

#Futures4EuropeConference #2026 #Foresight #Futures

3. THEME OF THE 2026 EDITION:
PLURAL FUTURES AND INCLUSIVE FORESIGHT

Strategic or Reflexive?
The Fundamental Dilemma of Science Communication in Futures Studies

Magdalena Soetebeer | schaltzeit

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LA LUCE DELLA SCIENZA CERCO E L BENEFICIO

"Muoiono gli imperi,
ma i teoremi di Euclide
conservano eterna
giovinezza"

Vito Volterra, 1931

Cities 2045®
Final report of a participatory foresight process

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES. BRIGHTER CONVERSATIONS

Renowned Research Institution

01 REGENERATIVE CITIES
Thriving within planetary boundaries.

02 HYPERCONNECTED CITIES
Seamless mobility. Expanded horizons.

03 HUMAN-CENTRED CITIES
Slower lives. Deeper connections.

04 CITIES UNDER PRESSURE
Resilient, but at a cost.

Always read the leaflet — aka the Methodology section and Limitations of the Study.

AI-generated
exaggerated
humorous
visualization of
published scenario
communication

Methodology and Epistemological Foundations

WARNING: This future may contain implicit assumptions.

Possible side effects include:
hidden worldviews • false certainty • expert bias • reduced imaginative plurality

Ask your futurist if this future works for you.

Try to critically reflect on the scenarios and to imagine futures otherwise.

Limitations

"Voi siete qui per un'opera
che non è solo di studio
una scienza [...],
ma è anche e soprattut
di formazione del pensi
di elevazione delle me
di maturazione del
coscienze"

Gustavo Colonnetti

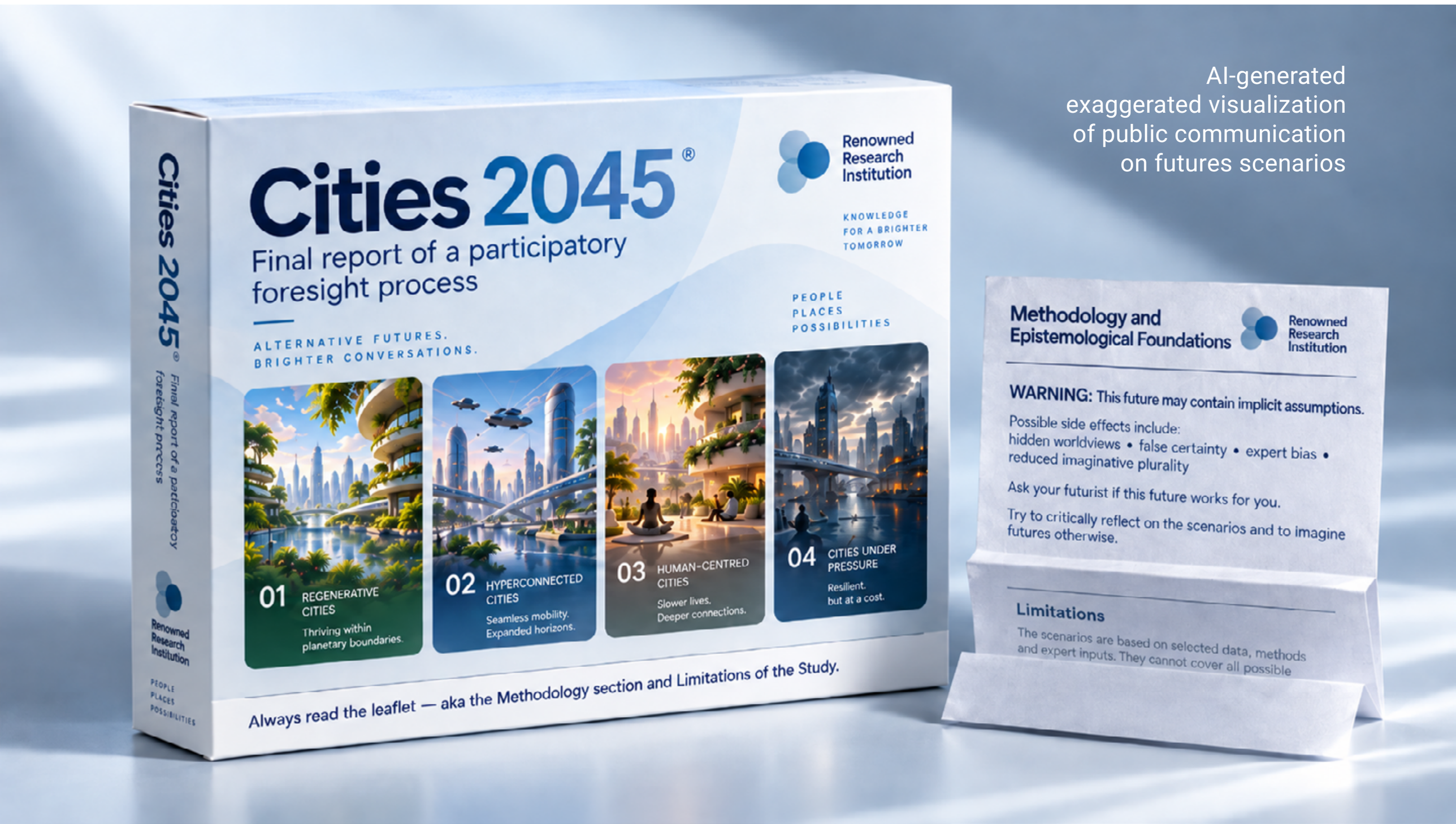
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Who reads the package insert?

Science communication should not only communicate results, but also foster awareness of how a discipline produces knowledge. This is particularly challenging in Futures Studies because our object of inquiry is so unusual: the future does not yet exist. Do we get that across when we share our insights publicly?

Of course, we include disclaimers stating that scenarios are not certain predictions, but explorations of possible futures under conditions of uncertainty. Of course, our reports contain methodology sections and references to complex epistemological foundations.

But do we really expect people to engage with these complex explanations in their free time? Do we actually convey the constructed and situated nature of futures and prompt critical reflection? Or is it like a package insert: **important, available, but rarely read?**



AI-generated exaggerated visualization of public communication on futures scenarios

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Two different demands for science communication in futures studies

- Science communication must reach beyond academically engaged groups across diverse audiences and varied media channels.
- Requires strategic communication (Kotler 2011), which often works through simplification, emotional appeal, and clear narratives – mechanisms that tend to invisibly reinforce underlying myths and metaphors

» It appears to me that Futures research must move beyond its academic enterprise into the domain of the media, through coordinated and intelligent communications strategies, through a hybridised foresight practice that is both epistemically reflexive and aesthetically infusive «
(Ramos 2006, S. 1119).

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Gustavo Colonnetti, 19

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Strategic or Reflexive ?

If nobody notices or understands our work, we have little societal impact –

but if strategic communication makes constructed futures appear natural, probable or desirable, communication can reinforce exactly the expertocratic power we wanted to overcome



AI-generated mockup of a public campaign for plural futures and inclusive foresight, based on the meme *Dramatic Crossroads*

Strategic & Reflexive

We need both — and we need to become much more conscious of the tensions between them. How can we create attention without closing imagination?

Good communication does not only communicate futures effectively. It makes visible the authors' *frames of thoughts*[1] that constituted those futures.

And it empowers people to question our constructed futures and to imagine future otherwise for themselves.

[1] Dr. Nele Fischer (2023)

BUT when we promote critical reflection on underlying assumptions and worldviews, we must be careful not to inadvertently create an opening for science denialism: Reflexivity and doesn‘t mean treating scien-tific evidence and personal perception as epistemically equivalent.

#DualUse




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Daring to imagine otherwise
Rome, 30 September - 1 October 2026


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Magdalena Soetebeer[1]

If foresight wants to make a difference in society, it needs good (science) communication.

Foresight Practitioner 192 | Future Literacy 20 | Futurist 91 | Design School | Germany 85

As a trained communication designer and futurist, I work at the intersection of strategic foresight, futures literacy, software development, and science communication at Schaltzeit, a Berlin-based foresight company.

My particular interest lies in critical futures studies and in the question of how futures research can become relevant beyond academia and professional foresight communities. I am especially interested in how we communicate about futures: whose images of the future become visible, which assumptions and worldviews they carry, and how alternative futures can be made accessible, discussable, and open to critique.