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Questions of future

– what young people of Bratislava and Brussels
want to know about the future

youth
watch

"We can change the future! There are many issues that need to be addressed, but if we do nothing, the future will remain the same as the present." - futures workshop participant

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“Relatively many things can change in 13 years, and I, as an individual, can do something for collective contentment. I hope for a better future.”
- futures workshop participant

The concept of futures as a tool for participation



The project Future Youth 2035 aims to support and strengthen the position of youth in society and develop competencies young people need for their future.

Together with our project partner [BrusselAVenir](#) from Belgium, we want to find out how young people imagine futures in Bratislava and Brussels in 2035. Through qualitative research and innovative educational activities, we get to see how young people imagine the future they would like to fight for and what needs to be changed in the present in order for the desired future to come true.

The concept of futures as a tool for participation

The project works with the concept of futures, a futures methodology devel-

oped by BrusselAVenir. The concept has a great potential for use in youth work as a participatory tool.

The power of the concept of futures lies in the imagination and liberation from conventions. When young people think about the future, they are able to see the world in a broader context. They have a better understanding of social systems and changes taking place in society. They create space for addressing various conscious or subconscious concerns, questions and challenges related to the future. Imagination allows them to look at the world from a different perspective and to think about unconventional or transformative solutions.

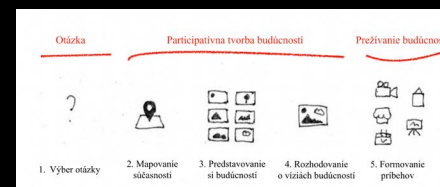
They can also better verbalize their needs, desires and visions for the future and define the ways they want to fulfil them. Awareness of future scenarios and their likelihood develop their sense of security and readiness. Defining visions for the future can also motivate them to make conscious steps now in the present so they can build the future they are willing to fight for. They are also able to name resources they need for taking those steps.

The concept of futures is also an excellent tool for building empathy between people or generations and helps to embrace diversity. During discussions about the future, its participants realize that there are many forms of the future, each individual has their own visions for it, and everyone has their own future. Thus, there is an infinite number of futures.

Working with the concept of futures stimulates discussion and can bring up any topic. The set-up of the discussion encourages the openness, perceptiveness and imagination of everybody involved. This also gives space to topics that are not usually discussed. Imagination has no limits, everything is possible in the future.

How we explore the future in this project

This figure sums up how we work with the concept of futures in the project Future Youth 2035.



The future is very broad and abstract. Therefore, the work with the concept of futures starts with the selection of a particular topic that we want to discuss. This step is crucial because if the topic does not resonate with people, the whole process will not work. So firstly, we need to find out what topics interest young people (and those who work with them) the most.

We at BrusselAVenir and YouthWatch also needed to identify an area that we will explore and that will lead us to a research question. First of all, we had to map the context of youth in our cities through desk research, interviews with experts, trend analysis and crowdsourcing of questions from the people of Brussels and Bratislava.

Desk research: we have carried out extensive desk research on youth in Brussels and Bratislava in general.

Expert interviews: we conducted five in-depth interviews with six experts from Brussels and eight interviews with experts from Bratislava and other cities. All of them have expertise in the field of youth and shared their views, ideas and observations about the youth of Brussels and Bratislava today and in 2035. The interviews

showed some recurring topics, most of them were related to data from various sources on youth.

Trend analysis: A preliminary trend research was conducted to map the behaviour of today's youth and to find out what changes will affect the future. The trend research offers an insight into how the Alpha generation (today's children) will live in 2035 when they are young. Trends are assumed developments in the future that will have a long-term and lasting effect or can change something (Hengsberger, sd). Trend research can be used as a method to identify and understand change in a structured way in order to be aware of possible directions of change. Trend research can give insights in the future and guide towards a more consciously chosen future as well as provide input to influence the future (Dragt, 2017).

Crowdsourcing questions: We asked people from Brussels and Bratislava to share their questions about the youth of Brussels and Bratislava in 2035. We created an online form that was distributed via newsletter, social networks or personal contacts. The crowdsourced questions can be used not only in the research part, but also in the phase of

imagining futures, as they provide an insight into the context and problems of youth in Brussels and Bratislava. The whole mapping process gave us an image of the youth in Brussels and Bratislava.

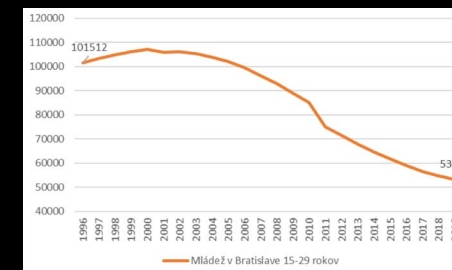
We have identified their problems and uncertainties associated with the future as well as overarching themes. We then defined some initial research questions, which we further explored in order to select the topic that proves to be the most urgent. To do this, we used the tool Wheel of the Future, which helped us identify the final research question.

Youth in Bratislava

Let's first have a look at the characteristics of young people in Bratislava and demographic trends. The information and data were collected from Open data Bratislava¹, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and interviews with experts in the field of youth work.

From the available data, it is clear that Bratislava is aging. Between 1996 and 2019, the number of young people (aged 15-29) living in Bratislava decreased by 49%. The question is whether this decline reflects the general demographic trends in Slovakia or is specific to Bratislava only.

Figure 1: Youth (15-29 years) in Bratislava (ŠÚ SR)



However, the situation will improve a bit and in the next ten years, the age category 14-29 will get bigger. So in the years 2020-2025-2030, there will be a slight increase in the number of

young people in Bratislava.

This is only a prediction and may not be fulfilled if there are significant changes in the situation, e.g. arrival of a large number of migrants, change in accommodation prices, change in working or climatic conditions, etc.

Young people with permanent residence in Bratislava make up only one part of the total number of young people in Bratislava. There is an average of 3.5 university students per one young person with permanent residence in Bratislava. That is a real mass of young people in the capital. The key figure is that on average 60% of all students who come to Bratislava from other parts of the country later find work here and probably stay to live here.

In addition to that, there is a large number of people from the surrounding towns and villages, who come to Bratislava every day to study, work or attend cultural events². Young people in Bratislava are at a very little risk of unemployment because generally they live in good economic conditions.

¹ <https://opendata.bratislava.sk/>, processed 21.4.2021

² <https://opendata.bratislava.sk/page/people>

Description of young people in Bratislava

Based on interviews with experts, we can say that young people in Bratislava form a very diverse group which is hard to describe. However, if we make a broad generalization, we can state that young people in Bratislava have considerably more economic, social, cultural and educational opportunities compared to the rest of Slovakia. Experts agree that they observe two extremes. On the one hand, there are very active young people who are involved in almost all possible activities. They often jump from one activity to another and usually do not have the motivation to complete the previous one. They want to be active and are often unable to say no. They are unable to choose a path that they would systematically follow. Or they lack role models and leaders who can help them.

On the other hand, there are young people who are extremely passive. They often copy viral trends, e.g. from TikTok, but they do not create new ones. A high percentage of young people come from divorced or dysfunctional families. The phenomenon

of helicopter parents³ is also present. These parents are overly focused on their children, take responsibility for them and follow all their steps, sometimes even literally through mobile apps. Such an approach does not have a good effect on children's self-confidence, skills but also mental health. This behaviour can be observed in parents of very small children as well as those who are raising teenagers.

Bratislava is a metropolis so it naturally offers greater anonymity but at the same time lesser sense of community. A diverse mix of people live in Bratislava, including disadvantaged groups and minorities. Greater cultural diversity, greater freedom of opinion and tolerance for differences are also features of life in the capital. It is also one of the reasons why more and more young LGBTQIA+ people come to Bratislava. We can also meet with youth from housing estates. This group, together with other minority groups, is considered to be at-risk youth due to the increased number of manifestations of socially pathological behaviour such as drug activity, alcohol, etc.

According to experts, all these groups are relatively well integrated into soci-

ety due to sufficient economic opportunities. No conflicts or significant tension between the majority population and disadvantaged groups have been observed.

Youth (in Bratislava) - changes and challenges

If we want to talk about young people in 2035, we first need to understand how things are gradually changing and how young people respond to those changes. So we asked experts about their views on this matter.

The current young generation has very similar concerns as the previous generations. But the forms they can use to deal with them are different. It is typical for adolescents to be most concerned with their identity and the need to belong somewhere. In general, the need to be original and authentic prevails. They often push themselves in search of their potential and uniqueness. Young people live under enormous pressure, but they are ill-prepared and unequipped to cope with it. They do not have sufficient resilience yet and are expected to help themselves.

The way young people look at the world is influenced by social networks. An effort to provoke the strongest emotion prevails. Social networks give space for any topic or problem, but they are flooded with negative behaviour. For young people, what is outside is often less important than what is currently happening online. They feel pressured to adopt an opinion, to pick a side. To say I do not know or not have an opinion is considered weird. This also affects the way they think about self-esteem. The predominant narrative is that "I am valuable based on what I think or do", and not just because "I am/exist". Young people can easily give in to societal pressures and also create their own. They want to be perfect but this approach takes a heavy toll on their mental health. Panic and anxiety disorders, self-harm or feelings of loneliness are all very common among young people.

They also have great ideals and ambitions. However, it takes a long time until they dare to do something or they have trouble to see the job through. It is a feature of a fast-paced world. I want everything fast, I want to see, know or have everything right away. This can be reflected in the density and diversity of their activities. Young

³ <https://eduworld.sk/cd/jaroslava-konickova/777/aki-su-helikopterovi-rodicia>

people are everywhere surrounded by information. Its overload sometimes makes them feel lost. There is not enough support on how to navigate so much information. They need a sense of security because work and relationships are very dynamic and the environment is competitive.

Intergenerational relationships are also affected by technological progress. Older generations do not commonly use social networks so extensively as younger generations. This creates digital inequality and generational gaps. The political culture in the country does not improve the relationships either. Young people are often reduced to the economic power whose only role is to earn money for pensions of the current generation. Intergenerational dialogue is also not encouraged. Even in the work environment, the younger and older generations see each other as competitors. Therefore, there is often no transfer of know-how.

The youngsters are also not equipped with competencies they need for work life. The school system is slow to reflect changes and so does not sufficiently prepare young people in this direction either. Another challenge

young people care about deeply is the climate crisis and climate change. They are much more interested in global issues such as human rights or global warming and put pressure on institutions to actively address these issues. However, their calls often go unanswered. This creates a huge crisis of trust in institutions and justice. In Slovakia, it is even reinforced due to revealed corruption cases.

We would like to thank the following experts for interviews:

- Milan Polešenský, Iuventa–Slovak Institute of youth, coordinator of Petržalka youth parliament
- Peter Kulifaj, Mládež ulice
- Martin Mojzeš, Nexteria
- Katarína Čavojská, Youth Council of Slovakia
- Janette Motlová, Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology
- Lenka Ilánovská, GetClients
- Andrea Madarasová Gecková, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice
- Jana Miháliková, Tomáš Pešek, Marcela Hajtmánková, Světlana Offermann, Lucia Szorád, Lukáš Michal, Soňa Turanová, Youth-Watch

What young people want to know about the future in 2035

“Let’s travel for a little while to the year 2035... You may have just crossed the threshold of adulthood or you may not be young anymore. Imagine what the world is like in 2035. What would you want to know about the youth in Bratislava in 2035?”

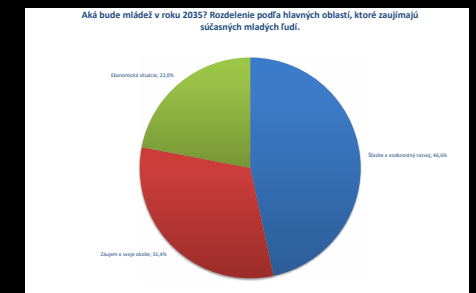
We have crowdsourced 355 answers or rather questions that young people would like to know the answer to. The questions were collected via online survey from May to September 2021 and during workshops.

We divided the crowdsourced questions into three main and seventeen specific categories.

Three main areas

The largest part, almost half of the questions, was related to happiness, values, relationships, health, educational level and free time of future young people. Almost one third of questions was about environmental protection, city development, political situation, participation in public affairs or diversity. In the last group, there were questions concerning the economic situation, housing, work and standard of living.

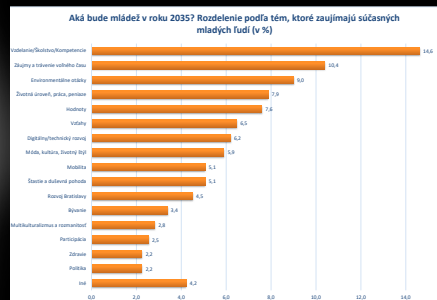
Figure 1:



17 topics that interest young people

For a further analysis, we broke the questions down into 17 specific categories. The four most interesting topics for young people are education, schooling, competences (14.6%), interests and leisure (10.4%), environmental issues (9%) and standard of living, work, money (7.9%). If we added housing to the topic of standard of living, it would be the second most interesting topic (a total of 11.3%). These four areas cover almost half of all crowdsourced questions.

Figure 2:



Education, schooling and competences

Young people are most interested in the state of the education system in 2035 as well as in the scope and level of competences of future young people. We can divide their questions into three groups. The first one can be described as a general interest in how much the future youth will be educated and in what form they will be educated:

- "What will be the quality of education?"
- "What forms will be used in education?"
- "Will students still go to school?"

The second group of questions shows concern whether the education system is able to adapt to current and

future needs:

- "Will the next generation be smart enough to sustain economic growth?"
- "Will they receive quality education that reflects the needs of the labour market and at the same time prepares them for life in Industry 4.0?"
- "Will they receive education that meets the needs of a changing economy?"

Questions in the third group express criticism of the current system of education together with a fear of whether something will change for the better in the future:

- "Will young people be as stupid as they are now?"
- "Will they still have to memorise stuff?"
- "Will they still learn things they won't use in life?"
- "I'm worried that future generations will be completely degenerated by conspiracy theories about the nonexistence of climate change and the whole future of humanity and the Earth will be messed up."

Interests and free time

Questions about free time make the second most numerous group. We can divide them into two groups. In the first one, there are general questions about what young people will do in their free time in 2035:

- "Will young people want to go out?"
- "What sport will be popular?"
- "What will it mean for them to go have fun on Friday?"

The second group of questions expresses fear whether young people will have enough opportunities to spend their leisure time in a meaningful way:

- "Will there be libraries they can go to?"
- "Will there be places where they can spend meaningful time—sports venues, libraries, community and cultural centres, public spaces, parks?"
- "Will there finally be a system of youth centres in Slovakia (and Bratislava) where young people (teenagers) can participate in various activities, get involved and have a space to meet friends?"

Environmental issues

The third largest group of questions is related to environmental issues. There is a small number of general questions and a lot of those expressing some concern. We can divide the questions into two groups. In the first group, there are questions that show fear of how the world will look like in 2035:

- "Will the climate and the Earth be habitable?"
- "Will fresh air still exist?"
- "Will they know the smell of home-grown tomatoes?"
- "Will they be able to see stars?"

Questions in the second group express a worry whether the youth will still care about the state of the world:

- "Will they be aware of the consequences of throwing waste into nature?"
- "Will they care about the environment?"
- "Will they have any knowledge about nature?"

Standard of living, work, money

In this category, young people were most interested in what the work of future young people will look like:

- "How will it be with work? Will

- there be enough people to do it?"
- "Will they work for pleasure or just for money?"
- "Will they earn more money compared to the present?"

They also worry about the standard of living of the young people:

- "Will there be enough food?"
- "Will it be affordable to get a mortgage and pay for it? And if so, will they have something left for a normal human life after paying for housing and food?"
- "Will there be a basic quality of life secured (e.g. health, work, housing, environment)?"

Social inequalities are also of concern:

- "Have they managed to remove social inequalities?"
- "What kind of support will be given to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds?"

Other areas

In other areas, we can identify a few more specific concerns that were frequently repeated in the questions.

Concerns about housing affordability:

- "Will young people from Bratislava live with their parents until they

start a family and decide to get a mortgage for the rest of their life?"

- "Will they have a place to live?"
- "What will be the availability of housing due to low supply and crazy prices?"

Concerns about the impact of technology on young people's lives:

- "Will they be able to live without the internet for at least 5 minutes a day?"
- "Will they still know reality?"
- "Will they sleep without a cell phone?"
- "Will they take care of their surroundings and live more in reality than in the world of the Internet and social media?"
- "Will they be still addicted to Instagram and TikTok, or will they already focus on important things like peace of mind or ecology?"

And concerns about intergenerational relationships:

- "How will young people take care of the older generation?"
- "What will their relationships with other generations look like?"
- "How far will the arrogance of the young people and their contempt for the elderly go?"

- "Will an ageing parent be a bother to them?"

Apart from the concerns, we need to mention a number of questions in which young people show interest in their surroundings and in improving the problem areas (other than environmental):

- "How will young people help with improving their city?"
- "Will they volunteer in any organisation?"
- "Will they be interested in what is happening around them—in public space, their region, other regions in their country, other countries?"
- "How will they want to improve their surroundings?"

Conclusion from the questionnaire survey

The crowdsourced questions have shown that today's young people are most interested in how young people in 2035 will be educated, how they will spend their free time, what their standard of living will be like and what will be the state of the environment. The topics of values, relationships and technology followed closely behind.

From the questions, we can also conclude which topics concern young people the most. Above all, it is the state of the environment, the quality of education in Slovakia, the standard of living of young people (work, money, housing) and leisure time (availability of spaces, opportunities as well as concerns that instead of the real world, they will be interested only in technology).

What do Bratislava and Brussels have in common and how do they differ?

Youth in Brussels

Brussels is the youngest region in Belgium and the youngest capital city of the EU (EU cities - the young and the old, 2019). The youth of Brussels is a hyperdiverse (ethnically, age cohorts wise and interests wise) and hard to define group. The current generation of youngsters in Brussels is a generation of activists. The youth is committed to work towards a better future. The youngsters defend their ideology by going on the streets.

The youth has the power to decide whether something exists online or not. Various movies, advertisements and shows have been canceled due to the collective voice of the youngsters. The youth of Brussels is really open towards themes that are difficult to discuss or even taboo like social consciousness, ecology, racism, LGBTQ+ and gender. Gen Z fights for freedom of self-expression. They have the mentality that everybody can be who they want to be. The current generation of youngsters in Brussels indicate that they feel lost and have no more trust in democracy and in the institutions.

Problems

Identity crisis

- Although there is a strong bond between the youngsters of Brussels, they do not identify strongly with the city. Their identity is fundamentally more localized (municipality-based) than 'Brusselselaar'. They are Molenbekenaar or Anderlechtenaar for example and identify themselves with their postal codes (Corijn, 2021).
- Youngsters with a migration background do not feel at home in Belgium on the one hand, because their roots lie in another country. But on the other hand, they do not feel connected to their country of origin because they live in Belgium. This fact drives the youth to segregation and almost exclusive contact with youth of the same country of origin (Sacco, Smits, Spruyt, Kavadias & d'Andri-mont, 2016).
- Every institution in Brussels is pillarized due to language. Extracurricular activities, education, and psychosocial assistance are all divided because of language. This makes Brussels youth even more divided than it already is (Man-

soury, 2021).

Neglected youth

- Youth in Brussels has to deal with prejudices, stigmas and racism on a regular basis. Other generations look at the young people of Brussels in a negative way. This even reinforces young people's low self-esteem and negative self-image.
- Next to racism by individuals, the youth of Brussels feels that they still encounter institutional racism. In Brussels people are facing racism at school, in the housing and labour market and in the judicial system (BenYakoub & Youssef, 2021).
- Youngsters are feeling lost and hopeless due to the pandemic. When the security of a classroom disappears, it gets harder to reach the youngsters from Brussels. Youngsters are feeling that no one cares for them and that they are being used as a scapegoat for the pandemic.

Education

- There is not enough capacity for all students in the schools of Brussels.
- Social inequalities are institution-

alised in school structures. Pupils of foreign origin and pupils with mothers with a lower education level experience difficulties at schools.

- 25% of the youth in secondary schools has a developmental delay of 2 years. 15% of the Brussels youth are early school leavers. They leave secondary school without their diploma, which is 5% more than in the rest of Belgium.
- Ethnic and social segregation by schools is very much present in Brussels. "Ghetto schools" and "elite schools" are both strongly represented in Brussels.
- Religion poses an additional difficulty within schools. Research shows that young Muslims often feel misunderstood in their religious identity at schools.

Unemployment

- Less than 30% of 15-24 year olds have entered the labour market. High risk of long-term unemployment due to combination of different disadvantages- no diploma, migration background and parents not in employment themselves.
- The lack of knowing both Dutch and French, the two official lan-

guages in Brussels makes it hard for many youngsters to find a job.

All the above problems weigh harder on the mental health of young people because of other big changes in their lives (e.g. moving out of the parental house, first marriage, first relationship, break-up, having a child). One third of young people in Brussels show symptoms of psychological suffering. This makes the topic of mental health and relationships vital for the cycle.

Overarching themes

Overarching themes- concerns Brussels		
Found in desk research, expert interviews, crowdsourced questions, Trends		
Desk research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex group • Problems with education • High youth unemployment • (Multiple) identity • Mental-health issues • Activism • Feeling lost • Racism • Young city • Digitalization of daily life • Generational battles 	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex group • Problems with education • Labor market • Identify with communes or quarters • Mental health • Generation of activists • Feeling lost • Prejudices, stigmas and racism • Citizens of tomorrow • Open character • Lost faith in democracy • Language in Brussels 	Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division between youngsters (complex group) • Education • Labor market • Decision making and empowerment • Social cohesion • City's infrastructure • Climate and sustainability • Technology • Openness • Mobility • Language

Future uncertainties

By following different influencers of Brussels closely, by searching for #Brussels on different social media platforms and by talking to youngsters various trends that are influencing the

future and naturally youngsters were identified. By further monitoring the identified trends and researching them we came up with a list of futures uncertainties that should be considered while defining the research question:

- Technology and its impact on social interactions
- Climate Relationships
- Education
- Decreasing attention Span
- Trust
- Fake News and Deep Fake

Overlapping the overarching themes and future uncertainties, we concluded the role of technology crucial to explore when we talk about futures and taking care of mental health as a crucial goal for the research question. Hence at an intersection of technology and mental health variables we shortlisted 3 questions from the list of crowdsourced questions:

How will youngsters connect to themselves and others in a healthy way?

How will youngsters feel well in Brussels in 2035?

How will youth hang out in 2035?

These 3 questions were further explored through the futures wheel to

understand the urgency and define the problem statement.



Each of these questions was placed on a matrix and scored for each criterion. The criteria for selecting the questions were:

- should address to citizens
- about a future uncertainty (2035)
- concerns Brussels/Bratislava as a city yet unaddressed
- reliable but challenging
- human interaction oriented
- possible to research in a nuanced way in limited time
- opportunities for potential partnerships.

The most urgent topic and next steps

Based on the findings from expert interviews and responses from young people, we decided to focus further on the topic of mental health and healthy relationships.

We will look for answers to the question:

„How will young people have a healthy relationship with themselves and others in Brussels/Bratislava in 2035?“

In the next steps, we will map the topic of mental health and healthy relationships in the past, present and future. In participatory workshops, young people and other inhabitants of Bratislava will develop their future visions which will be later translated into stories and shared with the public. All findings, visions and stories will be available on our [website](#).

Imprint

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Title: Questions of future – what young people of Bratislava and Brussels want to know about the future

Edition: first

Year of publication: 2022

Proofreading: Mgr. Andrea Sihelská

Graphic design: Bc. Matúš Mihaľko

Photo: YouthWatch

www.youthwatch.sk

This publication was created with the financial support from the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

