 below details the specific techniques adopted in this phase of the research.

Table 3.0: Techniques used in Phase 1 of **EUARENAS** foresight research activities

Technique	Description and Usage
Textual Analysis	This is used for analysing visual, written and audio cues within texts (i.e., media content). A section of the media content analysis reporting template – used for local/national and pan-European media content - was dedicated to this.
Discourse Analysis	This is a research method for analysing language and is predominantly applied to written and spoken word. The majority of the media content analysis reporting template - used for local/national and pan-European media content - was dedicated to this.
Collective Sense-Making	This is a participatory approach to working with a group of people to ascertain different perspectives on data and topics in order to construct meaning. It is underpinned by the notion of collective intelligence (Lévy, 1997).

	A section of the five local workshops held with different citizen groups focused on them reviewing the media content.
Horizon Scanning	This is a process through which signals of change in the present can be identified. Signals can be identified in a range of ways such as desk-based research and a number of approaches to ‘surveying’.
Driver Mapping	This is a process through which the key factors that will shape the future can be identified and discussed within their context. We did this using PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) factors.

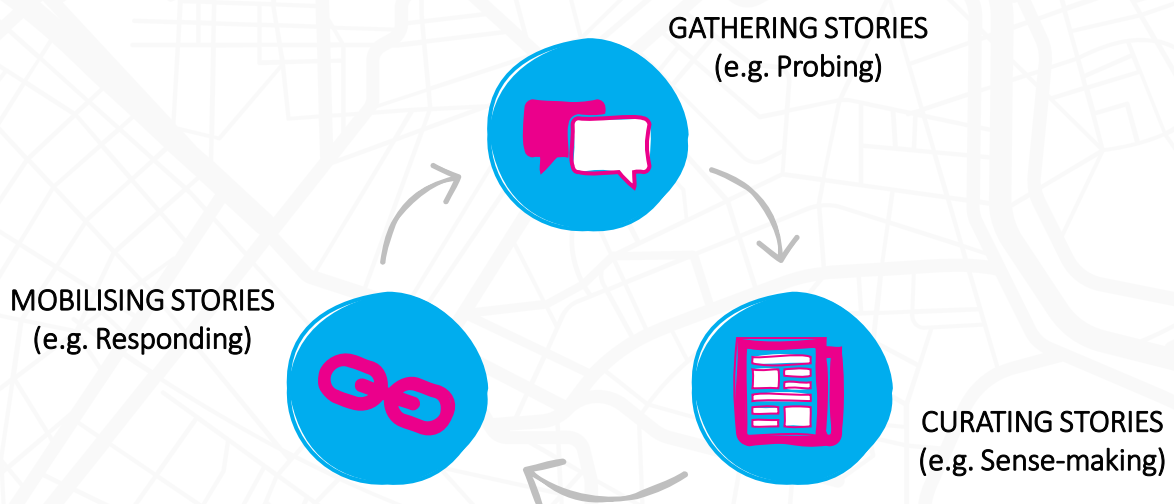
A set of guidelines that detail this approach further was produced as part of Deliverable 5.1 and a public version of these can be [accessed here](#).

Foresight Research Phase 2: Lived Experience Storytelling

Stories are powerful tools through which people connect, share understanding and build bridges. Storytelling has a long history as a tool for “learning and dialogic encounters” and in supporting change-making processes (Copeland and Moor, 2008: 101). Storytelling, and ‘lived experience’ storytelling in particular, has thrived as a tool for social justice, supporting both democracy in action and progressive change (Couldry, 2008; Lambert, 2006) via the creation of deliberative spaces for “authentic voice to be heard and recorded” (Copeland and Moor, 2008: 106).

Originating in 2007, Community Reporting is a specific approach to digital storytelling that has been developed by People’s Voice Media across Europe as a tool for achieving social justice. Community Reporting is a mixed methodological approach for enhancing citizen participation in research, policy-making, service development, and decision-making processes via digital storytelling practices rooted in lived experience. With three distinct components – story gathering, story curation and story mobilisation – Community Reporting is based around the Cynefin decision-making framework for complex environments (Snowden and Boone, 2007), as depicted in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: Community Reporting Cycle



In Phase 2 of our foresight work, we combined lived experience storytelling with future-thinking, by bringing together elements of the Community Reporting methodology and horizon-mapping activities. Specifically, we drew upon the Three Horizons approach that supports people to think about different trajectories of the future, see challenges that arise and take advantage of emergent opportunities (see Curry & Hodgson, 2008; Petchey, 2020).

Five local level studies were undertaken in EUARENAS pilot cities of Gdańsk (Poland), Reggio Emilia (Italy) and Võru (Estonia) in which residents of the local area took part in storytelling and future-thinking workshops. Each workshop contained the following activities:

- Welcome and introduction to the session
- Exploring what democracy means and the different ways in which it is implemented locally
- Dialogue interview training and conducting of peer-to-peer interviews
- Story analysis training and conducting of collective analysis of the stories
- Creating a horizon map using the Three Horizons approach

Figure 3.5 depicts this workshop structure.

Figure 3.5: Lived experience and foresight research workshop process

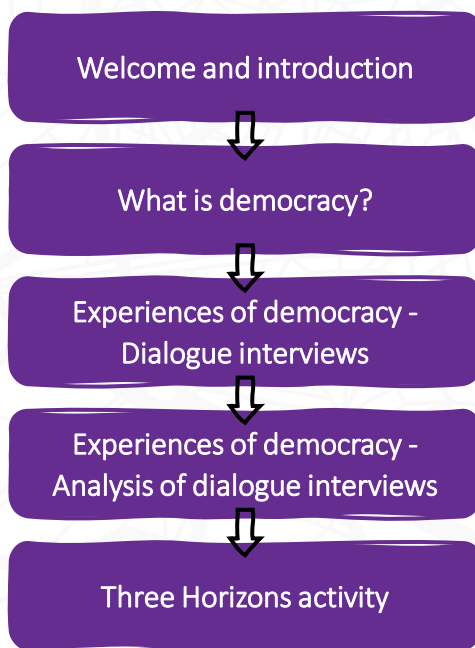


Table 3.1 below details the specific techniques adopted in this phase of the research.

Table 3.1: Techniques used in Phase 2 of EUARENAS foresight research activities

Technique	Description and Usage
Peer Research	This is a participatory research method that involves people with lived experience of a particular research area in conducting research activities. This underpinned the Dialogue Interview approach outlined below.
Dialogue Interviews	This is a storytelling method developed by People’s Voice Media as part of their Community Reporting methodology. The interviews are conducted without the formulation of pre-determined questions and begin with a broad conversation starter based on the topic of the research. In this instance the conversation starter was: ‘What has been your experiences of local democracy?’ Any subsequent questions are determined during the interview by the story gatherer/interviewer based on what the storyteller/interviewee shares with them. It mimics the structure of everyday conversation and aims to have the conversation’s agenda set by the storyteller/interviewee rather than the story gatherer/interviewer.

	In the workshops, citizens interviewed one another about their experiences of local democracy.
Story Analysis	In the context of this work, the approach to story analysis has been based on People's Voice Media's Community Reporting methodology. The approach is underpinned by elements of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Tummers and Karsten, 2012) and discourse analysis (Brown and Yule, 1983). In the workshops, citizens reviewed the interviews they had conducted and thematically grouped key insights identified from them.
Collective Sense-Making	This is a participatory approach to working with a group of people to ascertain different perspectives on data and topics in order to construct meaning. It is underpinned by the notion of collective intelligence (Lévy, 1997). This supported the grouping of key insights in the story analysis process.
Horizon Mapping	This is a process that utilises understandings of the present day situation to envisage future scenarios. In the workshop, the Three Horizons approach was adopted. The insights from the lived experience stories were used to inform the present day situation part of the activity.

A set of guidelines that detail this approach further was produced as part of Deliverable 5.2 and a public version of these can be [accessed here](#).

Social Media Signals

Social media provides a window into current debates, social issues and topics pertinent to communities. Whilst the presentation of such content is not necessarily a reflection of society and, like traditional media representations, is more of a refracted view on current trends than a mirror image, it is still a valuable source material for understanding society. In respect of democracy and citizen participation in formal and informal democracy, social media accounts connected to social movements can provide us with signs of what issues and debates are pertinent to people (as opposed to institutions) and simultaneously offer a glimpse of emerging forms of citizen participation and civic action. Such content can be useful for hypothesising over future trajectories in democracy. As Kayser and Bierwisch (2016) outline, social media in general can provide rich source material for foresight work and has the added value of increasing the number of actors' perspectives which can be brought into future-thinking activities.

In the third phase of our foresight activities, we used social media and aspects of the Delphi method to explore the future of democracy in Europe. Delphi is a research technique that uses the survey format as a means of collecting data from experts within their area of expertise (Chuenjitwongsa, 2017). The approach enables researchers to handle "divergent opinions" with the aim of achieving "consensus concerning real-world knowledge on a certain topic" (ibid). The method adopts an iterative process in which "various rounds of questions [are asked] to a selected group of experts on a particular subject" and the responses in each round are to formulate the questions in the subsequent round (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, 2021: 2). This iterative process allows for the identification of "agreement and disagreements among participants" (ibid). Whilst the purpose of the guidelines is not necessarily geared towards consensus over future visions of democracy due to foresight being rooted in plurality rather than singularity of vision, the Delphi method's ability to identify areas of debate or contestation between experts and the ability to apply the tool remotely, made it an apt choice for this work. We also included a policy stress-testing activity as part of this process. Policy stress-testing is a foresight practice that enables the testing of "strategic objectives against a set of scenarios to see how well they stand up against a range of external conditions"

(UK Government Office for Science, 2017:12). Such approaches can be applied to different policy arenas and legislative areas, as demonstrated in Fernandes and Heflich's (2022) recent work in this domain.

In **EUARENAS**, three national studies were undertaken in the UK, Finland and Poland, with a fourth study taking place with experts from across Italy, Hungary and Portugal. These studies involved the following activities:

- Research teams recruited a group of experts in democracy from across policy practice and research arenas to participate in the activities. A minimum of five experts per study were recruited.
- Research teams identified five social media accounts to study in the activities. The parameters for this selection were that:
 - The accounts should be from social movements/activist groups;
 - The accounts should be of a group, collective and/or organisations' social media accounts - NOT individual people's accounts;
 - The accounts' posts should be publicly viewable (i.e., no log in required to view the posts)
- Research teams set-up a Padlet board and posted at least 50 social media posts from across the identified social media accounts to it. The selected posts focused on topics pertinent to democracy and social issues - i.e., not generic promotional material.
- The groups of experts were then asked to comment on the posts on the Padlet board. A set of instructions to direct their commenting was issued.
- Based on the experts' posts on the Padlet board and social media posts, Questionnaire 1 was created. Guidelines on the content and structure of this questionnaire was issued so that all questionnaires followed a similar style.
- Based on the experts' responses to Questionnaire 1, Questionnaire 2 was created. Guidelines on the content and structure of this questionnaire was issued so that all questionnaires followed a similar style.
- The responses to both Questionnaires 1 and 2 were used to create a report for each study. A report template was issued that provided guidelines as to how to report the findings.

This results of these four studies were used to generate different preferred future scenarios for democracy in Europe. A group of experts from across Europe engage in a policy stress-testing activity that used the European Democracy Action Plan (2020). In this activity, the relevance of the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) in-line with how far it supports or presents barriers to the future scenarios was assessed. Figure 3.6 depicts this process.

Figure 3.6: Social media and foresight research activities process

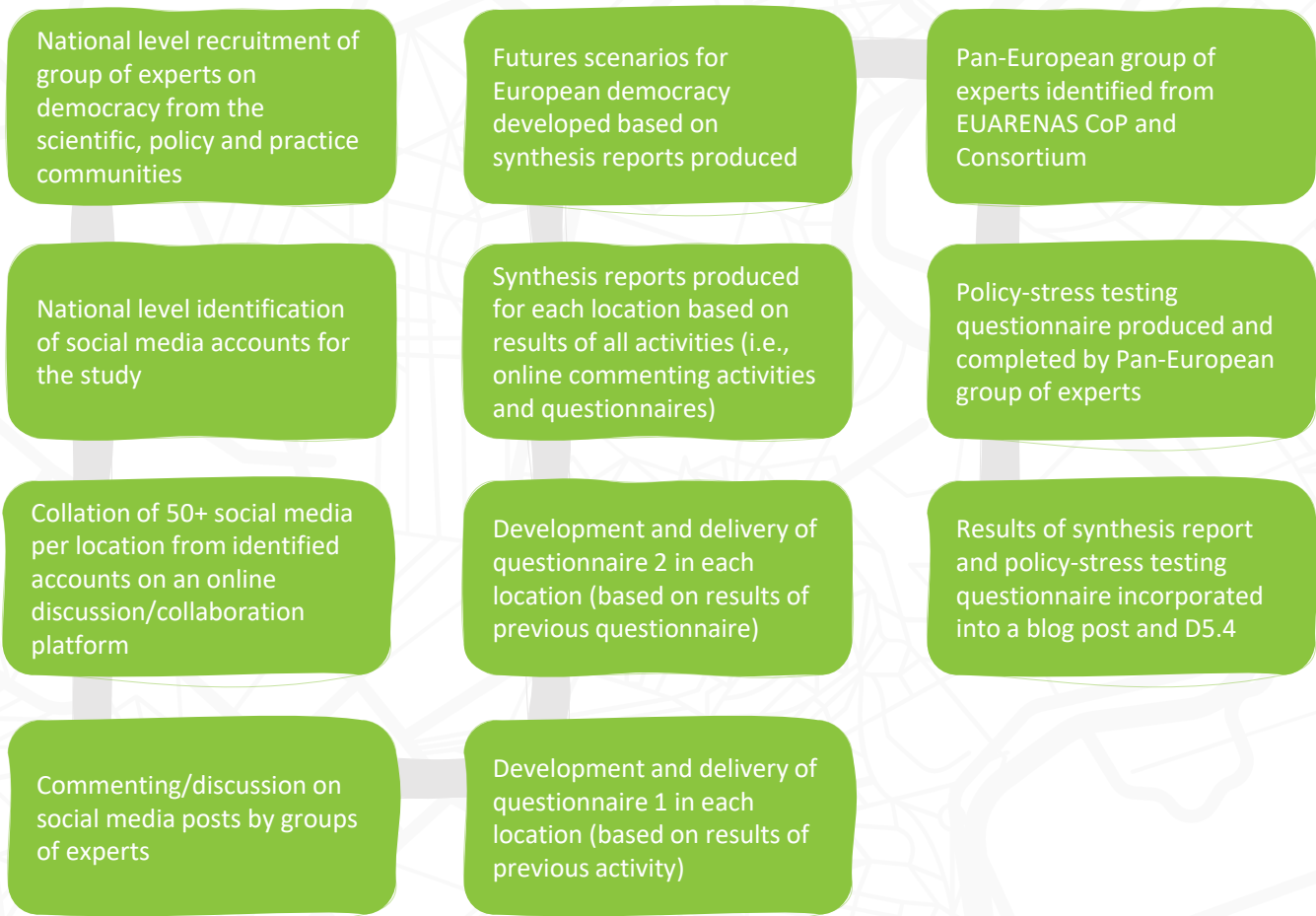


Table 3.2 below details the specific techniques adopted in this phase of the research.

Table 3.2: Techniques used in Phase 3 of EUARENAS foresight research activities

Technique	Description and Usage
Desk-based research	Another term for secondary research – i.e., examining existing materials and publications. This was used in the collation and analysis/review of the social media posts.
Textual analysis	This is used for analysing visual, written and audio cues within texts (i.e., media content). This was used in the experts’ review of the social media posts.
Data analysis	An umbrella term for examining, ordering and presenting data so that it displays key insights and ideas. This was used in the experts’ reviewing of the social media posts, the research teams’ analysis of these reviews and the analysis of the experts’ responses to the questionnaires.
Delphi method	A series of questionnaires completed by experts in a particular arena/topic area that provides scope for identifying future developments within that specific field. This was used in the four studies that were undertaken before the policy stress-testing activity.

Policy stress-testing	An approach to testing policy objectives against future scenarios. The policy that was stress-tested was the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) and this activity was conducted remotely via a questionnaire.
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A set of guidelines that detail this approach further was produced as part of Deliverable 5.3 and a public version of these can be [accessed here](#).

Foresight Research Phase 4: Future Scenarios Workshops

Following the three phases outlined above, a series of local and European future scenario workshops were delivered that used the data and insights generated from the three sets of foresight activities described. The purpose of these workshops was to: develop future scenarios in the field of deliberative and participatory democracies at local and European levels. Local and European future scenario workshops took place in this phase and engaged relevant stakeholders (residents, policymakers, civil society actors, local administration, scientific communities etc.) in creating future scenarios for cities of the future, focusing on how participation in democracy can be enhanced. These workshops involved a range of creative and participatory methods, in addition to foresight approaches such as serious play, collaging and photo voice. Further details are provided in Table 3.3.

The local workshops took place in Berlin (Germany), Helsinki (Finland), Võru (Estonia), Reggio Emilia (Italy) and Gdańsk (Poland). These workshops all took place in-person and followed this structure:

1. Introduction to the workshop: This outlined the aims and objectives of the workshop, and the **EUARENAS** project as a whole.
2. State of Play: This section presented the participants with insights and data already collated as part of WP5 activities - both at a local and European level. Additional, local 'state of play' data was also used in some local workshops.
3. Dynamics of Change: This section provided space for participants to use the 'state of play' data and their own knowledge to identify the key drivers of changes in their local area connected to democracy.
4. Describing the Future: Using the insights from Parts 2 and 3 of the workshop, participants engaged in one or more of the creative methods previously described to create visions for the future.
5. Developing Responses: This section of the workshop focused on what needs to change and/or what key actions need to be taken to move from the current state of play to the future scenario(s) created. Specific techniques used here were roadmapping and backcasting.

Internal guidelines and training were provided to support the delivery of these workshops. Local level reports based on the activities and outcomes of the workshops were produced using a common template and instructions.

Based on the local workshops and reports, a pan-European future scenarios workshops was held in Berlin (Germany) that brought together Berlin residents, workers in local administrations/Government, civil society professionals, academics, practitioners in deliberative methods and members of the **EUARENAS** consortium. This workshop contained the following activities:

1. Introduction to the workshop: This outlined the aims and objectives of the workshop, and the **EUARENAS** project as a whole.
2. Results of Local Future Scenario workshops: A poster presentation was made for each local workshop and carousel-style activity took place in which participants of the workshops visited each poster in turn and discussed its content with a representative from the local workshop. At the end of the carousel activity, participants identified the key themes and components from across the local results.

3. Pan-European visions: Based on the themes and components identified in the previous activity, participants worked in small groups to create a specific a vision of area of a city that responds to those themes/components and enables participation in democracy using building blocks and annotation materials. The specific areas created were green, educational, residential, local governance and cultural spaces. The groups presented their visions to one another as short oral presentations.
4. Implementing the visions: The final activity asked the participants to identify (1) elements of their vision that were recognisable in the present and (2) elements of their vision that were not recognisable in the present. Based on these, participants then identified the key macro-level changes that would need to occur in order to realise the visions that they had created.

The various methods involved in the above local and pan-European activities are outlined briefly in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Methods used in the future scenarios workshops

Method	Description and Usage
Serious Play	<p>This is an umbrella term used for an array of playful inquiry and innovation methods that serve as vehicles for complex problem-solving, often used as part of design-thinking processes (Rieber et al, 1998; Primus & Sonnenburg, 2018). Serious Play techniques can be used to help disrupt the status quo, dismantle hierarchies in groups and help people to think differently.</p> <p>In the workshops, ‘building blocks’ were used to produce the future visions and were annotated with post-it notes to add further information to the designs.</p>
Collaging	<p>Collaging asks participants to select images that represent how they feel about a particular topic and is a tool through which participants can express ideas about a specific topic (Soucy, 2012).</p> <p>In the workshops, a range of collaging materials such as newspapers, magazines, maps etc. were used to create ‘posters’ of people’s future visions. There were annotated with written text.</p>
Photovoice	<p>Photovoice is qualitative method used in community-based participatory research to document and reflect reality - it enables people to express their points of view or represent their communities by photographing scenes that highlight research themes (Nykiforuk et al, 2011).</p> <p>In the workshops, people took images that represented the future and captioned these.</p>
Roadmapping	<p>A timeline or lines that shows how different inputs (certain and uncertain) are combined over time to shape a policy (UK Government Office for Science (2017)).</p> <p>This technique was adopted in some local workshops, and the aspect of identifying inputs was embedded into the pan-European workshop.</p>
Backcasting	<p>This is a technique that enables people to identify the route from the present day to the future, by working backwards to “identify the key steps, events and decisions that will make it happen” (UK Government Office for Science (2017)).</p> <p>This technique was adopted in some of the local workshops. The exploration of differences between present day and the future was also included in the pan-European workshop.</p>

Figure 3.7 depicts the process undertaken in phase four of our foresight activities.

Figure 3.7: Phase 4 foresight activities.



Summary

Our approach to foresight research activities has spanned foresight, traditional and participatory research methods and has stretched and innovated existing approaches. Figure 3.8 displays the approaches adopted mapped to the aforementioned research method domains.

Figure 3.8: Overview of methodological approach

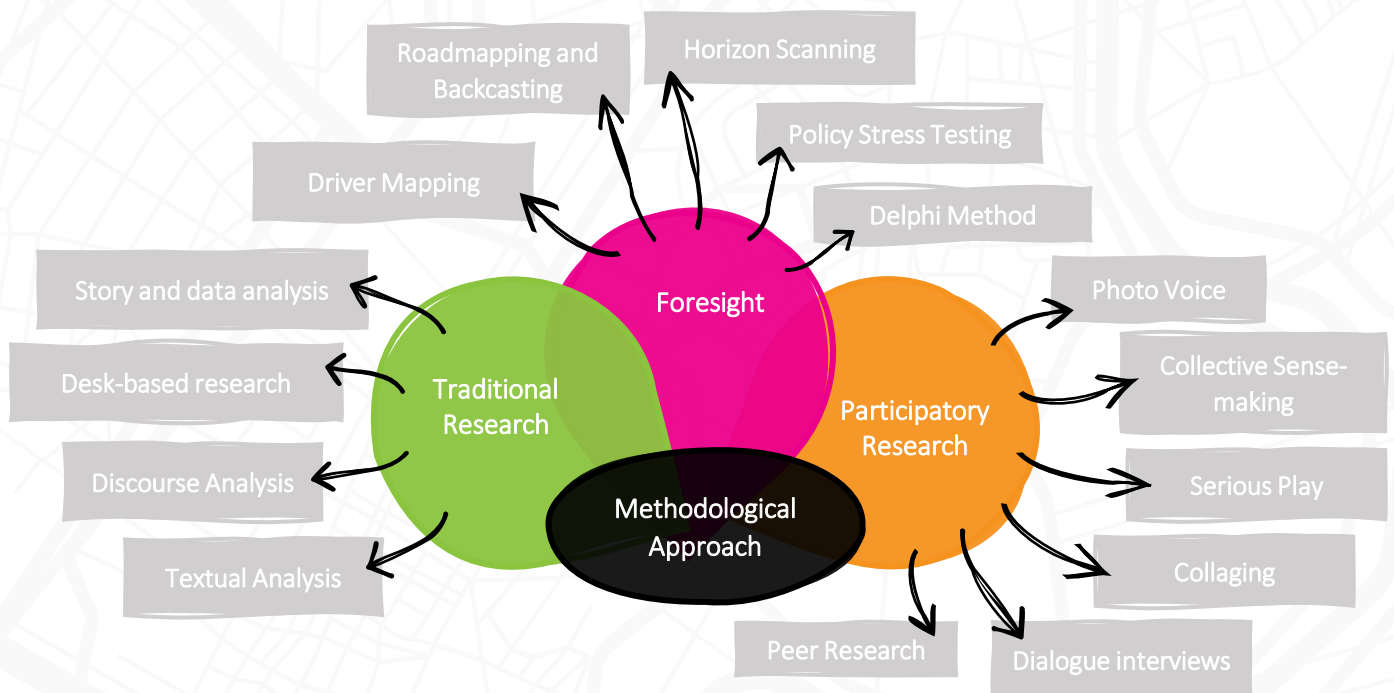


Table 3.4 below provides a summary of the foresight activities that have taken place in this project, the locations and who participated in them.

Table 3.4: Summary of foresight activities in EUARENAS

Method	Activity	Location(s)	Participants
Media Discourses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 examples of local/region and national traditional media content focused on current affairs (i.e. broadcast, print etc.) from 5 countries collated and analysed using a media discourse analysis process. 5 sense-making workshops delivered with citizens (in-person and online) 5 reports produced based on results of media discourse analysis and sense-making sessions 	Finland, Germany, Italy, UK, and Poland	<p>Long-term unemployed citizens, senior citizens, citizens from migrant backgrounds, volunteers, students, people identifying as LGBTQ+, young people with ADHD and autism and people whose first language is different from the national language of the workshop’s context.</p> <p>Total: 63 participants</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 examples of traditional media content focused on current affairs (i.e. broadcast, print etc.) that are produced for a pan-European audience collated and analysed using a media discourse analysis process. 2 pan-European sense-making workshops delivered (online) 1 report produced based on results of media discourse analysis and sense-making sessions 	Pan-European	<p>Members of the EUARENAS consortium and scientific and policy advisory boards, external researchers, health and social care professionals, youth workers, policy advisors and citizens.</p> <p>Total: 28 participants</p>
Lived Experience Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 lived experience storytelling and future-thinking workshops held (in-person and online) 33 lived experience stories gathered and review sheets completed 3 reports produced based on results of the lived experience storytelling and future-thinking workshops and formal story review process 	Reggio Emilia, Italy	<p>Mixed gender citizens who are involved in participatory democracy and voluntary associations within Reggio Emilia.</p> <p>Total: 13 participants.</p>
		Võru, Estonia	<p>Young people.</p> <p>Total: 10 participants.</p>
		Gdańsk, Poland	<p>Heterogenous group of citizens - represented demographics including people from different social classes, different education levels, people with intellectual disabilities, people with different political views, ages, genders and nationalities.</p> <p>Total: 12 participants.</p>

<p>Social Media Signals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 individual studies completed that (a) reviewed over 200 social media posts from grassroots movements/activists working in fields connected to democracy and (b) worked with 4 groups of experts as part of a Delphi survey to ascertain the learning about the future of democracy from the social media posts • 4 reports produced based on review of social media content and questionnaires from the Delphi study 	<p>UK, Finland, Poland, Italy, Hungary, Portugal</p>	<p>Researchers from a range of academic disciplines (i.e., social innovation, economy, sociology, politics, geography), local government administration workers, civil rights activists, NGO leaders, community workers, policy advisers, local politicians/Mayor, cultural workers, local forum leaders and an architect (specialising in participatory planning).</p> <p>Total: 22 participants</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x future scenarios produced on the future of democracy in Europe based on results of the above activity • 1 policy stress testing activity undertaken via questionnaire format 	<p>Pan-European (online)</p>	<p>Researchers, Community Workers and Activists from Finland, Poland, Germany, UK, and The Netherlands.</p> <p>Total: 7 participants.</p>
<p>Future Scenarios Workshops</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 future scenarios workshops undertaken in 5 different locations. Visioning methods used in the workshops including photovoice, serious play and collaging. • 5 reports produced based on the future scenarios workshops 	<p>Germany, Finland, Estonia, Italy, Poland</p>	<p>Local civil society works, local administration workers, older people, people from migrant communities (including refugees and asylum seekers), social workers, young people, students, policymaker, activists, elected local representatives (political and civil), strategic leaders and local residents.</p> <p>Total: 233 participants.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 future scenarios workshop undertaken using the insights from the 5 local workshops as stimuli. Methods adopted in the session were group synthesis, serious play and backcasting. 	<p>Pan-European (held in-person in Berlin)</p>	<p>Berlin residents, workers in local administrations/Government, civil society professionals, academics, practitioners in deliberative methods and members of the EUARENAS consortium.</p> <p>Total: 45 participants.</p>

As the table above depicts, 433 participants from across academia, services, policy and communities contributed to the foresight research activities. The insights and ideas from these participatory research activities are presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.



CHANGE IS ON THE HORIZON

Present day signals for future trajectories
in democracy

4. Change is on the horizon: Present day signals for future trajectories in democracy

Before we begin to explore the future of democracy - we must start with the present and understand the current scenario. Within the mixed-methodological approaches used in phases 1 - 3 of the foresight research, a set of findings on the 'state of play' of democracy in various locations in Europe and on a pan-European level were identified. This chapter synthesises the findings from the media discourses, lived experience storytelling and social media analysis foresight activities and puts forward a set of present-day signals for future trajectories in democracy.

Democracy in Europe: State of play

What is the media talking about?

Given the date on which the media discourse research was undertaken, it is unsurprising that the **COVID-19 pandemic** was a frequent topic of conversation in the media sources analysed. Of particular relevance was the impact that COVID-19 has had on specific demographics as a result of ineffective responses from government and leadership bodies. Within this context, social exclusion was also discussed. One article highlighted how elderly people in Poland have become more isolated and excluded from society because of ill-thought-out strategies implemented by senior decision-makers in response to the rising number of cases. Such wider contextual considerations are relevant to our understanding of democracy in the sense that a lack of trust with decision-making regarding the pandemic impacts how people feel about democracy and their trust in governance systems more broadly.

"The elderly live isolated lives. They are socially, culturally and psychologically excluded from society and most significantly, they are excluded from the health care system."

Quote from *Polityka* article (Poland)

The **connection between globalisation and climate change** was another theme which emerged from the analysis of the media content. In Italy, the discourse highlighted that a lack of economic, environmental,

"As a result of globalisation, widespread industrialisation has undergone drastic change, in recent years 80% of wood arrives as semi-finished products from other countries."

Quote from *OFFICINA* article (Italy)

and social sustainability had led to the breakdown of communities. The importation of resources from overseas has contributed to the breakdown of local industries and job losses. This has been amplified by the lack of consultation with communities and failure to organise retraining programmes, support systems and redevelopment plans. The importance of involving all citizens in plans to combat climate change was another topic explored in the sources. One piece argued that awareness and behavioural changes must exist on a national and personal scale to create real change. The message here was

when people relate to issues on a personal level and can see how adapting their own actions and understandings will benefit themselves – that is when change is most likely to happen. In terms of learning on democracy, we see here the importance of involving people actively in the decisions that will affect their lives, and in translating macro-level issues (i.e., the climate crisis) into micro-level understandings that connect with citizens is key to engaging people in action and change.

"Most scientists agree that a 'paradigm shift' is needed and that we must learn to move in a European and global context, actively participating in major international decarbonization projects and focusing on the most effective, promising and environmentally friendly options."

Quote from *Econopoly* article (Italy)

The relationship between grassroots activism and governmental institutions, and how decision-making and power is dispersed between the two was another key focus area in the media sources. There was debate around whether change should be

led by institutions such as the EU or by grassroots organisations. Some sources argued that participatory democracy is possible in Europe, but only under the control of the EU, whereas others criticized the

“The Conference on the Future of Europe is now in full swing - and it may seem like another frivolous political EU process to some – another shop talk about the EU's future that talks a lot but changes little. But in reality it could be different. If all goes well, the conference could become a milestone in the history of the EU, leading towards a more participatory, more capable and more forward-looking Union.”

Quote from EUOBSERVER article (Pan-European)

institution and raised concern over the need for reform. There were also conversations which explored the efficiency of a bottom-up approach to decision-making processes. Some sources doubted the long-term capabilities of grassroots organisations, favouring the long-standing Commission-Council-Parliament model currently used by the EU. At a more local level, in Gdańsk Poland, participatory budgeting was reported as a form of civic engagement in which residents of the community could put forward suggestions and ask questions to those in power. There was a mixed approach to reporting with some presenting it in a positive light, with case studies of successful implementation in which people representing different political views were brought together. However, one source contradicted these successes and suggested public consultation had been prohibited by the City and its bureaucratic structure.

Another topic which stood out was political engagement, particularly in reference to young people. In the UK media, increasing disillusionment within young people of colour for the traditional political parties was explored. In particular, Labour’s failure to actively acknowledge and engage with current social movements and action meaningful change to counteract racism in the UK has caused many young voters to rethink which party to support. The article explored how the leaders of political parties significantly impact voters’ decision to back a party. From the sources examined, ineffective and unclear leadership is seen as what leads voters seeking alternative parties, even those on different ends of the political spectrum. It was indicated that, whilst young people may be disillusioned from traditional power structures, the discourse did suggest that they are still engaged in social issues, protest and activism. This might not necessarily be displayed through formal voting practices but in grassroots activities. Again, within these discourses, distrust of current governance systems and the status quo is visible. Yet despite this, there is also a sense of an emergence of, and appetite for, citizen change-making processes that can influence and inform traditional decision-making processes.

“Activists want public consultations regarding the forest at the pier in Brzeźno. The city replies that the legislation does not allow such consultations. The Green Wave calls the Gdańsk magistrate's decision a ‘scandal’, and the authorities' action ‘lawlessness.’”

Quote from Gazeta Wyborcza article (Poland)

“According to Salome, a failure to confront anti-Black racism and a lack of an active pitch to Black voters is taking its toll. “It’s this thing of taking us for granted,” she says. “Eventually, the party will lose young [Black] voters — I’ve already got older relatives and friends who have been voting Conservatives for the past couple of elections.”

Quote from gal-dem article (United Kingdom)

despite this, there is also a sense of an emergence of, and appetite for, citizen change-making processes that can influence and inform traditional decision-making processes.

What are people’s lived experiences of democracy?

In **Võru, Estonia**, The Development Centre of Võru County worked with young people from the local area to explore their experiences of and visions for democracy. The stories demonstrate that the young people participate in a number of different activities and initiatives which have allowed them to express their opinions and engage with democracy. Regular youth cafés are places where young people can discuss and highlight interests and concerns. Each year, a larger participatory café is held for young people in Võru County, where they talk about democracy,

“I am very active in youth movements. I would like to encourage people to be more open-minded, to listen more and to feel free, to be innovative, but also keep our traditions.”

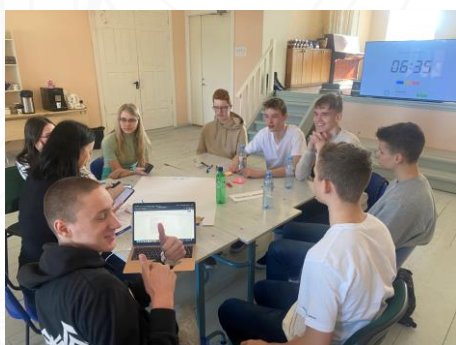
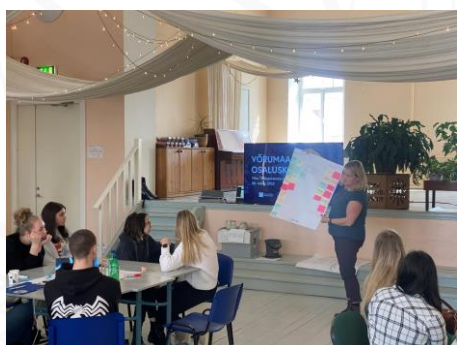
Quote from a young person (Estonia)

“We have mostly elderly people doing politics, they don’t want to invite young people to speak and young people do not go to speak with them.”

Quote from a young person (Estonia)

elections to European Parliament, deliberative democracy and people's voices. The student government is another platform which has provided young people with the means to have their say. Võru City Council has also formed a youth committee at the city council. From the stories, it is clear that young people are keen to be initiators of new ideas and want to be heard as opposed to being labelled or denigrated.

The stories show that young people are keen to discuss and provide input on the field of education and have a curiosity in being involved in the preparation of community events. Young people also spoke about how they want to understand more about how local government works and get involved in community activities. They also emphasised the desire for support and understanding from older members of the community and decision-makers while maintaining their own level of autonomy.



Citizen Storytelling and Future Thinking Workshop in Voru, Estonia

In **Gdańsk, Poland**, the City of Gdańsk worked with a diverse group of adults to examine how they engage with democracy and how this could be improved with the area. They expressed how the meeting for some of them provided an opportunity to express themselves for the first time about democracy and its role in their lives. The participants’ discussion explored different themes of democracy, the main focus being on equal access to democratic tools and being treated equitably and fairly. The participants spoke about their own willingness to be involved in democratic processes and emphasised the importance of other citizens also

“I saw that my decisions, i.e. [my involvement in] the so-called grassroots initiatives, means that I can also make a difference.”

Quote from a resident (Poland)

“There is a lack of empathy, lack of conversation, lack of cooperation between institutions. This is something that doesn’t work. A system is totally failing, which instead of helping it does harm.”

Quote from a resident (Poland)

being included. The participants also discussed the conditions that must be met by a democratic system in order for it to be accessible to all citizens, taking into account the rights of minoritized groups. The group highlighted how the tools of participatory and deliberative democracy should cater for everyone's needs, taking into account their particular educational, social, and cognitive needs to ensure that everyone is heard and receives true representation. The

stories show that more work needs to be done to increase collaboration between different institutions and the people they serve. At the moment, the lack of cooperation is contributing to harm being done to citizens. Additionally, it was mentioned that the role of education in encouraging engagement in democracy should be explored further. One storyteller shared their feelings of disappointment when partaking in traditional methods of democracy, such as local elections, and explained how this can result in

“I did not participate in the second election because I felt that I had put a cross [on the ballot paper] and what next? And for me, the first encounter with democracy was disappointing in the long run. In fact, I felt that nothing was going on with my actions. That as a society we have little influence and it hurt a bit ”

Quote from a resident (Poland)

disappointment due to a feeling of lack of influence. Conversely it was also explored how getting involved with grassroots and community initiatives and staying up to date through podcasts and other accessible media formats offers an alternative route to engaging with democracy.



Citizen Storytelling and Future Thinking Workshop in Gdansk, Poland

In **Reggio Emilia**, Italy, Comune Di Reggio Emilia delivered an online workshop with citizens currently involved in voluntary associations and who are active in their communities. From the stories, it is clear that

“We need IT tools, technology and people to empower citizens, we need to create containers in which, through technology and the will of the people, we can involve them in decision-making.”

Quote from a community volunteer (Italy)

group members engage in democratic processes on a neighbourhood scale, promoting communities of practice and displaying a constructive and critical way of thinking. One theme which emerged was how technology could be harnessed as a tool for engaging more citizens. One storyteller highlighted how there is a need for tech to be used to empower more citizens and, if this were to happen, people who have the will to engage, but maybe not the means, could be more involved with decision-making. They also mention that improving work around inclusion within democratic strategy would allow the skills and contributions of citizens to be fully realised. The main point was that people have the experience and desire to be involved in political

processes. However, barriers in the form of disempowerment and the exclusive nature of democracy in its current state deters and prevents people from doing so. Another conversation which emerged from the stories was around the complexity of democracy and how much energy it takes to understand how it works and engage with processes, which, in turn, leads to disengagement. The complex and bureaucratic nature of democracy means that citizens often find it difficult to fully understand the processes involved. Attempting to understand not only requires large amounts of time and energy, but without formal education around democracy, it is difficult to know where to start.

“Democracy is not grasped by citizens. Citizens do not grasp it out of tiredness and indifference. It is difficult to participate. The great difficulty is to pierce indifference, we have to break this self-perpetuating circle”

Quote from a community volunteer (Italy)

Furthermore, the lack of inclusion and sense of change contributes to indifference and leads people to question the influence their role has within democratic systems. What one storyteller believes is that more

“Many foreign people in our area do not participate [in elections] except through their associations, so they are not represented, and we should open up to them as well.”

Quote from a community volunteer (Italy)

work should be done to break these negative cycles of complacency in order to encourage more people to actively take on their role as engaged citizens within the current democratic system. Difficulties in voting eligibility is another topic which was discussed in the stories. Specifically, the fact that someone may be a resident of a community, but if they do not have Italian citizenship they cannot participate in elections and voting processes. The group was conscious of people within

their community who lacked citizenship, who also lacked a voice in political processes and democratic arenas. The storytellers were keen to open up processes and provide migrants and non-nationals with representation, as they contribute to the community similarly to how someone with citizenship would and so deserve to have their voices heard. People who are nationals of other countries are involved through associations, so the desire to have a say is present, but the means are not provided. On a general scale there is a need for true representation of diverse communities in local councils, and from people in positions of power. In the current climate, the same type of people consistently put themselves forward and are successful in securing roles within the democratic system. People who have had negative experiences of engaging with democracy in the past, or have lost faith in the processes which exist, struggle to re-engage in organising and participating. Marginalised groups and citizens who encounter barriers to engagement need to be supported in order to effectively engage with processes and have their voices heard.

“To be effective, the councils must be representative of all contexts. The risk is that we just represent ourselves.

Quote from a community volunteer (Italy)

The key insights from these citizen experiences of democracy are:

- **Young people aren't being listened to:** There is a significant number of young people who are passionate about democracy and want to have their voices heard, but more needs to be done to ensure they have access to opportunities for meaningful engagement and chances to influence change. There should also be more work carried out in schools and within the education system to educate young people on democratic processes, as well as methods of engaging them through grassroots initiatives. Older members of society should acknowledge the important role young people play within the democratic system and be open to sharing power and influence to ensure equal representation.
- **People who do not have 'citizenship' are usually excluded from formal democratic processes:** Municipalities should look at how these people can be more active and involved in local decision-making in order to create communities in which all people feel as if they belong and are stakeholders.
- **There is a gap in communication and connection between different sections of society:** In order for power and responsibility to be shared and better representation to be achieved, more should be done to develop connections and increase collaboration between formal institutions, grassroots initiatives and citizens not currently engaged in democracy.
- **Technology isn't currently being used to its full potential:** There was little mention of how technology is currently being used to improve democratic inclusion. People highlighted that research into how tech could be used as a tool for positive change is needed and could result in a more accessible democratic processes.

What is happening in activism?

Table 4.0 on the next page summarises the learning points connected to democracy based on the social media analysis of posts from grassroots and activist organisations. This learning is more 'future focused' than the media discourses and storytelling activities, due to the nature of the social media accounts analysed - i.e., posts from activist and grassroots organisations that are focused on change-making. The learning identifies a number of ideas and signals of change.

Table 4.0: Summary of key learning identified in the analysis of grassroots and activist organisations social media posts

Location(s)	Signals of and ideas for change in democracy
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage people in democratic action, inclusive language is needed (e.g., language that is simplified, jargon-free and not academic) • There should be an emphasis on independent voices sharing stories and lived experience • Co-production is a tool for enabling participatory democracy • A joining up of grassroots movements and more mainstream democratic organisations is needed to progress agendas • An emphasis on calls to action is and should be placed, not just awareness-raising
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are rising demands for equality, inclusiveness, sustainability, holistic approaches • Calls for education on critical thinking exist within the posts - this can support people to navigate information and media content more effectively • There is a polarisation of political views on social media sites as they are used as opinion-sharing platforms, rather than spaces for public fora. Exchanges of ideas are possible, and it is apt to look at how technology like social media can create public fora style spaces
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of inclusive language in social media on democracy - to engage with the general public it was felt that posts should be simple, not academic, gender-equal • Sentiment of a lack of trust in any type of media and in governance structures - this was also expressed by the experts themselves • The content identified a strongly polarised “discussion” concerning democracy and participation or even lack of discussion, • The posts highlighted a sense that talking was not enough, action needed to be taken - there was an urgency around this • Financial crisis and the war in Ukraine make it seem less possible for citizens to engage in participation and co-governance
Multi-location study (Italy, Hungary, Portugal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local administrations need to mirror the bottom-up process of citizen engagement displayed by associations, neighbourhood committees and active civic initiatives. • Volunteers should be recognised with rewards or pay back schemes - leveraging from local administration is not enough • Participatory practices and civic initiatives are focused largely on urban parks or the management of the green areas - these need to spread to all aspects of the community. • More education is needed to help utilise social media as an effective means of building campaigns

Drivers of change and future trajectories

From this varied source material on the state of play of democracy in Europe, we have identified a number of drivers of change that are likely to bear influence on the future trajectories of democracy in the continent. Table 4.1 details these drivers of change utilising the PESTLE framework and how they could impact on the future trajectories of democracy.

Table 4.1: Drivers of change relevant to democracy in Europe

PESTLE Category	Drivers of Change	Potential impact on future trajectories of democracy
Political	Lack of trust in governance systems and decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter apathy and low turnout • Lack of engagement from public and civil society in decision-making, top-down change-making and local governance • Communities self-organising and creating change outside of existing systems
	Polarisation of political views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of nuance debate, empathy and understanding leading to divisions and entrenchment of positions • Continued prevalence of populism • Competing priorities between different political leaders disabling working together and long-term thinking (i.e., restricted to political life-cycles)
Economic	Ongoing impact of COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time and resources to commit to democratic participation and organisation • Lack of funding available for participatory and deliberative activities • Lack of funding for education on active citizen, democratic engagement etc.
Social	The emergence of, and appetite for citizen change-making processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for citizens to influence and inform traditional decision-making processes • Opportunity to change existing system and to reimagine and build different governance systems • Formalised collaboration between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities • Opportunities for mainstreaming education around grassroots democracy and less traditional methods of participation to increase awareness of how these can influence change <p>Co-production as a tool for enabling participatory democracy</p>
	A shift between old, hierarchical power structures towards new, more horizontal power structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to change existing system and to reimagine and build different governance systems • Formalised collaboration between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities • Opportunities for mainstreaming education around grassroots democracy and less traditional methods of participation to increase awareness of how these can influence change • Opportunity to create effective human connection between people in positions of power within formal democratic institutions and the communities and neighbourhoods
	Ongoing impact of COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exacerbated deep-rooted inequalities, worsening structural issues to participation in democracy
Technological	Increasing circulation of 'fake news' and false information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence on public views, beliefs and actions • Lack of top-down control on 'news agenda' • Same technology could be used to diversify voices and perspectives in debates and for education and awareness raising

	<p>Failure to utilise technology as a tool for improving democratic engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing an opportunity to include voices who may not be heard • Opportunity for further investment in technology, as well as research into how this can be used as a tool for increasing participation in democracy and decision-making by enabling people to participate at times suitable for them
<p>Legal</p>	<p>A shift between old, hierarchical power structures towards new, more horizontal power structures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation may need to be changed to accommodate these changes or to progress them formally
	<p>Increasing circulation of 'fake news' and false information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New legislative environment is needed to address this issue - current provision is ineffective
<p>Environmental</p>	<p>Climate crisis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key issue that will continue to be prevalent in our future and will impact on all other areas of the PESTLE framework



FUTURE VISIONS



Cities as spaces for strengthening engagement and participation in democracy

5. Future Visions: Cities as spaces for strengthening engagement and participation in democracy

In cities in Poland, Estonia, Italy, Finland and Germany, local future scenario workshops took place in which residents and various actors within the cities' structure (community leaders, service leaders, businesses local administration and government) used 'state of play' stimuli gathered during this work from local and pan-European levels to explore visions for the future of their city connected to democracy. Specific details about these workshops are as follows:

- **Workshop 1 - Gdańsk, Poland:** This workshop was facilitated by Gdańsk City Hall at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk. This workshop focused on young people's present and future attitudes towards democracy, social participation and decision-making, and the overall future of the City. 13 people aged between 15 and 26 took part in the session. The majority of the participants were high school or university students.
- **Workshop 2 - Võru, Estonia:** The workshop was held as part of a seminar for updating the development strategy of Võru County. 50 people took part in the event, including people from the municipalities, citizen representatives, council members of the development centre, leaders and members of the County Development Strategy Working Group and residents.
- **Workshop 3 - Reggio Emilia, Italy:** The municipality of Reggio Emilia and a local foundation organised the workshop. It was a space in which residents and people connected to the governance of the city could (1) examine the underlying problem and issues facing the area and (2) use these to create visions for how democracy at a local level could be enhanced through working with citizens. In total, 110 participants took part in the workshop. They were made-up of citizens, policymakers, civil society activists, and newly-elected Consultee members. This group was 52% male and 48% female. The average age of participants was 47.6 years old.
- **Workshop 4 - Helsinki, Finland:** The University of Eastern Finland in collaboration with the City of Helsinki (Borough Liaison Officers) and the Finnish Environment Centre (SYKE) delivered the workshop in the sub-neighbourhood of Kannelmäki in northern Helsinki. 45 people participated. They were mostly residents of Kannelmäki and but also included 5 participants from local civil society organisations and the local administration. Participants were mostly from older age cohorts, but some younger people were present. There were 3 non-Finnish speaking participants.
- **Workshop 5 - Berlin, Germany:** Comparative Research Network e.V., a local NGO, delivered the workshop in the Wedding neighbourhood in Berlin. There was a specific emphasis on engaging with residents who do not speak German and who are from migrant background, and thus are usually excluded from local democracy. 15 participants were involved who lived or worked in Wedding. The age range was 15 to 67-years-old.

The results of these workshops are detailed below as 'future stories'. These stories and other insights and ideas from the workshops were used at a pan-European future scenario workshop held in Berlin, Germany (May 2023). The pan-European 'future story' is described beneath the local vision and is depicted in the EUARENAS City of the Future visualisation (see Chapter 7 for further details). This chapter concludes with the key policy/legal, governance (political and administrative), civil society, physical environment, socio-cultural changes, technological and economic changes that need to take place in order to create these future visions.

City Level Future Visions

Young people as leaders in creating cities of wellbeing (Gdańsk, Poland)

The future looks bleak. Residents of Gdańsk don't feel well and need rest. They work long hours and the

natural environment is disappearing under mounds of garbage. The sea levels are rising and waves regularly crash down on the city's boundaries, destroying what they hit. Large residential skyscrapers are blocking out natural light and cameras monitor citizens' activities from every angle. Financial gains take precedence over quality of life and has led to inaction in addressing society's problems.



Future Scenario Workshop in Gdansk, Poland

But all is not lost. Young people have come together to create a better world and reverse the poor decision-making of previous generations. They are running activities to show that another way of life is possible - one that values people's wellbeing. These activities educate people on speaking-up, are places to get help on how to find better a work-life balance and how they can play an active role in making the city a better place to live. The activities show people the benefits of diversity and difference in problem-solving. They show what young people can do to revitalize democracy and can contribute to address society's challenges.

Aspiration, joy, opportunity and cultural heritage (Voru, Estonia)

Võru County is a place of aspiring and joyous people. It is known for its numerous possibilities and distinct cultural heritage. This has been achieved by our County Development Strategy. The Strategy is an agreement between county residents, municipalities, companies and organizations that states that they will contribute to a set of agreed goals. Contributions are made through working together via:

1. the county's local governments implementing the county's goals
2. partners who ensure activities in their field that are necessary for the sustainable development of the county.
3. the non-profit sector with their activities contributing to the provision of services that better living conditions for residents and through being connectors of communities



Future Scenario Workshop in Voru, Estonia

The strategy is underpinned by ensuring positive representation of the county. This hooks in residents who want to see their home portrayed well and thus make contributions to the goals. The County Development Centre is the initiator of activities and the catalyst for planning new developments.

Community, connection, trust, and open exchange (Reggio Emilia, Italy)

Reggio Emilia has a strong sense of community, connection, trust, and open exchange among its citizens. This has been built by using insights and ideas from residents to directly inform actions taken by the City. People can see their ‘voice’ influencing decisions. Apathy has decreased because residents are aware of how they can affect change in their community.



Future Scenario Workshop in Reggio Emilia, Italy

Specific activities that take place are public assemblies, focus groups, small projects that promote active citizenship and training events that build skills in civic participation. These activities create a welcoming community and people are more motivated to create neighbourhoods that are better places to live. People are looking after the environment more, and volunteering and youth participation have increased. The City looks at what is working in civic participation and actively removes barriers for those who are currently excluded. A specific focus has been on involving people without citizenship in local decision-making, so that their voices and ideas are valued by the City and its residents.

Valuing and preserving the natural, social and cultural environment (Helsinki, Finland)

Kannelmäki in the future is a greener place to live. We’ve retained our green spaces and safeguarded our natural environment as we’ve developed our neighbourhood in sustainable and environmentally friendly ways. The new buildings we’ve created are only a few stories high and we’ve introduced noise mitigation measures for the motorway to support residents’ overall wellbeing.



Future Scenario Workshop in Helsinki, Finland

The health centre and day centre are still serving our community, offering local services to people in the area. The new street lighting makes residents feel safe exploring their neighbourhood and the benches provided spaces for people to rest and to sit and talk.

The area is vibrant and the main market square – Sitratori – is the “centre” of the neighbourhood. In this space, and others, there are often public, cultural events that bring together residents of different ages. These events help us to foster new connections with other residents and these spaces help to create a sense of civic duty. The volunteering culture is strong in our neighbourhood.

Education, dialogue and bridging divides (Berlin, Germany)

Berlin’s districts have strong community infrastructures that bring people together to co-create solutions to local issues and link in with other districts for city-wide challenges. Different voices and divergent perspectives are brought together, leading to better problem-solving. Local administration is involved and takes forward the ideas with communities put them into action. This bridges resident voice and decision-making and motivates Berliners to get more involved in their communities. Through this, Berliners get to know people who are different to them. People do not fear difference and we are moving away from creating ‘safe spaces’ into creating a safe city.



Future Scenario Workshop in Berlin, Germany

The city fights disinformation through formal and informal education. This supports residents to think in anti-racist ways and make better decisions about their environmental impact. This has led to public-pressure to create more social housing for displaced citizens in Berlin and better, affordable public transport. In turn this has improved the air quality in the city by reducing the need for cars.

The future is now (Pan-European Vision)

The City is based on liberating structures that are not only visible in the City’s built environment but also within the relationships between people, organisations and institutions.

At the heart of the City is a sprawling park. This landscape is a hive of activity. Crafted between the trees is sheltered learning space. A University Professor is delivering a talk on the opportunities and threats of artificial intelligence. The learners are working together with the Professor to decide how they share and use this knowledge. Nearby, people have gathered in the outdoor community cinema space watching an animated fictional film about a child with Autism who goes on an adventure to a new City. By the side of the river, a bandstand is housing musical performances from newcomers to the City - the sounds filter through the surroundings.



Participants building and presenting their visions for participatory spaces in the Pan-European Future Scenario Workshop in Berlin, Germany

From the park, nature flows through the City - connecting and running through the districts that create the City's ecosystem. Elsewhere, on a piece of wasteland, politicians and civil service staff are sat in a circle on seats fashioned from the tyres and breeze blocks that have been dumped on the land. They are discussing what to do with the land. Some residents feel it needs to be used for new, affordable, well-insulated housing with solar panels and heat pumps. Others feel it should be a communal allotment for the existing residents. An architect is listening and drawing sketches of these ideas. They are working out ways to combine them. Further down the pathway, a playground has been built using recycled materials. Each piece of equipment needs at least two children to participate in it to make it work; it has been designed to foster collaboration through play.

In a prominent square in the City is the City Hall. Large bi-folding doors open its ground floor space to the public, seamlessly connecting the pavement into its interior. Within this space are various seating areas and information displays about what is happening in the city and how people can be involved. The information is in text and audio, with technology translating into a variety of languages used by the City's population. Civil service professionals are talking 1-2-1 with residents in the space, using the information in the space and portable digital tools to help them navigate the various processes and services that will help them address the challenges they are facing. Appointments are not needed in this space and the opening hours extend beyond usual office hours.

In the square outside a demonstration led by young people is taking place. They are protesting against surveillance methods proposed by the City's administration. Speakers have been invited to use the public platform stage in the square to present their perspectives. Above, the windows of the City Hall are open so the ideas and concerns can flow into the building. A number of politicians have come out from the City Hall and are talking with the young people who are a part of the demonstration. Shoppers stop to listen to the talks as they go about their daily business, and some decide to sit down and talk to other residents. Nearby, a water fountain and public lavatories provide the means for people to stay a little longer than they'd imagined.

Across the river, a woman using a wheelchair takes the lift down to the metro station. As she is buying her travel ticket, she is offered a reduced fair for participating in a short survey about plans for revising the metro service. Outside, a digital display is showcasing recent actions taken by the local administration

based on engagement with residents and local news from different communities. The display uses minimal text, communicating largely through visuals. There is an option to scan an icon to hear the updates as audio descriptions or as a fuller text report in a variety of languages. Similar displays, voting mechanisms and incentives are incorporated throughout the City’s public transport system.



EUARENAS City of the Future. Illustration by Lizzy Doe.
The full visualisation can be found on section 7. Key links

In a corner of the City are a set of unused industrial buildings, reminders of the City’s past. Within them a group of residents are experimenting with how they can be repurposed or temporarily used to meet the needs of the City’s people. In one building, a temporary art gallery has been set up with work from independent artists. Outside, on a picnic table with parasol, a human library activity is taking place exploring migration. It is disrupted momentarily by a resident who feels the activity is excluding them and their stories. A Convenor intervenes and talks to the person about this. As you look at the industrial buildings, you realise that they gradually move from the ad-hoc into more longer-term usages. A formerly ‘pop-up’ clothes swap shop now has a permanent residence, a community café that uses locally produced food is open at regular times and an education space has been decorated by local residents. Gradually, the buildings are coming back to life and people are working together to find solutions.

This vision for the future is not out of reach. The ideas in it are already starting to happen around us. We need to mainstream them and embed them into our cities. The future is now.

Key Changes Required

Table 5.1 on the next page details the specific changes identified in these workshops in order for the visions to be brought to life.

Table 5.1: Key changes needed in order to create future visions

Future Vision	Policy/Legal	Governance	Civil Society	Physical Environment	Socio-cultural	Technological	Economic
Gdańsk, Poland	Develop City-wide strategies and specific ways of working that involve young people in policymaking	Appoint a student ombudsman	-	Deliver youth voice engagement activities in spaces where young people already are (e.g. shopping centres)	-	Advance the Citizens' Card System by adding elements specific to 'youth' and 'volunteering' that gives young people access to various benefits to incentivize civic participation	
Võru, Estonia	-	Identify key specialists and experts to involve in the work and support its governance	Engage more volunteers to help bring the vision to life	-	Be more outward looking - learn more from existing practices and projects from beyond our setting	Ensure that people have the time and resources to be able to contribute via exploring remote working opportunities to help people to contribute	
Reggio Emilia, Italy	Create ways for people without citizenship to meaningfully take part in democratic life	Administration must be ready to listen Concrete actions from citizen engagement must be taken to build trust	NGOs feel recognized in decision-making arenas AND take on responsibilities for engaging with diverse groups in society	-	-	Tools developed that overcome barriers to participation such as age and language skills – they should not reinforce exclusion	-
Helsinki, Finland	-	Decision-making for the long-term City genuinely listening to residents Transparent processes	More voluntary work Community clean-up events Cultural events held communally that speak to different ages	Preservation of existing urban fabric More benches in public spaces	Better integration of migrant communities	-	-

<p>Berlin, Germany</p>	<p>Voting rights from the age of 16</p>	<p>More local neighbourhood councils, voting spaces</p> <p>Less bureaucracy, easier access to administrative appointments and clarity on decisions made</p>	<p>Funding directed towards activism, population education & locally-led projects</p>	<p>Enhancing public transport routes</p> <p>More trees, parks, green and play areas</p> <p>Spaces for people to sit and bike spaces</p> <p>Improved street lighting</p>	<p>Enhancing mental health and wellbeing support, particularly for people under 18</p> <p>More mixed-age housing & living</p>		<p>Lower rents and more flats to address the housing crisis</p>
<p>Pan-European</p>	<p>Life-long policies</p> <p>Focus on active social policies, not just monetary support for communities</p> <p>Regulation of housing on social need</p>	<p>Involving different voices and community ideas in decision-making, and valuing diversity</p> <p>Transparency of decision making</p> <p>Permission for spontaneous experiments by people and groups outside of governance structures</p>	<p>Use of external facilitation to bring together communities and perspectives</p>	<p>Adapting public spaces to local community needs and collaborative design of the evolution of neighbourhoods</p> <p>Prioritising nature in design of spaces and neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Eco-systemic thinking</p>	<p>Finding a better balance between culture, health and technology</p>	<p>Increasing public ownership of spaces and access to private space</p> <p>Housing not to be a market product but a core resident right</p>



FROM VISION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Creating a more equitable and inclusive democratic landscape

6. From Vision to Implementation: Creating a more equitable and inclusive democratic landscape

The European Democracy Action Plan (2020) aims to “empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU” (European Commission, 2020a). It was created to address challenges to democracy such as rising extremism, electoral interference and disinformation and perceived distance between people and politicians. The European Democracy Action Plan (2020) has three key pillars to help it to meet its ambitions:

- The promotion of free and fair elections
- The strengthening of media freedom and pluralism
- The countering of disinformation (ibid)

Since the action plan’s creation, further democratic challenges can be added to this macro level list - not least the invasion of Ukraine. Within the foresight activities undertaken in EUARENAS looking predominantly at local level democracy a number of challenges were also identified. Table 6.1 below thematically summarises these key challenges. We’ve highlighted the challenges that directly relate to the context of the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) creation and the core pillars. Table 6.1 also details some of the core opportunities (or ideas) for addressing these challenges that have emerged from this work. The opportunities that directly relate to the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) are in pink.

Table 6.1: EUARENAS Challenges and Opportunities for Local Democracy in Europe

Theme	Challenges	Opportunities
Inclusion and Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes. • Lack of opportunities for migrant and non-citizen communities to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education around grassroots democracy and less traditional methods of participation to increase awareness of how these can influence change. • Funding for initiatives that provide a platform for minoritized groups (e.g., migrant communities), to have their voices listened to and acted upon.
Structures and Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of collaboration between grassroots initiatives and formal democratic institutions • Conflict between old, hierarchical power structures and emerging horizontal or grassroots power structures • Lack of trust in existing governance structures and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The emergence of, and appetite for citizen change-making processes that can influence and inform traditional decision-making processes • Formalised collaboration between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities
Changes in Society and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polarisation of political views • Influence of digital technologies on what/how ‘information’ is produced and shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating spaces for dialogue and networking for people with divergent perspectives - focusing on understanding rather than consensus • Increasing digital literacy of the public and counter disinformation through education around critical thinking skills

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The busyness of everyday people’s lives, (i.e., working hours, care-giving commitments, commutes etc.) coupled with level of energy and commitment required to understand and engage with democracy and politics is a barrier that is often overlooked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilising technological advances and everyday digital tools as conduits for democratic engagement - enabling people to participate at times suitable for them.
External/Wider Contextual Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of COVID-19 and exacerbation of existing inequalities Environmental crisis and exacerbation of existing inequalities War in/invasion of Ukraine Media ownership and relationship with political systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing media literacy of the public and embrace digital technologies as a mean of encouraging people to access a range of media outlets Strengthen media pluralism through exploitation of digital technologies as a means of diversifying the voices present in media and the content that is created

As the table identifies, there are a number of challenges and also opportunities that are beyond the remit of the European Democracy Action Plan (2020). The focus of the plan is largely on information and media, which is understandable given the disruption that technology and ownership has had on the type of content and views society is accessing, and the fluid ways in which information and media now circulates. However, as Table 6.1 above indicates, democracy in Europe is facing other challenges. We would therefore propose that revisiting the action plan and widening its focus beyond media and information, and establishing core pillars that relate to the two broad domains of:

- Equitable Participation: Objectives relating to the structural, educational and legal barriers to people’s engagement in democracy; and
- Collaborative Working Practices: Objectives relating to how communities, organisations and institutions work together to strengthen democracy

would be beneficial to support the strengthening of democracy at a European level. Furthermore, during policy-stress testing activities in EUARENAS, it was highlighted that whilst the objective on ‘strengthening of media freedom and pluralism’ is warranted, the need for new spaces and media platforms shouldn’t necessarily be focussed on quantity but rather quality. These new arenas for conversation should have the ability to open up dialogue between groups that often do not interact with each other and can become siloed. As one expert commented during the process:

“Media pluralism is not the construction of new media channels for all groups that want to channel their ideas in the public sphere. Media pluralism is about the ability to become a true public sphere again, with discussion of democratic debate.”

Furthermore, in relation to the objective on ‘countering of disinformation’, this is not necessarily always needed in a top-down legislative way but instead via the creation of connections. As one expert commented:

“It is necessary to develop new solidarities and connections between groups so that disinformation will be dismantled right away.”

A key message from this policy-stress testing work then, was that by continually creating effective new spaces for democratic dialogue to occur, both online and in person, there would be decreased chances of siloed groups of thinking. This would contribute to increased opportunities for networks of diverse thinkers to grow - leading to a more inclusive democracy.

Strengthening Local Democracy: Core Changes

EUARENAS focuses on revitalising cities as sites for democratic engagement and as such, an emphasis on resident engagement in local democracy and decision-making has been placed. From the future-thinking work conducted, a set of core changes have been identified to enable democracy in Europe - specifically in terms of local democracy - have been identified. These are summarised in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Core changes required to strengthen of local democracy in Europe

Policy/Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for engaging people and communities who are not currently heard and/or visible in decision-making realms are City-wide and embedded in all layers of governance and decision-making structures There are ways for people without citizenship to meaningfully take part in democratic life • People aged 16+ are able to vote • Policies are developed that are life-long, socially progressive and are focused on the long-term
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an ombudsman-style role focused on resident involvement in local decision-making • There is transparency and clarity in decision-making and decision-making is focused on the long-term • There is a culture of listening to communities and divergent and diverse perspectives are involved in those dialogues • Specialist, external support is used were needed to help facilitate change • Trust is built with communities by (1) taking and making visible concrete actions from citizen engagement activities, (2) reducing thresholds to accessing the local administration (i.e., less bureaucracy) and (3) further localising decision-making (i.e., more decisions made at a neighbourhood where applicable)
Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local volunteering infrastructure is used to mobilise communities in the democratic sphere • NGOs become a recognized actor in local decision-making arenas • Funding is directed towards activism, education & locally-led projects • NGOs are given a mandate and responsibilities for engaging with diverse groups in society to reduce the silos and the gaps between them
Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spaces where residents usually access - particularly those who are currently unheard or least visible in local democracy and decision-making - are regularly used as spaces for democratic activities • Public spaces are adapted to local community needs and collaborative design is used to evolve neighbourhoods
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities to be confident in identifying external ideas that can support them to address local issues and how such ideas can be transferred to their area • Communities value different experiences and perspectives, and people with different protected characters and background work together frequently • Adoption and promotion eco-systemic thinking
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology to be used overcome barriers to participation such as age, time and language skills with care taken to ensure such interventions do not reinforce exclusion
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial cost to individuals and local civil society for engagement in local civic action, decision-making and democracy need to be addressed systematically • Decisions made to benefit 'markets' should not have unintended or long-term negative social implications

Creating Equitable Futures in Cities: Core Recommendations

Based on the insights gleaned from EUARENAS future-thinking activities, we would like to propose the following recommendations for cities wanting to strive towards more equitable local democracies:

1. **Address structural barriers to participation:** There are multiple and intertwined structural barriers to people's participation in local decision-making and democracy - some of which are transversal across different locations (i.e., time and resources needed to be able to participate) and others which will be locally specific (i.e., transport provision in rural areas). When moving towards more equitable democratic participation, such issues need to be actively examined and addressed, otherwise equity will never be achieved. Accepting that diversity in decision-making - and the representation of people with the least power and resource in society in decision-making - ultimately leads to fairer and better decision-making for all means that we must ensure that existing and new interventions that seek to enhance participation do not inadvertently impose new or re-impose existing structural inequalities. For example, when adopting methods such as participatory budgeting or citizen assemblies, critical questions need to be asked over whether the ways in which they are being implemented simply give further platform and voice to people who already have scope to influence and inform decision-making, or if they can be used to enable the inclusion of those who are least visible in such spaces? It may be the case that, in order to re-balance existing imbalances in democratic participation, resource, time and focus may need to be directed to where those imbalances lie. This could involve providing funding for initiatives and activities that seek to involve marginalised voices in decision-making. The EUARENAS future-thinking work has identified migrant communities, young people and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds as being key groups in this arena. More so, whilst technology has scope to enable participation in different ways, at times that suit some residents, and address language barriers, we must be careful to navigate digital literacy and access issues when implementing technological interventions to ensure we do not create new or widen further existing fault lines in democratic engagement.
2. **Build relationships of trust:** During the EUARENAS future-thinking activities, a consistent current barrier to enhancing people's involvement in local democracy and decision-making that has been identified is the lack of trust between the different people, organisations and structures in the system. A common thread running through the conversations about the future and the preferred visions for the future created is a need to enhance transparency in these domains. What is preventing this at present has been attributed to (a) competing priorities between different people, organisations and structures that leads to a lack of joined-up thinking and action and (b) a lack of visible action seen based on the input from and consultation with communities by local administrations and connected organisations. Therefore, practical actions that could be taken at a local level to build trust-based relationships between the different actors in local democracy include:
 - Formalising collaborations between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities - i.e., partnership agreements, shared goals and outcomes that are regularly reviewed etc.
 - Reducing the gap between decision-makers and residents by City administrations working with residents who are affected by decisions to make the decisions and making decision-making as local as possible.
 - Ensure that the City administration is (1) ready to listen before engaging residents in dialogue, (2) acts on information and decisions identified in participation and deliberative activities, (3) is open about barriers they are facing to implementation and (4) makes results visible to communities by diversified communication strategies.
3. **Invest in formal and civic education:** As the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) details, disinformation is a key challenge to democracy and education (formal and informal) can be to address

this issue by supporting people to develop critical-thinking and information, digital & media literacy skills. We recommend that this education goes beyond disinformation and into the realms of being 'active citizens'. In both the formal education system and in civic spaces, investment in educating people of their roles as citizens and how they can make active contributions to equitable futures is needed. This may take the form of introducing people to mechanism for grassroots democracy, raising awareness of less traditional methods of participation and strengthening understanding of current system and democratic rights/responsibilities to increase awareness of how such mechanisms and approaches can be used to influence change. It could also involve funding initiatives that enable people to step into their power and begin to create the changes they would like to see in their communities. Furthermore, maintaining and supporting the development of social and cultural spaces in communities is key to creating a sense of civic duty and activating people's participation in their local area.

4. **Make decisions for the long-term:** Decision-making needs to be focused on making long-term progress for cities and their residents. It needs to transcend political life-cycles, immediate economic gains, and short-term 'wins'. Future generations in decision-making should be prioritised, focusing not just on adding to an area but on preserving what currently has value to communities and cities as well. Whilst building on or continuing to resource what already works may circumvent new trends and has the danger of leading to complacency, it does offer the potential to build towards longer-term goals that can support more systemic change, rather than surface-level change. This type of thinking asks decision-making structures to account for the long-term impact of the decisions they facilitate, the benefits of which can support wider challenges beyond democracy that society is facing such as the environmental crisis. An example of legislation that supports such ways of working is the The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that provides "the ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve [Wales'] social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being", despite some difficulties in its implementation (Messham and Sheard, 2020).

A visualisation of these ideas in action can be seen in the **EUARENAS** City of the Future visualisation (see Key Links section). The future represented in this vision is not too far in the distance for us to conceive it being possible. In fact, the future is now – the seeds to create it are already being planted, they just need nurturing by:

- Scaling and **mainstreaming existing pilot or niche practices** that are working locally – whether that be participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies or other smaller-scale projects – so that these become the new 'status quo'
- Adopting **test and learn approaches** to promote experimentation and on-going learning – this will enable ongoing innovation and be responsive to society's needs
- Finding ways of **celebrate and connect-up the small changes** that are taking place - this will help people see that progress is being made, even when it feels like things are changing too slow

KEY LINKS

• Sports & educational spaces are usually mixed

• one now built on FUNCTIONAL spaces

• Free education → NOT A THING (yet!)

• educational culture flows from city center sometimes

• Spaces for (and) play

• Milan → Tough social situations

• Berlin → Community meeting point

• playgrounds ≠ experience in cities

Differences

FUTURE!

7. Key Links

Insight Briefings

- Future Challenges and Opportunities for Democracy across Europe Insight Briefing: A synthesis of the key learning about future challenges and opportunities for democracy from a participatory analysis of traditional print and broadcast media from the across Europe in 2021 - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/insight-briefing-1>
- Pan-European Experiences of Democracy and Visions of the Future Insight Briefing: A synthesis of the key learning from storytelling and future thinking workshops that took place in Gdańsk, Poland, Võru, Estonia and Reggio Emilia, Italy in 2022 - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/insight-briefing-2>
- The Word on the Tweet: Social media signals on the future of democracy Insight Blog: A synthesis of the key learning from horizon-scanning activities using social media posts on the future of democracy in Europe - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/the-word-on-the-tweet-social-media-signals-on-the-future-of-democracy>

Toolkits

- Media Discourse and Foresight Toolkit: A guide that combines media discourse analysis with future-thinking approaches. It supports practitioners from policy, research or services to use media discourses as source material for signals about our future and to explore the drivers of change in society - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/media-discourse-foresight-guide-available-now>
- Lived Experience, Storytelling and Foresight Toolkit: A guide that supports the combining of lived experience stories with future-thinking approaches. It supports practitioners from policy, research or services to use people's stories as source material for signals about our future and to explore possible futures - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/lived-experience-and-foresight-toolkit-now-available>
- Social media and Foresight Toolkit: A guide that supports practitioners from policy, research or services to use social media in future-thinking activities. The toolkit uses social media posts combined with elements of the Delphi method and policy stress testing techniques to explore future trends in society and the policy environments needed for potential future scenarios - <https://www.euarenas.eu/post/social-media-and-foresight-toolkit-available-now>

Visualisation

- EUARENAS City of the Future: A pan-European visualisation for cities of the future that supports residents' participation and inclusion in decision-making and democracy - https://www.euarenas.eu/files/ugd/e14654_17271a821d19446bac8696ffce28baf4.pdf

What is a dialogue interview?

Dialogue interviews don't have a list of questions. Instead they are like conversations between two people. The conversation should be directed by the storyteller so that they set the agenda. The Community Reporter helps to facilitate that conversation.

An opening question (i.e. a conversation starter) is asked which enables the storyteller to start to tell their story / **E.G. What has been your own experience of democracy - on a local, national or pan-European level?**

The Community Reporter recording the story may then ask any questions within this storytelling process that naturally occurs to them / **E.G. Why didn't you feel you listened to at that meeting?**

When the conversation comes to a natural end, the interview and recording stops.



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