

Roadmaps to the future

In brief

- What should the city of the future look like? How do we want to live in 2050? What will we eat? Citizens, experts and stakeholders answer these kinds of questions with the aid of CIVISTI, a new participatory method.
- Laypersons' and experts' knowledge and creativity are cross-linked to include a variety of views whilst shedding light on questions relevant to the future.
- Results broaden the basis for robust decisions and support long-term planning.

What is it about?

CIVISTI is a new participatory foresight method which helps to find answers on how we, as society, want to live. Moral values as well as laypersons' everyday knowledge are cross-linked with expertise to define priorities and framework conditions for topics relevant to the future. This allows decision makers to detect challenges for implementation early on; bad planning can be avoided and policies can be shaped proactively. Additionally, results stimulate the development of innovative and responsible services and products.

CIVISTI is a qualitative method. Even though results are not statistically representative, they are socially robust. They provide a roadmap which forward-looking policies can use as a guide. The method was developed as part of an EU project and tested in several countries. Afterwards, further applications followed in Austria.

In so-called 'vision workshops', 25-50 citizens initially formulate visions for and concepts of a desirable future in 30-40 years. The only requirement in this phase is a standardised process for dialogue. Participants are guided towards creatively expressing their wishes, hopes and fears for the future

with regard to a certain topic. The method fosters and depends on integrating as many views as possible.

Following a content analysis, experts develop various preliminary recommendations for implementation on the basis of the visions. A highly interdisciplinary group of experts and stakeholders then refines these suggestions in another workshop, producing tangible recommendations and measures for research, development and innovation policies.



Inventing the future with CIVISTI

Finally, the initial citizens review and assess the recommendations before they are presented to decision-makers and the public. Additionally, an Internet-based voting on the results can be used to add the opinion of the general public.

The method contains several feedback loops. The project team mediates between the different groups and phases of the process. Optionally, a steering board consisting of administrators, planners, scientists and business representatives may support the process whilst simultaneously ensuring that results reach appropriate channels.

Depending on the scope, final results are available after one to one and a half years.

Moreover, an additional 'product' – a 'Newsletter from the future', which merges visions and recommendations – can be delivered at the end of the process. Looking back from the future, it describes fictional developments that may have led to the implementation of ideas forming part of the visions.

Basic data

Project title:	CIVISTI – Citizens' Visions on Science Technology and Innovation
Project team:	Sotoudeh, M., Peissl, W., Gudowsky, N. (several consortia)
Duration:	01/2008 – 02/2016
Funded by:	EU (FP7), City of Vienna, FFG, BMVIT

Examples

Within the scope of the first CIVISTI application, citizens from seven EU countries produced an overall of 69 visions. Experts and stakeholders condensed these to thirty recommendations for European R&D policy, namely Horizon 2020. All participants mutually agreed that the following topics have top priority:

- Attractive public transport
- Decentralised energy production
- Tools for disabled people
- European eco-cities

However, there were also differences of opinion. Citizens deemed topics such as social innovations for an ageing society or the re-appropriation of the countryside to be very important topics for the future whilst experts prioritised the topics public participation as well as recycling of complex materials.



Developing visions together

Recommendations related to different time horizons: in addition to pilot projects and options for action, which could be implemented at short notice, there were also recommendations that needed mid- and long-term planning. Additionally, experts ordered their results according to the criteria 'novelty' and 'importance'.

As an example, we briefly refer to the topic 'attractive public transport' – the elaborated version of this recommendation can be found on the CIVISTI website:

"Promote technical and social innovations to improve people's access to transportation schemes, through an intelligent and interactive network. This network should cover and integrate both local and transnational travel in a flexible, user-friendly and environmentally sound way."

The experts rated this recommendation as *innovative* and *very essential*, because it included the advice to advance technical and social infrastructure by means of artificial intelligence. This should help solve current transport and environmental problems.

What to do?

Standardised methods such as CIVISTI systematically link knowledge of citizens and experts. This produces valuable results, which can be integrated into the planning process of research programmes to induce responsible research and innovation.

- CIVISTI provides a setting, which allows for inter- and transdisciplinary communication for agenda setting within the research policy context. Public opinion maintains its authenticity when compared to prevailing experts' beliefs and stakeholder interests.
- The method can be adapted relatively easily to cope with case-specific and practical challenges. Application to broad topics as well as to very specific ones is possible.
- Qualitative studies on the basis of the CIVISTI method are a good alternative to opinion polls and focus groups, because they are more responsive to current as well as future needs and wants of citizens. Cross-linking of different types of knowledge results in new ideas and socially more robust research agendas.

Further reading

Examples of application:

www.civisti.org, European CIVISTI project
www.leben2050.at, Autonomous Living of Older Adults
www.ages.at/ages/futurefoods, Future Foods

Gudowsky, N.; Peissl, W.; Sotoudeh, M.; Bechtold, U. (2012) Forward-looking activities: incorporating citizens' visions. *Poiesis & Praxis* 9, 1-2, pp. 101-123, <http://www.dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10202-012-0121-6>

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