

Views on futures literacy from across the EIT Climate KIC Deep Demonstrations

People from EIT Climate KIC – staff, partners, challenge owners, and community stakeholders interviewed each other about their experiences with futures literacy. The following are selected highlights, person by person.

The interviews included three questions: How did you first encounter futures literacy? What is new to you about futures literacy? And, how do you apply futures literacy to your innovation work?

Krzysztof Bilinski

*Systems Innovation Design Manager, EIT Climate KIC Central and Eastern Europe
Part of Just Transformations Deep Demonstration*

First encounter with futures literacy

“It was like a mythical beast that appeared in our work.”

What’s new about futures literacy

“This workshop was not about a certificate, it was something that will pay off in the future straight away. Futures literacy is about innovating public policies and education. It is also about skills to be used in private life. So this is quite a comprehensive and holistic an approach.”

Applying futures literacy at work

“In EIT Climate KIC we are used to ‘hacking the system’. Futures literacy is a great door opener to work with the public sector. I see a great potential [for it] in the industry and sectors that need to reinvent themselves.”

Javier Cañas

Innovation Project Manager, EIT Climate KIC

First encounter with futures literacy

“At the end of the [futures literacy] workshop you realise that you have so many assumptions that you are not even aware of, and then how these assumptions configure the way you see the world, and not only the present moment but the future world.”

What’s new about futures literacy

Thinking about the future you can uncover the assumptions that you have, and how powerful it is just to know that. You can see the present with completely different lenses, just by thinking about the future. And how this can help you to change and see possible actions in the present world to achieve those futures that you desire. At the beginning people always feel a bit uncomfortable, because it really uses a different part of your brain and thought processes. Once you get it and participate, it’s really fun. It’s crazy what things people can imagine when you give them the space and the right mindset to play with it. You often analyse the present in a biased view. So if you can make people aware of their own assumptions, then they can analyse the present in a much richer way. Once they want to think about the

future vision, their mind is much more open to think about many of the possibilities that they normally wouldn't think about, they might think that they went too wild."

Maria Christantoni

*Sustainability Officer, Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund
Part of Resilient, Net-Zero-Emissions Maritime Hubs Deep Demonstration.*

What's new about futures literacy

"During FL training, I started to get used to unfamiliarity and realised that there are no limits in imagining alternative futures. By practising out of the box thinking with our anticipatory ideas we can shape and invent new futures and opportunities. I find it difficult to imagine futures that are not deemed probable. I also fear negative or undesirable futures. So, I had to recognise and then overcome my own limitations regarding imagining futures. Futures literacy training made me feel more powerful somehow."

Applying futures literacy at work

"Futures Literacy is an essential part of responsible policy making. Since we cannot predict the future, our policies should be tested against plausible scenarios, including the very surprising and provocative ones. We are considering organising a futures literacy training for our partners to use the future to come up with innovative ideas".

Alexander Craig

Sensemaking Lead, EIT Climate KIC

First encounter with futures literacy

"It was amazing to see [how lab participants] wake up their imagination about what contribution they could make, and their sector could make. There was a great amount of energy towards the end of the workshop that the participants had, and the actions that could be taken back to their work and their institutions."

What's new about futures literacy

"To me what is inspiring is the ability to create empowerment by giving people a set of frames or lenses around understanding the different types of futures that they may be thinking in, and that there are other ways, other frames that they can use and play with. That opens up freedom.... And potential for action and different possibilities to be realised. It's a very powerful feeling not just being locked in into thinking 'this is just how it's going to be.'"

Applying futures literacy to work

"My sense is that in any form of change work that sense of empowerment that change is even possible is actually a really critical layer of enabling for that type of work to take place. That also can be a enjoyable place to be, not only a difficult space to step into. There is an energy load that does have to go into opening up that side of yourself to imagine outside your normal modality. That invitation to participate in imagining the future and not having the future purely imposed to you is actually a very important layer of bringing people to that kind of journey together and it seeds the beginning of that process."

Aleksandra Goldys

*Education Design Developer, EIT Climate KIC Central and Eastern Europe
Part of the Just Transformations Deep Demonstration*

First encounter with futures literacy

"My first encounter with futures literacy was connected to relief because it was super helpful in getting more broad and comprehensive understanding of this super complex system that we are planning to transform. I had a feeling that something was missing, and then that I can make an order of what is wrong and what is missing in our transformation process in Rybnik."

What's new about futures literacy

"First you think that nothing will surprise you in a workshop. In the methodology, there are several quite simple assumptions which are totally transforming your attitude towards the present and the future, and that is the power. In Rybnik, we are in a situation where people prefer to stick to the present, because no matter how hard it is, it is safer than the future. The most threatening thing is [when] you think that future is a sentence Futures literacy gives this feeling of agency. You realise that it's not like the future is done and the only thing you can do is to be afraid. It sounds simple but it is really changing your daily feelings and words. Every person, no matter if you are a regular student, a teacher, a small business woman - and corona virus proves that you need to be ready for a different kind of working, thinking, and dealing with the reality, everyday. Only adopting to the present is not sufficient. To me futures literacy is about stretching your imagination. And you never know when will be the moment that you need to stretch that imagination. And not because you are a fancy scientist or a big visionary. I mean if you are a hairdresser you need to use your imagination."

Applying futures literacy at work

"Futures literacy has to be everywhere. In regular citizens, in school system, in policy making, everywhere. And I think that due to that the level of responsibility would be higher and naive optimism would be lower. We are telling each other this fairytale of the future, but we are not doing anything to make it happen. To me futures literacy is a bridge between *the optimism* and *the responsibility*. It's hard mental work, which is absolutely necessary here."

Spyros Kellidis

*Business and HR Consultant, Enterprise Europe Network – Hellas
Regional Development Agency of West Macedonia S.A. - ANKO*

First encounter with futures literacy

"When I first heard about futures thinking, I thought that is yet again a new terminology to add to my daily life. I first thought that it's about the next day, month, year and so forth. But I didn't understand it in a concrete sense. My first thought was, 'Ok, is somebody going to predict the future of my city?' After the first meeting I understood that nobody is going to "tell" you the future, but you have to think about it and stretch your mind. It is both inspiring and difficult at the same time."

What's new about futures literacy

"It's not easy to stretch the boundaries of imagination, but it was really inspiring to see that happening."

Applying futures literacy at work

"Strategic planning is not only made top-down. Every department in my company should apply futures literacy to rethink and redesign their activities. This way the whole strategic planning is made by taking into account employees personal futures literacy capacity."

Charlotte May

Cities Advisor, EIT Climate-KIC Spain

First encounter with futures literacy

"I used futures literacy to probe resignation about the future. It's helped me appreciate the variety of different futures that people have. The training reconfigured my imagination. I didn't think that would be possible."

Applying futures literacy to work

"I think I will apply it directly in my own interactions with stakeholders. I think I will also use to help some stakeholders who may be resigned to a certain sort of future. I think I'll use it to try to get people to think how we don't have to stick with what seems predetermined, but to think different futures and to enjoy imagining different futures and to think about how to get there."

Liana Papaterpou

*ANKO SA-Regional Development Agency of Western Macedonia
Connected through Just Transformation Deep Demonstration*

What's new about futures literacy

"Predicting the future is not like gazing into a crystal ball; the future cannot be reliably predicted. One can see a range of possible futures. It was a great challenge for us to start to think about the future. We are largely blinded by the now. It is difficult to imagine futures that are significantly different from what we already know."

Applying futures literacy at work

"Futures literacy could be used a supportive tool for business innovation for engaging SMEs to be adaptable, to be resilient to unexpected changes. For engagement of the citizens, organisations and companies of our region, especially in the face of decarbonisation, is a great challenge, but futures literacy can help in that. The city of Kosani is in a turning point, because of decarbonisation pressure for the fossil fuel industry. This offers a large-scale reframing opportunity."

Anna Sacio-Szymanska

*Manager, 4CF Strategic Foresight; President, Foresight Europe Network
Part of Just Transformations Deep Demonstration*

What's new about futures literacy

"Futures literacy helps participants to play with their assumptions and it shows that planning mode is not the only mode."

Prepared by the FLxDeep consortium, co-funded by its six partners and EIT Climate KIC. ty.fi/flxdeep

Harald Rauter

EIT Climate KIC

Part of Long-termism Deep Demonstration

What's new about futures literacy

"We don't make the need to look into the future explicit. It's something that requires the integration of much wider spectrum of factors, factors that we don't know of. What was already new to me: futures. There could be potentially different futures. So how do you make sense of all of this? It's a very intellectual process on the one hand, but a very spiritual and emotional one on the other. It helps to use your imagination as a tool, a vehicle, to imagine different futures. And this change of perspective also affects my decision making, my perception of the now. Even if many of the possible futures might never happen, it allows us to rethink and recalibrate our position in the now, and be more skilled and more capable in our decision making in the now."

Applying futures literacy to work

"Future is our business. We are mandated to think and experiment with different futures specifically when it comes to climate change. We all talk about the future as we have learnt in the past. So essentially we bring our path dependencies into the room. And we argue about the future based on the experiences we have had. What we have learned, what it really requires to foster ambitious action for such an innovation initiative, there is a step missing. Before we rush to a solution or approach, first take time to settle in and imagine different futures, and reflect back on how this common experience changes our own perception in the now. And then suddenly our own attachment and affection to what we thought was the right solution is maybe not that strong anymore. Just to stretch our minds, and in that sense it made us more accepting towards different approaches and open to different perspectives. The limit in terms of future is our imagination. There is a power in imagination that really allows us to really shape different futures. You can call imagination and inspiration the key ingredients to create futures. Maybe the key ingredients are not the solutions, the accomplishment, but maybe it starts with creativity, starts with language, stories, disciplines we might not link to "how to accomplish futures". We are upscaling ourselves in a way that we can use what is natural to us—as creativity, as imagination—and use it to our advantage as something that really has the power to shape our future."

Chloe Treger

Dark Matter Labs

Part of Long-termism Deep Demonstration

First encounter with futures literacy

"My first encounter to test my own futures literacy was in a two-day lab in Dublin with a focus on the financial services where we went through a learning journey, and had plenty of aha-moments along the way. I think it has a profound impact on the way I as an individual was aware of the way I used the future."

What's new about futures literacy

"A feeling like I have more choice and agency with anticipation. Futures literacy feels like a potential tool to use to open potential futures, the second you become aware that you have biases in using the future in certain ways, and that is cutting off all other possibilities, it's like a blinker comes off. That awareness is inspiring if you can use it to trigger action in some way."

Applying futures literacy at work

"Now that I have the awareness (of how I use the future) it's also difficult because I don't know how to use that awareness. It's sometimes difficult to understand that I am [futures] literate, because I don't understand the nuanced side of it". "[I'm using it to] shift how people understand legacy, to have a more of a holistic lens. Legacy is not only the money you leave but the decisions that you take—triggering the thought that the future is now, your present day actions really, really count."

Methodological note

Participants were invited to interview each other based upon their levels of exposure to the work of the Futures Literacy across the Deep (FLxDeep) consortium across main areas of the consortium's activities. Pairs or small groups interviewed each other using three simple questions, and recorded their conversations using their video calling software. These interviews were conducted in November 2020. Parts of these videos are included in the video shown at the EIT Climate KIC booth at UNESCO Futures Literacy Summit 2020. For this communication, key highlights from these interviews were selected by FLxDeep team member Noora Vähäkari and edited into these highlights by FLxDeep consortium leader Nicolas Balcom Raleigh at Finland Futures Research Centre - University of Turku. University of Turku is coordinating partner of FLxDeep.