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Moving from conventional to experiential and creative futures: methodological reflection on pathway co-creation

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Transformative change is increasingly understood as plural, emergent and relational, yet many futuring approaches remain dominated by structured, linear, and causal modes of thinking. Such 'systems-analytical' approaches often assume high levels of manageability and coherence in societal change, generating useful strategies and conditions for transformation but overlooking more embodied, emotional, relational and creative ways of imagining the future. Such experiential and creative approaches can surface radical ideas, challenge dominant assumptions, and complement conventional approaches by better reflecting the plurality of realities, perspectives, and futures that shape complex socio-ecological systems. In this work, we explore how combining systems-analytical, experiential and creative futuring methods can enhance co-creation processes for transformative change.

We draw on an extensive co-creation process involving three iterative 2–3 day workshops with 23–26 participants from across Europe and various sectors, through which three visions and pathways for a nature-positive Europe by 2050 were developed, evaluated and enriched. The process intentionally integrated systems-analytical co-creative methods – such as backcasting, sectoral structuring, and analysing trade-offs and synergies – and transformative, experiential, and creative exercises. These included reflexive activities (outdoors and written positionality exercises to deepen awareness of personal perspectives and engage with differing worldviews), radicality-oriented techniques (a perspective-taking exercise using radical roles to push beyond conventional assumptions), creativity-based methods (theatre presentations, crafting, and storytelling), and immersive elements (including podcast-based narratives, theatre performances, and guided walks). These aimed to support participants in engaging affectively and relationally with emerging futures. Plurality was strengthened throughout by using the Nature Futures Framework and by explicitly encouraging engagement with diverse value perspectives.

Through reflecting on our experiences, we highlight how integrating systems-analytical, experiential and creative futuring approaches can generate richer, more plural, more emergent, and more relational pathways toward transformative change. These methods help surface tacit knowledge, open imaginative spaces, and challenge the tendency toward overly coherent and managerial narratives. In this presentation, we discuss insights from applying this hybrid methodology, discuss challenges and limitation of these methods and invite further dialogue on expanding the repertoire

of futuring methods capable of capturing the complexity, plurality, and relational nature of transformative change.