

Let's think of a good future for ourselves

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What we think about the future, and how we see it, influences how our future is shaped by our actions today. So our thoughts about the future are not insignificant.

Humans differ from other animals, at least in that they are the only animals, as far as I know, that have the ability to think and plan far into the future, thanks to abstract thinking. On the other hand, humans' ability to think about the future and imagine different futures varies.

It is typical that people can imagine a future that is based on the phenomena of the present and the obvious changes that will be visible in the future. This will result in cautious visions of the future that vary only slightly from the current situation. Sometimes these visions can be accurate, but this is less likely these days. These visions are often negative and do not offer what is desperately needed in this day and age – the opportunity to pursue a society that lives within planetary boundaries and provides equal prosperity for all. A society that, instead of causing environmental damage, not only reduces it and repairs the damage done, but also renews activities and does good to the planet and to people.

Our attitude towards the future has also varied in different eras: in the 18th century, the future was thought to be no more than a repetition of the past – often even worse than the present. People's origin determined their occupation, income level and social class. Life was a zero-sum game, and it was thought that there was only a certain amount of luck in the world: for me to have it, it had to be taken from others.

The Finnish “future”, i.e. the idea of a better future, a future that can be influenced, was set in motion by the Industrial Revolution, economic growth and the liberation of world trade. The European **belief in the future** – that tomorrow could be imagined as something different from the present – was transformed into a useful way of making the future, which gradually developed into a welfare state. By the twentieth century, the cyclical conception of time had

become linear, and people had developed “freedom of choice” in terms of their future. Someone somewhere dared to start dreaming of something better and made others work for a better future as well.

The history of **futures thinking** shows not only what good can be achieved if only one can imagine it, but also the far-reaching and systemic effects of today’s decisions, and what is unknown and cannot be foreseen. During the cyclical vision of the future, it was not yet possible to use resources in the quest for a better future. As it was learned, attitudes towards the future also changed. What was not understood at the time is now before us as a sustainability crisis.

Once again, we need to change our attitude towards the future: Just as in the 19th century we did not continue the slash-and-burn practice and the futures thinking of that time, we must not continue the current fossil economy and overconsumption of resources. We must not dwell on a vision of the future in which we believe that change is no longer possible. We must not remain dependent on the path of the economic and social model we have created. Although we may not yet be able to imagine what a new and functional sustainable model would be like, or how it could be implemented, that is no reason not to dream of something better. Getting rid of the fossil economy, overconsumption of resources and the current futures thinking requires the ability to imagine – and thus also to make – a better future.

Futures thinking is not just walking with our heads in the clouds. In futures thinking, it is also important to identify and interpret current trends, phenomena and weak signals that shape the future and based on which we can somehow imagine something better. Futures thinking can be learned and practised, and anticipating it and tools for anticipation provide methods for this.

As a background for the preparation of the current regional programme for Lapland, the future was examined with the aid of scenario work. It should serve to stimulate discussion on developments that will change the current state of affairs. **Future scenarios** help and teach us to interpret the phenomena visible today and to understand their effects. In the scenario work, three alternative images of the future of Lapland’s external operating environment were built until the 2040s. The scenarios are “Block development”, “Automation community” and “Sustainability transition”. You can read more about the scenarios in the [Lapland Agreement](#).

A different way of approaching the future, which complements the scenario work and is often based on it, is **future remembrance** based on storytelling. It is at its best when implemented

together and as a dialogue between people from different backgrounds, but it is also a great way to practise futures thinking independently. Its aim is to make the future commonplace and people-oriented, and it is also a good way to resist anxiety about the future.

Future remembrance helps us to be critical of our own and others' claims about the future. I have also found it to be a good way to test my own thoughts and hopes for the future with others: do other people from different backgrounds find a future I think would be good for me desirable or not? What are their fears, and what does it mean to others? How do other people interpret the phenomena, actions and decisions of the present in terms of the future? One such story I have created is based on the Lapland Agreement and [its vision for the future](#): *Smart and international Lapland is an Arctic pioneer. We are building sustainable competitiveness, wellbeing and success in the cleanest province in the world.*

I encourage everyone to practise identifying and interpreting phenomena that affect the future, challenge their own interpretation, and dream and tell stories about a better future. Exercise your future muscle, stretch your ability to think about the future and thus the future for us all.