

Futures Thinking in International Youth Work

DIY² Lab | 11.12.2025
Report



Documentation

ijab

About

In March 2021, IJAB launched its new format **DIY² Lab: Do-it-Yourself in Digital International Youth Work** for experts, project managers and team leaders who want to explore the possibilities of hybrid and digital settings in international youth work. Today the DIY² Labs have evolved into an opportunity for experts and team leaders to try out innovative tools, ideas and methods and discuss practical as well as more fundamental issues associated with international youth work. The DIY² Lab takes place 3 to 4 times a year on Thursdays and is usually held on ZOOM.

What is *Futures Thinking* all about, and why is it becoming increasingly important for (international) youth work? The [European Academy on Youth Work](#) (EAYW) has conducted [research on Futures Thinking](#) in Youth Work and recently launched a [Futures of Youth Work Toolbox](#). In the international DIY² Lab on December 11th 2025 IJAB in cooperation with the European Academy on Youth Work explored together with over 30 practitioners, youth workers, and educators from 13 different countries what *Futures Thinking* can contribute to international youth work – and vice versa.

Together with Anita Silva in Portugal and Sonja Mitter Škulj in Slovenia, we dove into both the theory and practice of *Futures Thinking* in international youth work, discovering simple and creative tools that can easily be integrated into practice with young people, colleagues, or partner organizations. Together, we played and reflected on the game [Window to the Future](#), a freely available tool developed by the European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW). It's designed to spark meaningful conversations about the futures we want to imagine and co-create.

About the trainers

Anita Silva is the author of the game *Window to the Future*, a Portuguese creative trainer, consultant, and clown. She has extensive experience in non-formal education, international youth work, higher education, and community work. She studied Creativity and Innovation and loves to take people and organisations on a journey outside their own boxes. She is the founder of Clowncare, an NGO that organises clown visits to eldercare settings, and the director of Team MAIS, a consulting company that helps organisations take learning, creativity, and innovation a step further.

Sonja Mitter Škulj has facilitated international cooperation in the field of youth since the late 1990s, first at the Council of Europe Youth Directorate, and later within the EU youth programmes. Her personal intercultural experiences and her M.A. studies in history, focusing on migration and social integration, convinced her of the value of people-to-people contacts and intercultural exchange. As coordinator of the SALTO SEE Resource Centre in Ljubljana and the European Academy on Youth Work, her focus is on supporting innovation and quality in international youth work.

About the European Academy on Youth Work

The European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW) is a Strategic European Partnership of 14 National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, youth field, the European Solidarity Corps and SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres. EAYW aims to promote the development of quality youth work and to support its capacity to react to current and future developments. To this end, it focuses on supporting innovation in youth work, as a

response to the trends, challenges and uncertainties faced by young people in today's fast-changing societies. The EAYW offers a platform for exchange and knowledge gathering on trends and developments in and with relevance to the youth field in Europe, and on innovative youth work responses to these trends and developments.

Well known among youth workers and researchers around Europe is the biennial event of the EAYW in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, which invites practitioners and experts from across Europe (and beyond) to exchange ideas on innovative approaches and quality in youth work. The 4th EAYW event took place [5-8 May 2026](#).

EAYW's study on: [Innovation in Youth Work](#).

More information on the European Academy on Youth Work: [EAYW](#).

Why Futures Thinking in International Youth Work?

What is Futures Thinking all about, and why is it becoming increasingly important for (International) Youth Work? Is it about hope or giving perspectives? Is it about forecasting? Is it about intergenerational dialogue or intergenerational fairness? About the rights of future generations? Is it even about looking at the past, in order not to repeat mistakes in the future? Is it about mental health? Is maybe Futures Thinking connected to trauma therapy and prevention? Is it about competencies that will be needed in the future? These are all questions that the participants of the DIY²-Lab deal with in their daily practice.

In September 2024 at the Summit of the Future the United Nations adopted the [Pact for the Future](#) together with the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations (A/RES/79/1). With the Declaration on Future Generations the states commit to embedding the needs and interests of future generations and long-term thinking into policymaking through anticipatory planning, foresight, and futures literacy, grounded in science, data, and awareness of intergenerational impacts. This is a strong signal: Futures Thinking is not a “nice to have”; it is linked to how institutions are expected to make decisions and design policies. International Youth Work can translate this high-level commitment into learning, participation, and practice with young people around the globe. In the words of the European Academy on Youth Work:

„If we want to develop viable initiatives we need to be aware of possible changes and futures. Fostering a future-ready mindset is crucial for youth workers as they navigate an increasingly uncertain world“
(EAYW)

In International Youth Work, Futures Thinking is not primarily about predicting the future. It is about opening up multiple plausible futures, questioning assumptions, and making deliberate choices about the values and directions we want to strengthen. That matters especially in youth contexts, where uncertainty (climate crisis, wars, digital transformation, polarization, economic instability) can easily turn into

helplessness. Futures Thinking can therefore be a pedagogical approach to hope and agency: not naïve optimism, but the ability to imagine alternatives and act toward them.

This last part is also the main message of the interview IJAB held with Antti Rantaniva, Project Manager at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk), Juvenia - Youth Research and Development Centre. Antti has developed a [“Futures Coaches” methodology](#) for youth workers on a local level. He presented the manual at the “Futures of Youth Work” workshop hosted by the European Academy on Youth Work in June 2025. Here is the interview: [From local to international – futures thinking in Finland](#).

Agenda

Preparation: Scanning the present to find hints of the future

In preparation for the topic of the DIY²-Lab in December 2025 the participants were invited to a short exercise with the title *Signal Spotting - Scanning the present to find hints of the future*. The participants were invited to note on a Padlet board trends, challenges and opportunities they see happening in the world right now that might indicate where society is heading (e.g. the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence). The results are visible on the *Windows to the Future-Sandbox*.



Picture 1: Window to the Future Sandbox

Check-in activity

At the beginning of the DIY² Lab, after the participants had been welcomed and the speakers had introduced themselves, Anita Silva started with a check-in activity about how people relate on a personal level to the future.



The question was: *What is one thing, big or tiny, that currently gives you energy or hope about the future?*

Answers that were given: community spirit, solidarity, family, engaged youth, friends and colleagues, sports- and women's communities, conversations, my plans in the future with loved ones...

The follow-up question was: *If you could take a single snapshot of your personal life five years from now (2030), what moment would you love to capture in that photo – and why?*

The participants mentioned all their lovely plans for the future being already successfully implemented, for example: PhDs, travels, projects with young people, a construction camp in Ukraine, planning the next future, a more peaceful Europe and much more.



“Start a conversation about the future”

Anita Silva sums up participant's answers, noting that this is just a way to start a conversation about the future, but it is also a way to “set the tone” about the future: Futures Thinking sometimes feels like looking at something difficult or looking at uncertainty, at the unknown. But sometimes Futures Thinking can also be about just starting to imagine, what is possible by activating our hope as a way for action. Sonja Mitter adds that Futures Thinking often starts like this: Having a conversation about the future and about now.

Intro-capture: Futures Thinking in Youth Work

Youth work already provides young people with tools and methods for orientation, agency and meaning and support for identity, participation and belonging.

Futures Thinking adds the crucial missing elements. It is:

- exploring possible futures
- understanding uncertainty
- linking present actions to future impact
- strengthening hope, agency and imagination

Youth work then becomes a bridge between personal futures and collective futures.

Let's play: Window to the Future

The game *Window to the Future* was created for and played by the participants during the 3rd European Academy Event in May 2024. It invites participants in small groups to open a window into the future – progressively, step by step. It is a reflection tool to kick off interesting and balanced conversations around what the future might hold for our communities and how we can act now to co-create a better future. Use it when you want to practice future-thinking skills, such as imagination, empathy, critical thinking and strategic thinking.



Further information about the game *Window to the Future* including a video tutorial with Anita Silva, material and instructions: [Window to the Future](#).

Picture 2: Cards from the *Window to the Future*

Window to the Future @DIY²-Lab

At the DIY²-Lab in December 2025 the game *Window to the Future* was played for the first time online. That was an experiment, and the game had to be slightly adapted to the online environment. The participants worked with the Windows to the Future-Sandbox on [Padlet](#). For this they were sent to breakout sessions of 3-4 participants each. Each breakout session had its own Padlet board with fancy and creative names like "Future Foxes".

→ Step 1: Thinking of the present or *Signal Spotting*

In preparation for the DIY²-Lab the participants were asked to note hints of the future in the present on post-its (see picture 1).

→ Step 2: *Building a Scenario*

For step 2 Anita prepared online game cards for the Padlet (see picture 3). Each card names two areas, for example "Health & Wellbeing" and "Innovation & Technology" etc. Each participant was invited to choose one of the cards and write down in one sentence one scenario for each area 15 years from now. For the area "Health & Wellbeing" for example this could be a sentence like "3-D Printers will be printing substitute organs with DNA taken from saliva" or "Virtual Vacation will be mandatory in the office for 45 minutes a day".

If needed the participants could use the *Ask a Futurist*-Cards, for example in case some participant does not know what to write.

→ Step 3: How is Life in this future scenario?

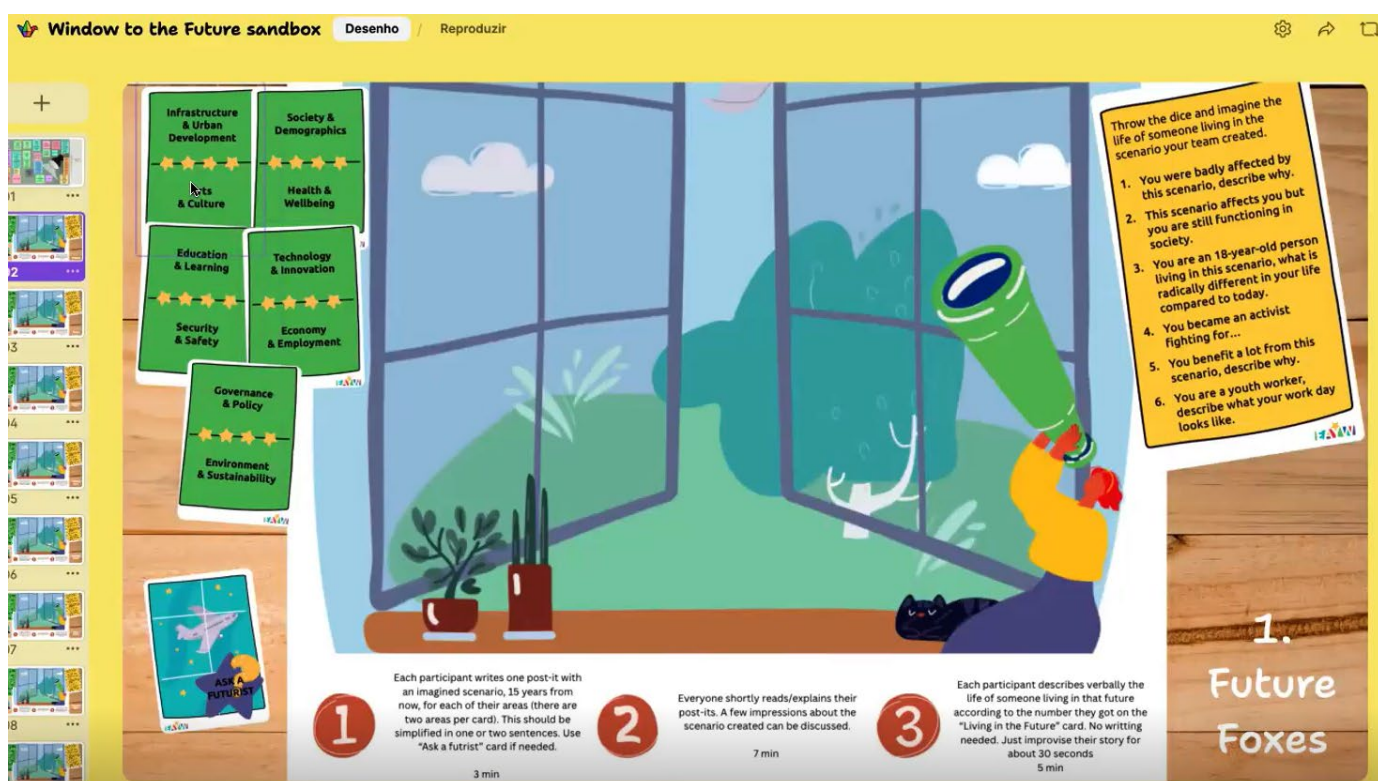
After the participants explain their scenarios in the group and everyone gets an impression of each scenario, each participant throws a die (we used virtual dice) and then describes living in this future scenario through the lens of the person described on the *Living in the Future*-card.

→ Step 4: A better scenario

After debriefing the participants can adapt the scenarios into better scenarios, more worth living in, for example, a more desirable future.

→ Step 5: Badges for valuing the conversation itself

The game includes also badge-cards that participants can use to value the role of each participant in the conversation. The badge-cards mention characteristics like "Empathy Ambassador" or "Collaboration Champion" etc.



Picture 3: Screenshot of the Padlet *Future Foxes*

Reflection-time

Working with young people in international groups the game *Window to the Future* can help the participants to get out of a "bubble feeling" realizing that other young people face the same challenges although they live in another country. There are no right or wrong answers in this game, it is more about openness than correctness. Agency is created by speaking about a roadmap with little concrete steps into the scenario the participants might have imagined.

Anita sums up: "Young people don't have to face the future that is coming, but in youth work they can practice the future in a brave environment".

Literature and Links

European Academy on Youth Work

Research Report on Futures of Youth Work

<https://www.eayw.net/eayw-research-futures-youthwork/>

The Futures of Youth Work Toolbox

<https://www.eayw.net/futures-toolbox/>

Window to the Future

<https://www.eayw.net/resources/window-to-the-future/>

IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (2025)

Futures Literacy in international youth work. From local to international: Futures Thinking in Finland.

<https://ijab.de/en/topics/research/current-articles-on-research/zukunftskompetenzen-in-der-internationalen-jugendarbeit>

Rantaniva, Antti / Eerikäinen, Ville (2025): Future Coaching Guide.

<https://julkaisut.xamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/URN9789523446243.pdf>

United Nations

Pact for the Future (2024): <https://www.un.org/pact-for-the-future/en>.

Imprint

This documentation was compiled by



International Youth Service of the
Federal Republic of Germany

Godesberger Allee 142-148
53175 Bonn
Germany

Telephone: +49 228 9506-0

Email: info@ijab.de

Internet: <https://www.ijab.de>

Status: February 2026

Responsible: Daniel Poli

Editor and contact person: Natali Petala-Weber (petala-weber@ijab.de)

Template design: simpelplus.de, Berlin

Photos: Cover: Willian Matiola | Pexels (Cover); Rest: IJAB

This work or content is licensed under a Creative Commons [Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Germany](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/de/) license.

The information compiled has been researched to the best of our knowledge. No claim is made as to its accuracy or completeness. The editorial team welcomes any comments, suggestions for changes or additions.

Note: IJAB is funded by BMBFSFJ as part of the KJP. The publication does not represent the opinion of BMBFSFJ. Responsibility for the content of the publication lies with the author.

Funded by:



Federal Ministry
for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

As part of the:



Federal
Child and
Youth Plan

STRENGTHENING WHAT THE FUTURE IS BUILT ON.