

Young People and the Future of Scotland

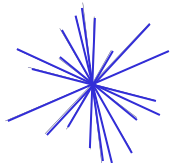
A Participatory Horizon Scanning Process
and Methodology

October 2025
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 - ◇ Challenges and opportunities of participatory futures work (and lessons from other contexts)
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- Appendix: Who is Demos Helsinki?

Demos Helsinki in brief



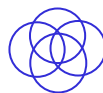
We are a globally operating, not-for-profit, **independent think tank**. We were founded in 2005 and are headquartered in Helsinki, Finland. Our annual revenue will be around **5.4 million in 2024**.



We create impact through **over 100 projects annually in 30 different countries**. We offer consultancy services, conduct research, and build alliances for transformation.



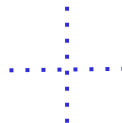
We are **project funded**. Our partners include progressive governments, international organizations, CSOs, corporations, philanthropies and world-class universities around the globe.



Our team consists of a community of about **70+ curious and kind individuals** with a vast international network of partners and contributors.



Our mission is **to lead societal transformation towards a fair, sustainable and joyful next era**.



Our impact model focuses on **five leverages of change**: governance, economy, infrastructure and technology and agency.

Our partners



DEMOS HELSINKI

20
years of experience

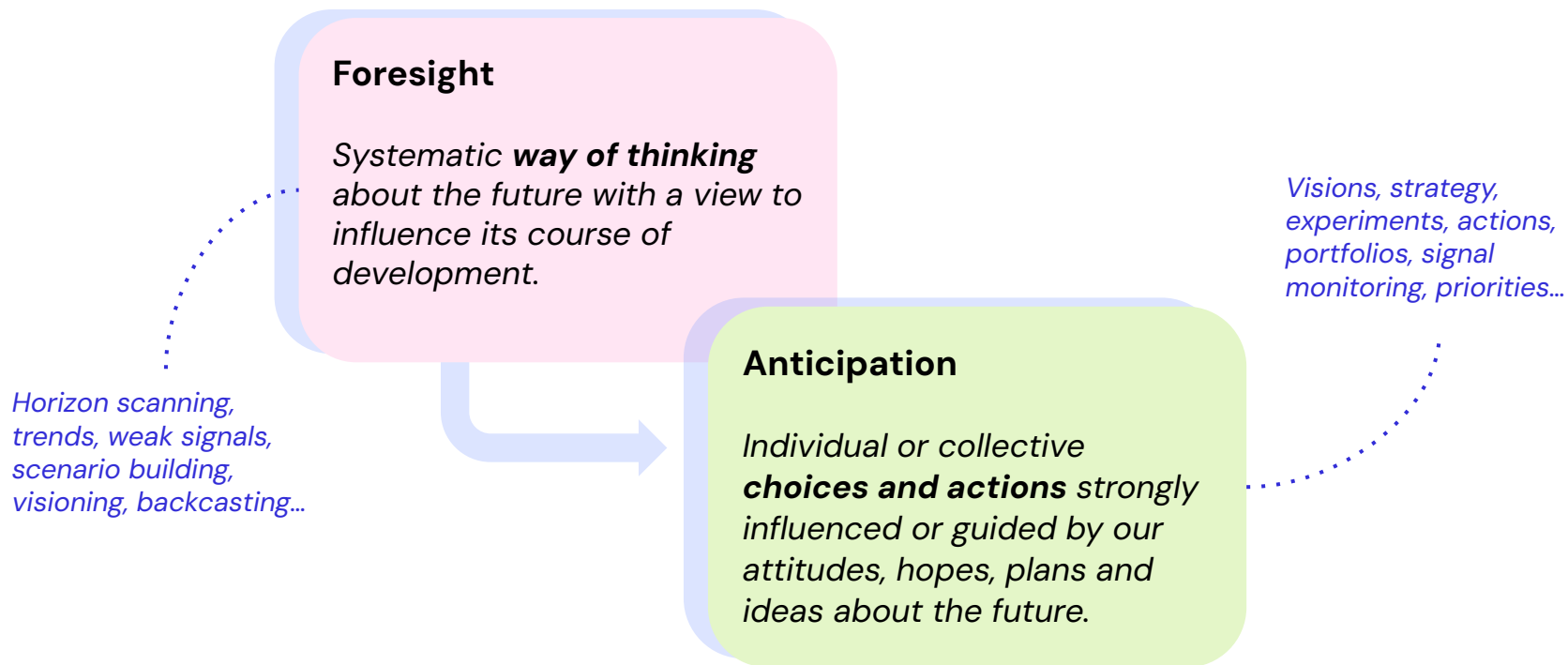
~100
projects annually

70+
employees

30+
countries

Our work with the Scottish Government: Horizon Scanning with Young People

What is Foresight?



The Context

- The Scottish Government is building its foresight programme to anticipate the **risks, opportunities, and challenges** that will shape Scotland's future over the coming decades.
- The Scottish Government conducts periodic **Horizon Scanning** to identify key trends, risks and opportunities over a **10–20 year horizon** to inform policy, planning, and strategy.
- We collaborated with the Scottish Government to **engage young people** to feed into the horizon scanning work.
- We partnered with the **Scottish Youth Parliament** and were supported by the **UK Government Office for Science**.

This work aimed to set a precedent for how the Scottish Government engage young people in their foresight work.



Why engage young people?

Around the world, strategic foresight processes often focus on contributions from experts, which can overlook perspectives from different segments of society, such as young people. But...

Young people experience societal transformations differently from older generations

Young people are not only 'the future' – they are already shaping society's present

Engaging young people in horizon scanning strengthens the **democratic legitimacy of foresight processes**

Young people bring diverse perspectives to foresight and often challenge assumptions

Young people are the group with the longest stake in the future, whose lives will be affected by and affect it

The Methodology

We designed the methodology to contain three key components:

1. *Participatory*

to gain insights on young people's perspectives of the future, while building their **agency** and participation in societal discussions

2. *Co-creative*

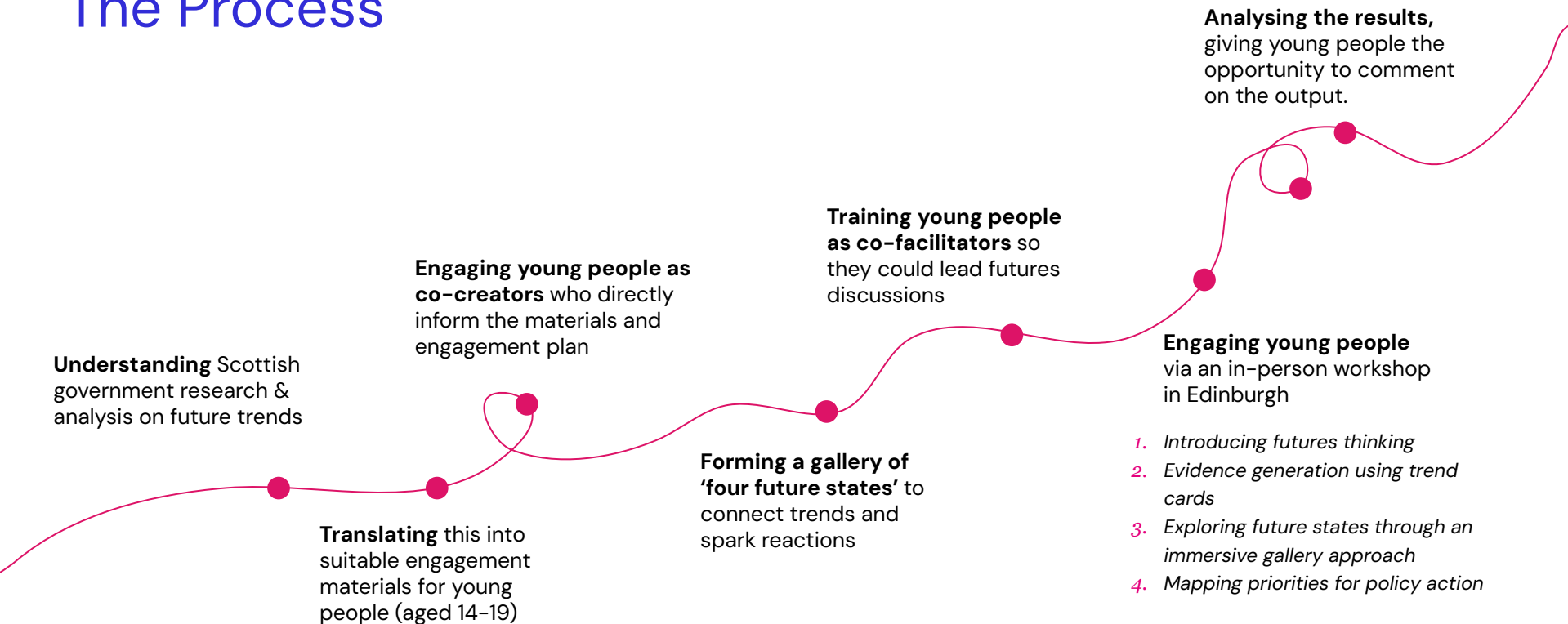
young people were co-creators and co-facilitators – via an '**Investigation Team**' of Members of Scottish Youth Parliament. They were key throughout the process of developing materials, facilitating the workshop, enriching the analysis, and refining the final report.

3. *Experiential*

Some of the formats included a deck of **trend cards**, and a 'gallery of future states' of Scotland in 2040 which included future state 'stations' with future states, artefacts, and profiles of people from the future, displayed using **creative**, visual, text-based, and some AI-generated visual materials.



The Process



Scotland in 2040 is powered by green industries. Wind, solar, and tidal energy have largely replaced fossil fuels. Green technology, sustainable farming, and eco-construction are the biggest job sectors. Schools focus on practical education in an environment highly-tailored to meet each student's needs, and the majority of careers have some link to sustainability. People from other areas of the UK move to Scotland for opportunities in green industries and education.

More people now work in **repair and reuse industries** instead of wasteful mass production. Local economies are stronger as they use their resources better. Big companies are held accountable for their environmental impact. Owning fewer things is normal, and communities are more share tools, transport, and even homes.

DEMOIS
HEIL, SURELL

Scotland in 2040 is more diverse

More people from across Scotland, and other international regions in growth, science, and industry has attraction in growing science, technology, opportunities, languages, cultures, and ideas. The economy depends on international trade and remote work. Young Scots working remotely for companies based abroad. Many people grow up in more multicultural communities than ever.

Technology has connected people more than ever, making it easy to learn, work, and make friends across borders. AI-powered translators help remove language barriers, and virtual reality classrooms allow students to study with peers all around the world. Many people now rely on AI assistants for daily tasks and specific needs such as health management and neurodiversity support. Virtual reality is a normal part

But not everyone benefits. Rural areas struggle to keep up with rapid change as jobs, education, and healthcare become more digital but are still centralised in cities. Some communities worry about losing local traditions, and are resisting multiculturalism together. Debates over the speed of change have become common, as have discussions around what it means to be Scottish in a changing world.

Scotland in 2040 is facing serious climate challenges. Flood storms, and extreme weather have damaged towns and forced people to move. Some coastal areas, such as the Western Isles and some of the east coast, are now nearly uninhabitable due to rising sea levels. Farmers struggle with soil degradation and unpredictable weather. Food prices have risen, and it can sometimes be hard to get so many ingredients as global supply chains are disrupted.

Some communities have adapted better than others. Weather areas have invested in flood defences, private renewable energy supplies, and climate-proof housing contracts, poorer communities face higher energy costs, unreliable infrastructure, and fewer resources to rebuild after disasters. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable, as some abandoned altogether as people move to cities where services are more reliable.

The government is trying to help but there are more needs and demands than before. **Because of a difficult mental health is a strong focus.** For example, focused government support on well-being and on providing essential services.

DEMOIS
HILLSIDE

Offshore Wind Turbine Technician
35 years old, Dundee

"I've got a good life. I'm proud that I can help maintaining the offshore wind farms around Scotland's coastline."

The Future of Mating

CATEGORY
Politics & Governance



YOUR

WIND TURBINE

TURBINE OR SCOT
OFFSHORE WIND FARM
SINGLE WIND: 8
SCALFORD WIND
SALTY BRACK FISH
WATTS HAYWARD W
NID OF SCOTLAND
SCOTLAND WIND F

URBAN VERT
BROWN FOOD IN KID-
SLEWS HYPERDRINKING
DRELLS, MINDS, &
DRELLS, AND BUD

CHALANT RAISED WITH SOMUJH

NEAT ST RAUTER
DARKNESS, (27)
SCOTLAND'S FOLK

His dearest: www.mindful.com

Aidan grew up in Inverness, the son of a former oil worker who was laid off when Scotland shifted away from fossil fuels. He remembers the uncertainty his family faced in the 2020s when the North Sea oil and gas industry collapsed. Inspired by how retraining programs helped his father find a new career, Aidan is now studying for a Green Energy apprenticeship at the University of Aberdeen.

Work: Now, as an offshore wind technician, he spends weeks at sea inspecting and repairing turbines. Though automation has taken over many tasks, skilled workers like him remain essential. The job is demanding but well-paid, offering security that he knows some of his childhood friends lack.

Thoughts on society and the future:

While proud of Scotland's green leadership, Aidan sees challenges. Sustainability is often expensive, leaving some behind. This issue is important to him, as he runs a repair café, helping people repair their electronics, and he is involved in various sustainability initiatives.

TREND

Young people care about politics but are less likely to vote than older generations.

IMPACT
If fewer young people vote, policies might not
— meet their needs.

QUESTIONS

Why do you think young people are less likely to vote? How could voting be more engaging? Why may young people feel differently about Scottish elections than other elections? What kind of activities does 'engaging in politics' involve for you?

2040 EDITION

CIRCULAR ECONOMY APPROVED

Product is repairable, reusable, or recyclable
You'll find me on furniture, clothing, and technology!

OUR BUSINESS RUNS ON RENEWABLES

MANIFESTO FOR ALL BUSINESS

WORLD'S GREENEST JOBS: 2019

ECO-CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
DESIGNING AND BUILDING ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND, GREEN, RECYCLED AND POTENTIALLY REPAIRABLE MATERIALS.

CARBON TAX APPLIED
For exceeding carbon limits

WATER FRIENDLY
THIS PROJECT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REDUCE WATER CONSUMPTION BY 100x

100x

[illegible]

mission free delivery - emis

CATEGORY
Climate & Environment

Environment

NEWS TECH POLITICS

Artific

*Meet Scotland's
Elected Repres*

Written by *Nancy Fisher*

A new arena in politics begins today as Southeast voters in its first election are trained on public integrity, ethics guidelines, and real promises transparent, data-driven decision-making. These influences, in its election, 14% of voters supported the *N-voice* public decision and increased public trust.

Key Features include: 147 public consultation, real-time sentiment, and a lack of personal interests or susceptibility factors said. "For the first time, decisions are made by facts, not feelings."

Real ethics warning: "Who controls the AI?" Is this the future of

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IMPACT
Scotland has the opportunity to demonstrate itself within the UK and beyond as a leader in green industries and work, especially in areas like green tech, biosciences, and green infrastructure (e.g. construction, energy, agriculture).

QUESTIONS
How would Scotland's green leadership raise its international profile and the opportunities Scots have? What opportunities does it have?

yourself if Scotland becomes an established leader in some of these industries? How would attracting new international workers in green industries affect communities and opportunities?

100

Special.

THE LAST HUMAN
TEACHER RETIRES: "A
SCREEN CAN'T INSPIRE
YOU LIVE A PERSON CAN"

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OCTOBER 6, 2013

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DECEMBER 8, 2002

Scotland in 2040 is powered by green industries. Wind, solar, and tidal energy have largely replaced fossil fuels. Green technology, sustainable farming, and eco-construction are the biggest job sectors. Schools focus on practical education in an environment highly-tailored to each student's needs, and the majority of careers are linked to sustainability. People from other areas of the UK move to Scotland for opportunities in green industries and education.



More people now work in **repair and reuse industries** instead of wasteful mass production. Local economies are stronger as they use and reuse their resources better. Big companies are held accountable for their environmental impact. Owning fewer things is normal, and communities share tools, transport, and even homes.

However, not everyone benefits equally. Some industries like aviation and heavy manufacturing face steep **environmental taxes**, making some products and services more expensive. Eco-friendly options aren't always affordable, and other challenges remain, such as a lack of affordable housing and some groups struggling to keep up with new technologies.

Some argue that climate policies have gone too far, pushing certain jobs and businesses out of Scotland. Others argue we need to go even further and take a role in international collaboration as some climate change remain, despite progress and public support.

Scotland in 2040 is more diverse than ever, and its international reputation in science, technology, and other industries has attracted more people to Scotland, bringing new opportunities, languages, cultures and ideas. The economy **depends on international trade and remote work**, with many Scots working remotely for companies based abroad. Young people grow up in more **multicultural communities** than ever.

Technology has **connected people more than ever**, making it easy to learn, work, and make friends across borders. AI-powered **translation tools** remove language barriers, and **virtual reality classrooms** allow students to study with peers from around the world. Many people now **rely on AI assistants** for daily tasks and specific needs such as health management and neurodiversity support. Virtual reality is a normal part of work and school.

Scotland has managed to turn emerging technologies and societal needs into opportunities. It has become a leader in international cooperation and ethical, sustainable technology. The country welcomes students, workers, and refugees, seeing migration as a way to strengthen the economy and society.

But not everyone believes. Rural areas struggle to keep up with rapid change as jobs, education, and healthcare become more digital but are still centralised in cities. Some communities worry about losing local traditions. As more communities resist multiculturalism together, debates over the speed of change have become common, as have discussions around what it means to be Scottish in a changing world.

With a digital connection, in-person interaction has become a thing of the past. As technology advances, opinions

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Scotland stay connected
opportunities fair for everyone

DERAIG
HILL, STIRLING

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Environment

Health & Habits

Economy & Jobs

Politics

Scotland in 2040 is facing serious climate challenges. Floods, storms, and extreme weather have damaged towns and forced people to move. Some coastal areas, such as the Western Isles and some of the east coast, are now virtually uninhabitable due to rising sea levels. Farmers struggle with soil degradation and unpredictable weather; food prices have risen, and it can sometimes be hard to get some ingredients as **global supply chains are disrupted**.



shortages and outdated infrastructure leave some are struggling to keep the lights on. The UK and Scott Governments have introduced emergency climate policies, but for many, the changes feel too little, too late.

Some communities have adapted better than others. Wealthier areas have invested in flood defences, private renewable energy supplies, and climate-proof housing. In contrast, poorer communities face higher energy costs, unreliable infrastructure, and fewer resources to rebuild after disasters. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable, with some abandoned altogether as people move to cities where services are more reliable.

The government is trying to help, but these communities need more.

mental health is a strong focus. For example, the UK government has focused on well-being and ensuring a resilient population.

Offshore Wind Turbine Technician
35 years old, Dundee

"I've got a good life. I'm proud that I help maintaining the offshore wind farms that power Scotland's cities."

CATEGORY
Politics & Governance

Iceland in 2040 is most diverse than ever. Trust in the democratic process
social media feeds become 'islands' where people prefer to interact with
physical **virtual**
only people who are similar to themselves.

Also, economic inequality has grown. Some people live well,
but most of the population struggles to afford basic
needs. Housing, healthcare, and education are now
privatized and free tuition has ended; asking people to pay
for services was the only way to fill gaps in essential
funding. There is very little left to fall back on.
disadvantaged in society, but very few young people for the most
part. Many people feel they will never be able to
home so are exploring new models of living together like
with friends or multi-generational families of living together like

increasing discussion about justice in society and how to drastically reduce inequality.

Because of evolving public and private services, the skills we need to work evolve quickly. Many people work jobs so they can ride the waves of change. Some people enjoy continuously learning new skills as their learning becomes the norm. But some society becomes not competitive. Workplaces are no longer fun and they struggle to balance the need to learn other family and life activities.

Loneliness and mental health issues are at crisis levels. More people spend time online than in 2001-02.

Priority

Aidan grew up in Inverness, the son of a former oil worker. He remembers the uncertainty when Scotland shifted away from fossil fuels. He remembers the oil and gas industry collapsed family faced in the 2020s when the North Sea oil and gas industry collapsed. Inspired by his family's history, he found a new career. Inspired by his family's history, he found a new career. Inspired by his family's history, he found a new career.

Work:

Profiles

Thoughts on society and the future:

While proud of Scotland's green leadership, Aidan sees challenges. Sustainability is often expensive, leaving some behind. This issue is important to him, and he volunteers at a repair café, helping people repair their electronics, and supporting local initiatives.

TREND
Young people care about politics but are less
likely to vote than older generations.

IMPACT
If fewer young people vote, policies might not reflect their needs.

Trend c

GUIDE TO SCOTLAND'S GREEN JOBS!

ECD-CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
DESIGN AND BUILD ENERGY-EFFICIENT
HOMES USING RECYCLED AND SUSTAINABLE
MATERIALS.
WOULD REDESIGN ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS
SELECTED, AND SUSTAINABILITY IN HOMES.
SALARY RANGE: \$1,000 - \$1,500 PER YEAR,
SPENDING ON PROJECT SCALE.

[illegible][illegible]

emission free delivery - emission free delivery - emission free delivery - emission free delivery - emission free delivery

housing, as young people are empowered to make better housing and financial decisions once they have left school!

Questions? What kind of
in politics' involve for

Clima

Disclaimer: These materials have been created to prompt discussion. They aren't intended to be 'hoof or prediction'

Summary of results

1. Climate and Environment

Need for **systemic** climate action and Scotland's **leadership** in sustainability and green jobs. Concerns remained about climate **injustice** and uneven impacts across communities.

2. Economy and Jobs

Economic **inequality**, the rising cost of living and housing **affordability** were key concerns. **AI and automation** are profoundly impactful forces but young people were very concerned about whether these would create new opportunities or deepen inequality.

3. Politics and Governance

Strong support for improving **political education** and digital literacy to combat misinformation and strengthen **democratic** engagement. While young people valued democratic institutions, they also expressed frustration that their **voices are often overlooked** in decision-making.

4. Society and Community

Many valued inclusivity and social progress, some worried about increasing **polarisation** in public debate.

Young people discussed the balance between **online and physical life**, including how people interact within and across each, and how this could develop in the future. Some were concerned about how digital interactions are changing or even replacing physical interactions, and the need to improve real-life connections.

5. Health and Habits

Mental health was identified as a top priority, with concerns over long waiting times and the impact of social media on body image and self-esteem. Calls for increased investment in health services in general, and particularly in youth mental health services. **Technological change** was also often linked to health and wellbeing in many ways e.g. regulation of digital spaces, education on misinformation and disinformation.

Key Takeaways

→ Purposeful Methodology

Co-creation with young people and research-based trend cards made futures thinking engaging and accessible. This method can be adapted for different contexts and needs.

→ From Foresight to Impact

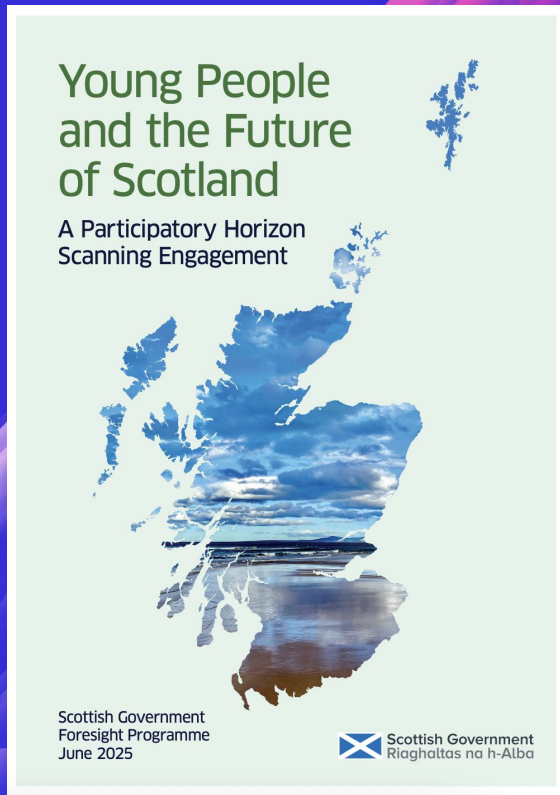
Bridging the 'impact gap' means linking foresight outputs to real governance and decision-making to have an effect. There are infinite future possibilities so we need to avoid analysis paralysis rather than using results to act and experiment.

→ Practical Challenges of Facilitating Futures Work

- ◆ Thinking beyond the everyday mindset
- ◆ Balancing positive and negative futures
- ◆ Tackling bias and power dynamics in engagement
- ◆ Moving from consultation to co-creation with the 'participants' of futures work

*“At the core of this, is **the need to recognise the strategic necessity of futures work** for ensuring government actions are oriented to steer towards desirable outcomes rather than only reacting to current problems. Ultimately, this work contributes towards the **ability to realise the opportunities of the future.**”*

→ [READ THE REPORT HERE](#)



Challenges and Opportunities of Participatory Futures Work and lessons from other contexts

How do we ensure
diverse voices have a
say in society?

How do we sustain work
beyond projects to bring
**lasting change and
processes** within
government?

How do we bridge
insight to action?

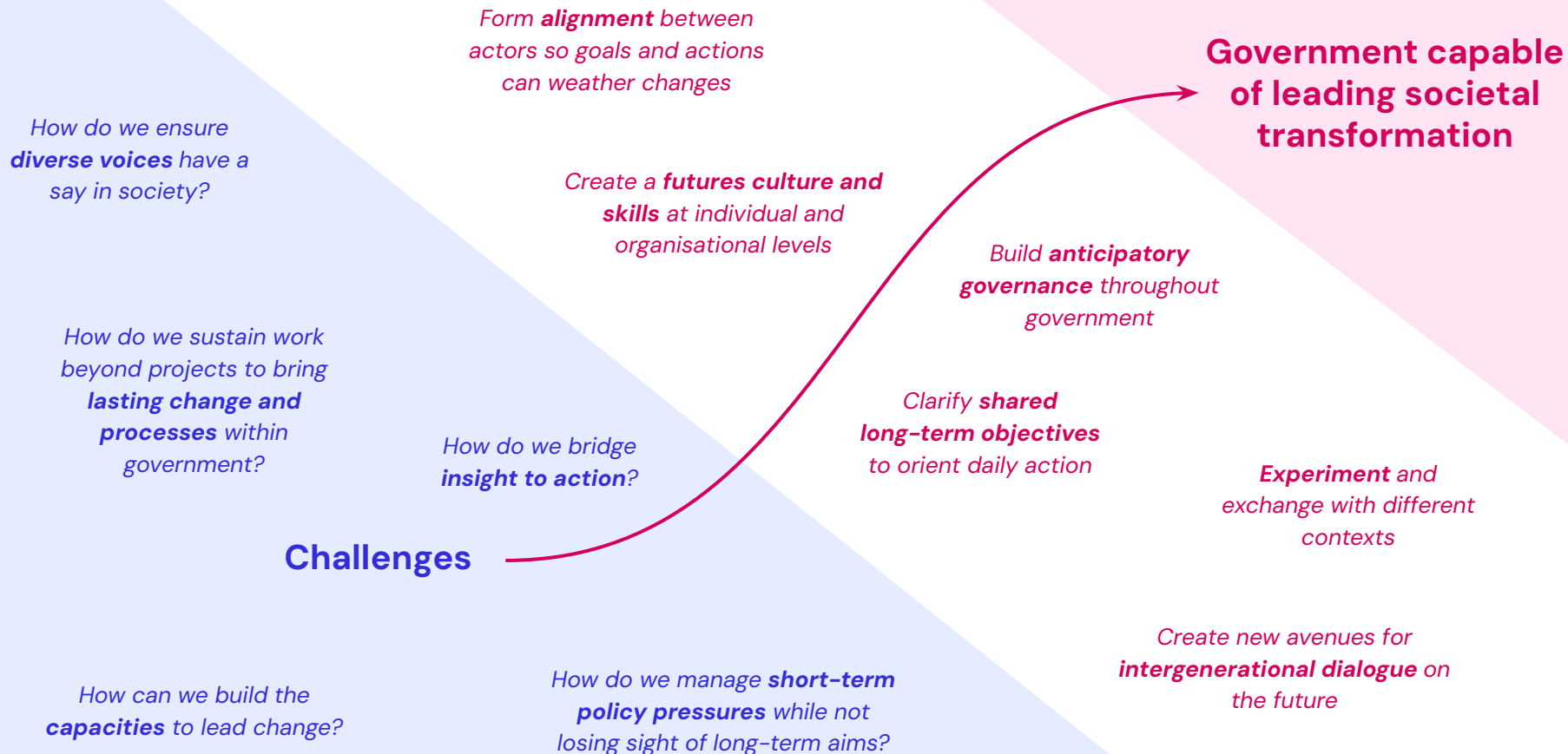
Challenges

How can we build the
capacities to lead change?

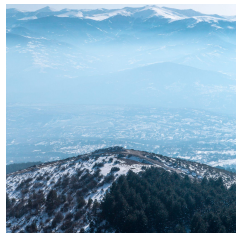
How do we manage **short-term
policy pressures** while not
losing sight of long-term aims?

The Impact Gap
the challenge for governments to
translate single foresight exercises
or processes into meaningful
change and impact.

**Government capable
of leading societal
transformation**



How to do this: Three examples from other contexts



Focusing on
specific
challenges

We collaborated with the UNHCR, IOM, UNFPA to build capacities and systems for **innovative, participatory and forward-looking migration management in North Macedonia.**

- **Capacity building** sessions for over 300 national stakeholders
- Development of an **analytical framework** suitable to the local context's governance and policymaking
- **Mini-pilots** for institutionalisation
- A [publication](#) that documented the process and results.



Focusing on
future-oriented
policymaking

With **UNDP South Sudan**, we

- Trained ~270 South Sudanese directors generals, undersecretaries and UNDP experts in foresight, on-site in Juba.
- Held a week-long **Anticipatory Policy Development** workshop with ~40 public sector leaders, drafting policies addressing critical areas such as climate resilience, inclusive governance, and sustainable development.
- These are slated for integration into the South Sudan Vision 2040.

[Watch a video about it here](#)



Focusing on
building skills
and experimenting

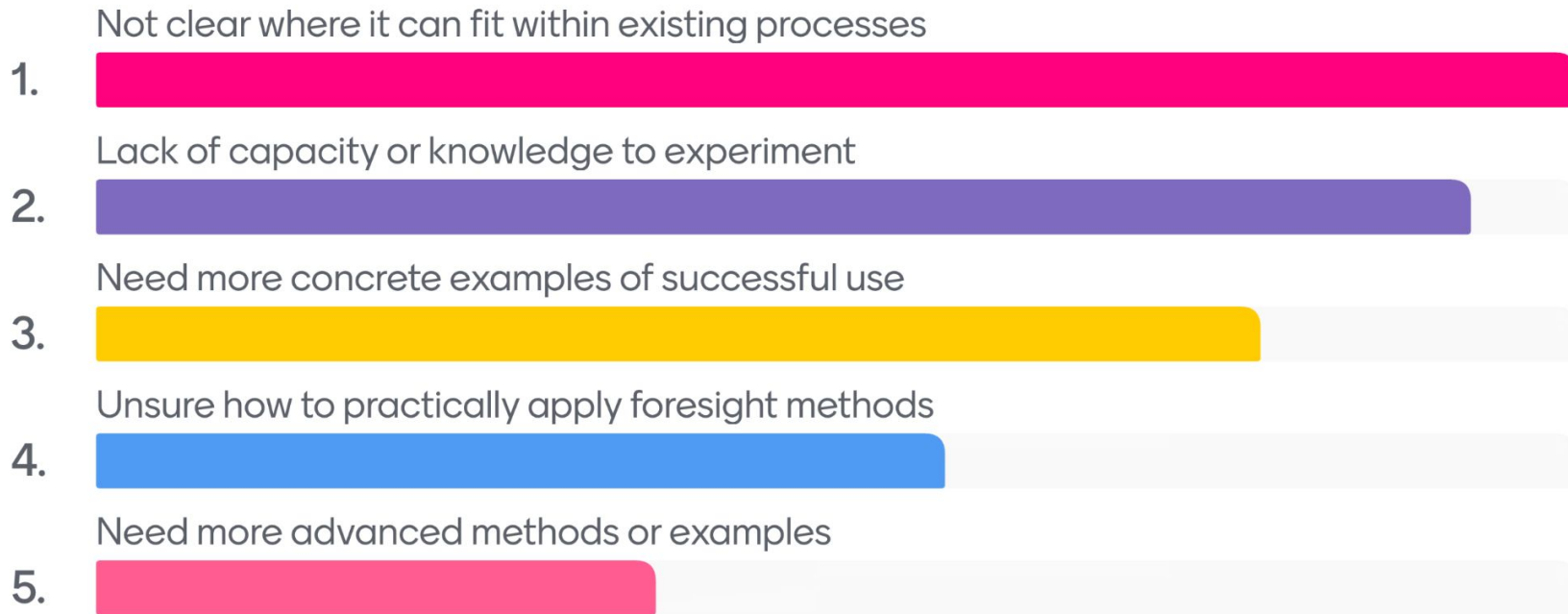
We supported the **Latvian School of Public Administration** to train civil servants to build and combine the skillsets of **foresight and experimentation** to learn innovative design methods for policy planning and legal drafting. After initial training, there was

- A **6 month experimentation phase**
- Solution oriented workshops and reflections.
- 1-on-1 and group mentoring focusing on applying the new methods and approaches in their work.

Any questions?

Exercise:
How this relates to your work

Which of these challenges to using foresight resonate most with you?



Which areas or processes in your current work could benefit most from future-oriented thinking?

vision alignment
impact of ai on water use
continuous discovery
change culture of sector
policy making
design patterns
climate
getting buy-in
strategy setting
creating digital services
reactive policy making
future of nhs
merger of dhsc and nhse
creating alignment
everything
setting a vision
complex policy
adult social care
ambition
creating alignment

Thank you!



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Expert

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Appendix: Who is Demos Helsinki?

Demos Helsinki's Impact Model



Role. Leading societal transformations.



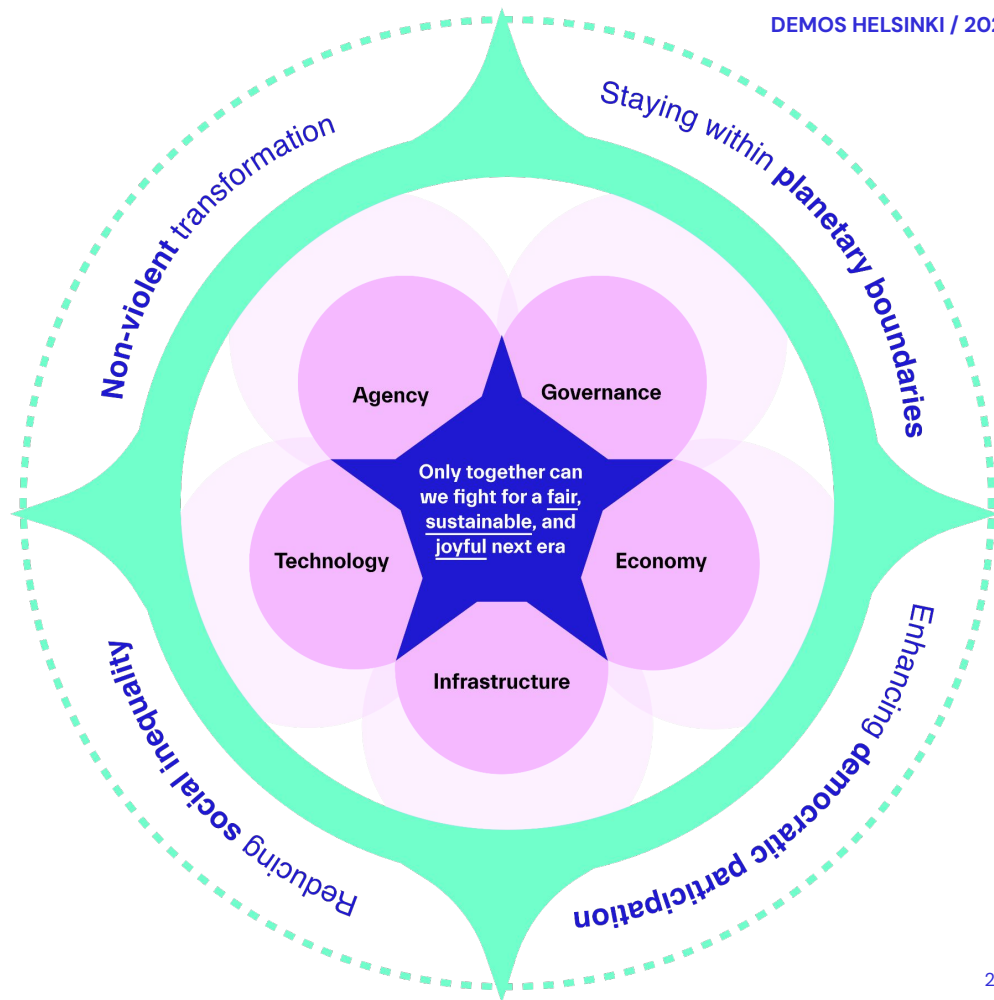
Ethos. Our ethos describes the starting point of our journey and our direction.



Leverages. The systems we have defined as critical for societal transformation.

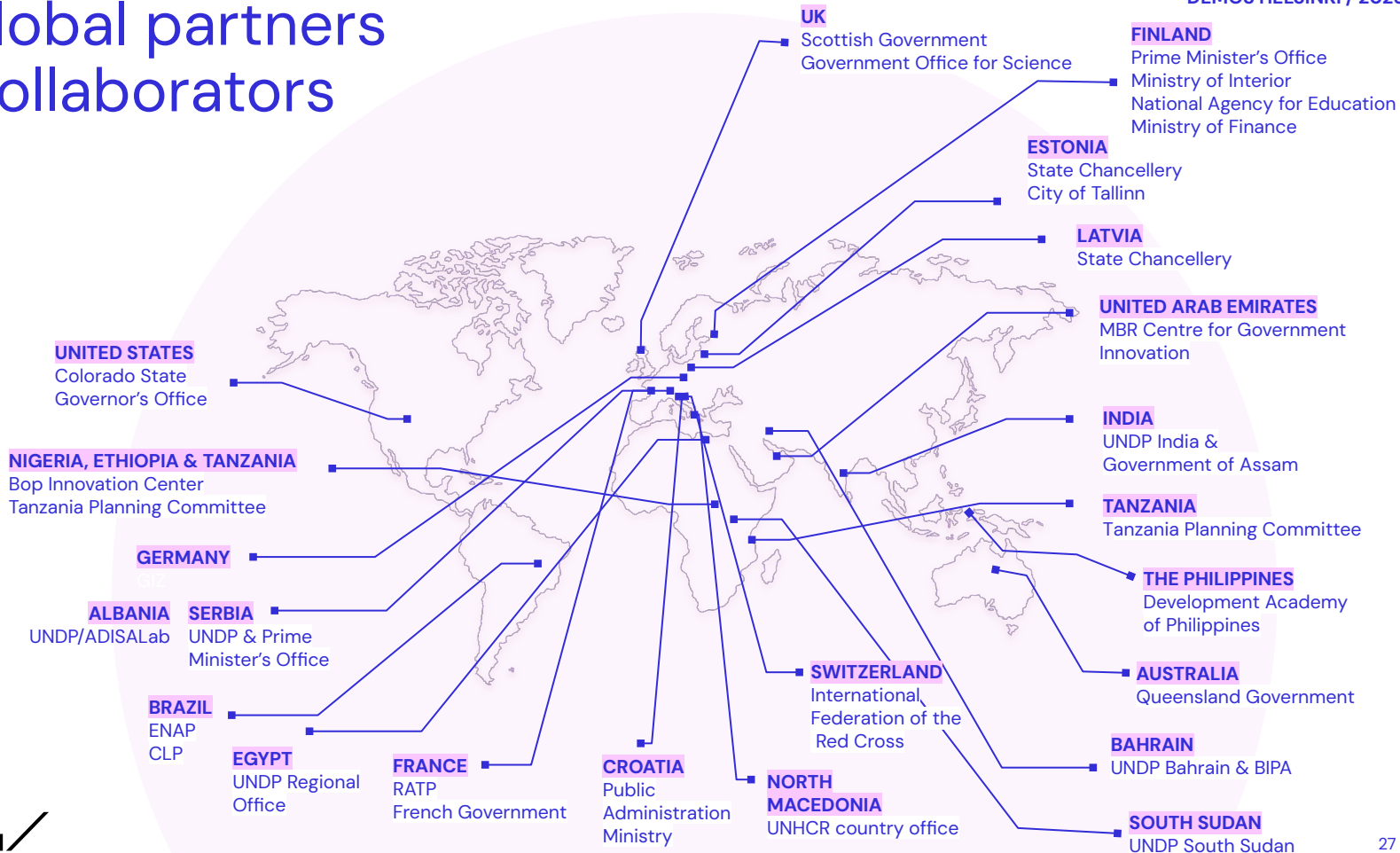


Commitments. The commitments we make to ensure that our work has critical limits.



Our global partners and collaborators

DEMOS HELSINKI / 2025



Only together can we fight for a fair, sustainable, and joyful next era.

