



UNESCO Pioneers Futures Literacy

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BACKGROUND

Do you use the future? Think about it. What does it mean to “use the future”? If you plan to meet friends for coffee or carry an umbrella when you go to work, you are using the future. Because it is the image that you have invented about what might happen that shapes your choices in the present. The only thing is, most people don’t think about why or how they use the future. They just do it.

Yet everyone knows that the future is important. We worry about the future of climate change. We hope for a peaceful and inclusive tomorrow. We want better education and healthcare now because it promises to help create the conditions for well-being in the future. When the world wants to set a global agenda to follow on from the [Millennium Development Goals](#) the report is entitled: [Realizing the Future We Want for All](#).

PROBLEM

The only problem is that few people stop to think about what is the future and how to best use it for a specific task. UNESCO calls knowing how to use the future: Futures Literacy (FL). FL is a capability, like knowing how to read or, to take the concept developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the capability to exercise freedom. When someone is futures literate, they know why they are putting the future to work to help with a particular challenge and what methods or tools to deploy. Just like a carpenter who knows that if they want to drive home a nail it is better to use a hammer than a screwdriver.

Today, not many people have this kind of practical knowledge about how to use the future. Oddly enough, even though almost everybody, even small babies, uses the future all the time, not much is known about this capability. This is why UNESCO, in its role as a cutting-edge laboratory of ideas, decided to run experiments that would reveal what people around the world know about using the future.

SOLUTION

[Futures Literacy Laboratories](#) (FLL) are an innovative action-research/action-learning methodology that allows people to discover and share both the reasons for using the future and how to use it. Just like chemistry or psychology laboratories, UNESCO’s FLL are specially designed processes, using well-defined principles, to create the conditions that enable people to invent, test and learn. In an FLL participants can invent new solutions, test a wide range of hypotheses, and learn about using the future to improve their world. In an FLL, people are empowered to use the future in new and more effective ways.

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FLL are always co-designed with a local partner. This is because the ingredients and tools, like the chemicals, beakers and Bunsen burners used in a chemistry lab, must be tailored as specifically as possible to the context. Since 2013, UNESCO has been able to collaborate with local partners to run over 30 FLL.



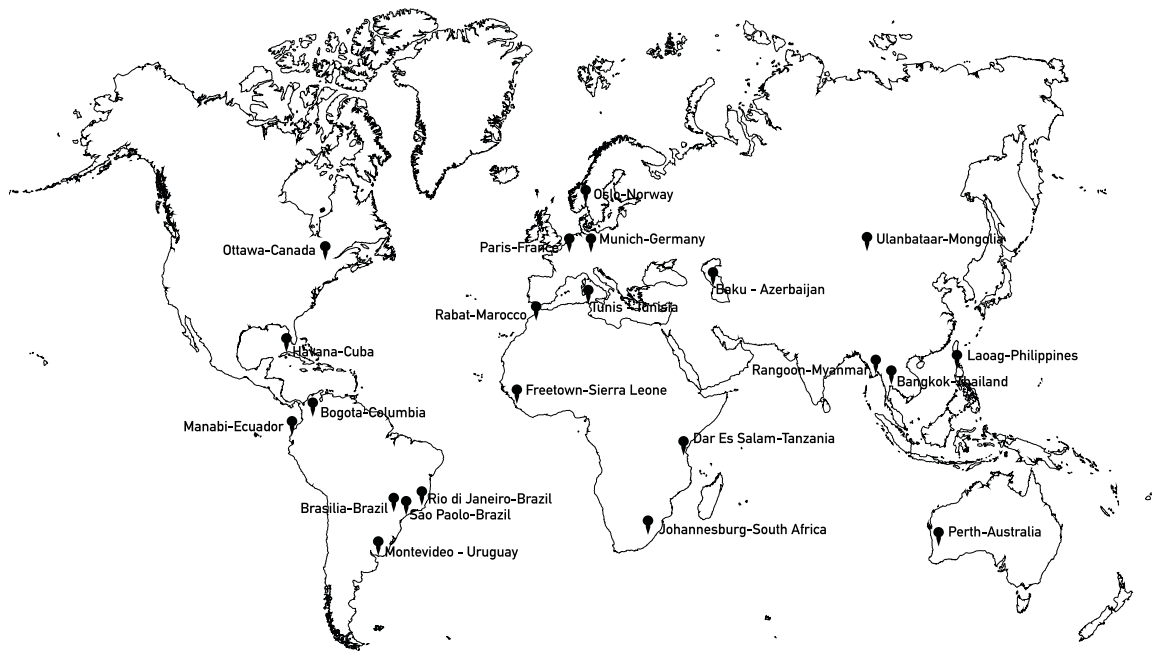
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Paris: The Future of Cultural Heritage Research, November 18-23, 2012

Baku: Shaping Global Architecture Capacity, June 1, 2012

Paris: Knowledge Design Test Session "Shaping the Knowledge Tomorrow's Knowledge, Creating Missions" A Primer and Images, June 20-21, 2013

Brasilia: The Future of Science, 11-12 July, 2013

Sao Paulo: Changing the Way Universities Use the Past, July 18, 2013

Chicago: The Future of Humanists, July 16, 2013

Oslo: Innovation in Learning, Knowing as Learning, Knowing as Success: Imagining a Universal Innovative Society in 2030, October 21-22, 2013

Bogota: Using the Future to think about local labor markets, November 25-26, 2013

Rio de Janeiro: Imagining the Future of Science in Society, November 28-29, 2013

Paris: Imagining the Future of the Transition from "Youth" to "Adult", January 18-19, 2013

Freetown: Youth & Rates of Passage in Sierra Leone, January 20-21, 2014

February 5-6, 2014

Munich: Imagining the Future of Sport in Society

Paris: Inhabiting Planet Earth 2100: Beyond Cities, March 27-28, 2014

Calcutta: Buldhia de Garuquca, Monte: A Series of Future Literacy Knowledge Talks in Bonaler, April 29-May 1, 2014

Rangoon: Addressing the future of education in Myanmar, May 2-3, 2014

Laosig City: Resilient Cities, Brighter Future - A Forum-Workshop on Anticipatory Thinking and Strategic Foresight Methods for Sustainable Cities, May 2-21, 2014

Johannesburg: All Africa Future Forum, May 20-24, 2014

Ottawa: The Future of Innovation: Engaging in the Public Sector, June 4-5, 2014

Tanzania: Beyond Proofing an Exotic Nation, September 2013

Brasilia: Joint International Parisight Academy, November 18-21, 2014

Paris: L'Avenir de Demain, May 21, 2013

Rabat: Imagining Africa's Future, June 25-26, 2013

Bangkok: Rethinking Education, September 1-5, 2013

Chambuster: The Future of Mongolia, September 26-October 2, 2013

Paris: UNESCO Youth Forum, October 20-28, 2013

Rabat: Future Literacy: Advancing a Community of Practice in Africa - The Future of Urbanism and Water in North Africa, December 4-5, 2013

Tunis: Social Transformation, 3-4 March, 2013

Montevideo: Who Does Commit to What? Engage! March 28-30, 2013

Paris: Reclaiming Memory and Identity: The Future of Africa, July 1-5, 2013

Havana: Using the Future to Enhance Complexity, July 15, 2013

THE WAY FORWARD



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UNESCO's FLL have proven that everywhere in the world people use the future and can become futures literate. FLL have demonstrated that innovative collective intelligence methodologies can empower people to change what they see and do. FLL can be used by every part of UNESCO, the UN and even regular citizens to become better at understanding why and how to use the future.

So the next step is for UNESCO to continue its leadership role in developing and diffusing Futures Literacy. To this end UNESCO will publish **Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century** (insert link to video). This book presents the evidence gathered during the pioneering proof-of-concept phase and points to the next "prototyping" phase of innovation that will develop, test and diffuse the design principles and expertise needed to advance Futures Literacy worldwide.

Within UNESCO and around the world there are many opportunities to initiate partnerships that will design and implement FLL. The seeds have already been planted in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and North America. Planning is well advanced for an ambitious prototyping project called *Imagining Africa's Future*. Communities of practice, networks of people who have participated and facilitated FLL are springing up in all fields and levels.

In the last three years UNESCO has set up three university Chairs and co-sponsored two major international conferences related to anticipation and Futures Literacy. UNESCO is well-positioned, contingent on priorities and funding, to lead a major innovation in how the world uses the future. As the champion of Futures Literacy UNESCO can show how innovation makes a difference for humanity's efforts to create a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world.



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