



Guide for **Participatory Futures**

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ØUTRAECONOMIA



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Introduction

The future is not something that simply happens to us, nor does it exist as a predefined destination waiting to be reached. The future often takes shape first in human imagination.¹ Yet, while imagining the future is a fundamental human capacity, it is not equally distributed. Most people are rarely invited, encouraged, or legitimized to think about the long term², while the power to imagine and shape what comes next remains concentrated in the hands of a few.

Today, long-term thinking and future-making are largely dominated by experts in corporations, academia, consultancies, and government foresight teams. When this happens, the future is often reduced to technical projections and narrow narratives about the world. These approaches tend to overlook the complexity of what truly shapes life for all beings: cultural heritage, social systems built over centuries, collective choices, public policies, technologies, relationships, and the many stories accumulated, yet rarely recognised, by modern models of planning and prediction.

To avoid surrendering to apocalyptic narratives and to imagine futures worth living, it is necessary to respond consciously to the challenges of the present. This requires adopting what Gaston Berger described as a prospective attitude: the capacity to look far ahead, broadly and deeply, in order to understand what truly matters.

What are Participatory Futures?

Participatory futures are grounded in the idea that everyone has the right and the capacity to imagine and shape the future. By bringing together people from different backgrounds, expertises, and lived experiences, these approaches expand what becomes visible, what feels possible, and what can be acted upon in the present. Rather than relying solely on data-driven forecasts or technical models, participatory futures value lived experience, collective intelligence, and political imagination as essential sources of knowledge.

Dialogue sits at the heart of this process, not only as a way to exchange ideas, but as a collective practice of sense-making and storytelling about what lies ahead, that in turn increases social cohesion. Through intentional questions about whose visions shape the future, who is left out, and which voices remain invisible, participatory futures create shared spaces where communities can slow down, move beyond short-termism, and engage in deeper conversations about long-term change, priorities, and trade-offs, strengthening collective responsibility and supporting more just and informed decision-making.

Justice begins with reclaiming imagination. Who gets to imagine the future matters, because when certain voices are excluded from future-making, inequality is reproduced and reinforced. Building collective visions of the future is therefore a justice practice. It allows communities historically excluded from economic and political decision-making to define what a fair, dignified, and sustainable future looks like from their own perspectives. Participatory futures help counter two powerful limiting forces: fatalism – the belief that change is impossible or

decided elsewhere – and elite futurism, where the future is shaped around narrow interests.

By widening participation, these processes lead to more legitimate decisions, stronger public trust, and shared ownership of long-term change. At a time when imbalance, accumulation, and oppression have been normalised – amid rising risks of war, growing disinformation, and the accelerating reality of ecological breakdown—the future becomes unreachable for much of humanity. This is why neuroscientist Sidarta Ribeiro argues that we must relearn how to dream, especially collective dreams.³ He reminds us that while we live in an era marked by the destruction of possible futures, we also paradoxically live in an era in which many futures can still be created. Reclaiming the dream of the common good, he suggests, will require deep collective wisdom – and the courage to imagine together.

This guide invites you to see the future not as something fixed or distant, but as an ongoing practice that is collective, open, and deeply connected to justice. It offers a tested method to begin the process of creating collective dreams, along with a roadmap for turning those dreams into shared realities.





About this guide

This guide is rooted in practice. It emerged from **ARAMA: A Particle of the Future**, a project developed by **Øutra Economia (Another Economy)**, the Brazilian hub of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance. ARAMA was conceived as a confluence between listening, ancestrality, and futurism, using collective imagination to explore what fair futures might look like when shaped by lived experience.

Between March and November 2025, ARAMA travelled across Brazil's five regions, hosting 10 participatory workshops in 8 territories and engaging 131 participants. The process deliberately prioritised people historically excluded from economic and future-oriented debates, including Black, Indigenous and Quilombola peoples, LGBTQI+ peoples, residents of urban and rural peripheries, mothers, children, adolescents, and elders. Most workshops were locally rooted, while some had regional exchange built into their design.

Øutra Economia developed a methodology centred on dialogue, active dreaming, art, and deep listening as tools for connection and meaning-making. Participants created visual collages and shared spoken and written reflections expressing what a fair future means from their own perspectives. Together, these materials formed a collective portrait of what should, and should not, be part of a shared and just reality.

ARAMA became a **30-square-metre interactive visual installation**, first exhibited in Salvador

during the Global Artivism Conference and later in Belém at the People’s Summit during the COP30, both of which took place during the month of November 2025. The full collection of collages, dream manifestos, quotations and photos from the workshops are available online⁴ in two languages, Portuguese and English. The project’s outputs were also systematized into a **book** and distributed to Brazilian policymakers, including federal deputies and senators, helping translate collective dreams into concrete policy recommendations.

**[CLICK HERE TO VISIT
THE ONLINE EXHIBITION](#)**

This guide distills the insights, questions, and methods tested through ARAMA. It offers practical steps for designing participatory futures processes grounded in lived experience – where collective imagination becomes a pathway to long-term, just transformation.

WHAT THIS GUIDE OFFERS YOU

This guide offers you practical guidance to design and facilitate participatory futures processes that support systemic change toward wellbeing-centred economies. It provides adaptable methods to convene diverse actors, engage communities often excluded from future-making, and transform collective visions into shared direction and action. By using this guide, you strengthen dialogue, collective learning, and long-term thinking – and expand your capacity to contribute, from your own context, to fair and regenerative futures.

WHAT TO EXPECT – AND WHAT NOT TO

This guide offers step-by-step instructions, practical tips, examples, a concrete case, and references to support the design of participatory futures processes focused on innovation and collective imagination. It is intended as a first step toward addressing the deep imbalance between the capacity of powerful institutions – such as technology companies and private consultancies – and that of citizens and communities to think long term and actively shape the futures they want. At the same time, this guide has clear limits. It is grounded in a real, situated experience that used participatory futures methods, but it does not cover all stages of formal futures methodologies. The focus here is on horizon mapping and collective sense-making, offering a starting point rather than a complete or prescriptive framework for future-making.

HOW TO WORK WITH THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to be flexible and adaptable across different contexts, scales, and levels of experience. All materials are practical and accessible for self-guided learning, while also supporting those who want to build an integrated practice of collaboration, participation, and long-term thinking. You can use the guide to design your own participatory futures processes,

to facilitate collective exploration with communities or organisations, or to strengthen your work in strategic foresight, innovation, and systemic change. Rather than prescribing a single way of working, the guide invites you to navigate, adapt, and combine its elements according to your purpose, resources, and the people involved



The guide is organized around the following structure:

Overview of the process - Introduces the methods, explaining why it is useful, when to apply it, and what outcomes it can support.

Instructions - Provides clear, step-by-step guidance, directly linked to the example.

Insights - Explores how to interpret and draw meaning from the process and its results, again connected to the example.

Tips - Highlights practical lessons learned from experience, including common challenges and helpful facilitation choices.

Template - Offers a blank, ready-to-use template that you can adapt and apply in your own context.

Participatory Futures Design

Overview of the process

The suite of methods that can be used to mobilize larger numbers of people in participatory futures activities are incredibly diverse, but, generally, all involve citizens in identifying signals of change, emerging issues and the factors driving them. They can also involve the exploration of different ways these changes may play out and their potential impacts, through the creation or use of alternative scenarios. It is recommended to blend methods to improve the scenarios that need to be created, so techniques related to active listening and radical collaboration can transform sessions into both a safe space and a dynamic environment where participants are able to access and activate senses related to the imagination.

There are five key functions participatory futures exercises can play within more traditional strategy and decisionmaking processes. They are: mapping horizons, creating purpose, charting pathways, acting together and testing ideas. One of the keys to success is the ability to separate diagnosis of issues, where people collectively make sense of the facts and their implications, from prescription, where pathways and solutions for change are developed or tested.

That is said **we used three guiding principles** for choosing the best methods to blend and design the process:

#1 Collective images of the future help orient and organise in times of disruption

#2 Diversity of perspectives helps to promote inclusive innovation

#3 Ancestral wisdom can offer novel perspectives for innovative practices⁵

TOOLS FOR COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION AND ACTION

Blended methods were used in ARAMA for mapping horizons and creating pathways. Combining methods and tools are essential for participatory futures because the outcomes we seek are not only cognitive, but also emotional, relational, and embodied. The methods we drew from included:

- **VISION STATEMENTS**

Short, vivid descriptions of a desired future that help people quickly form a shared mental image of where they want to go and why. Effective vision statements are concise, memorable, and understandable in just a few minutes, making them powerful tools for alignment and inspiration. The common vision statement of a group is the main goal in a session that aims to plan actions or interventions, especially considering the possibility of backcasting⁶ the planning process.

- **FUTURETELLING⁷**

Imagination-based exercises that use storytelling, performance, images, or drawing to explore future contexts and possibilities. By showing rather than telling, futuretelling makes ideas more tangible, inclusive, and emotionally engaging – especially in groups that do not share the same language or dominant cultural frameworks.

- **SOCIAL FICTION⁸**

Inspired by Muhammad Yunus, social fiction invites people to imagine creative responses to social challenges, much like science fiction inspires technological innovation. It emphasises empathy, creativity, and determination as essential forces for social change, helping communities envision futures where human wellbeing is not overshadowed by technology. It can support the idea that the future is not ready, it is powered by what we can imagine.

- **ART AS A MEDIATION TOOL**

Artistic and embodied practices connect emotion, memory, imagination, and action in ways that go beyond rational analysis. Art helps access symbolic and unconscious dimensions of experience, creating space for empathy and shared meaning. As Carl Jung noted, the creative process is less about the finished work and more about the act of creating itself.³ In participatory futures, this focus on process enables deeper engagement and opens pathways for new imaginaries and collective realities to emerge.

- **DREAMING³**

Dreaming is understood as the capacity to imagine potential futures by recombining past experiences into new configurations. Neuroscientist Sidarta Ribeiro describes dreams as a counterfactual territory – a space for novelty – where new imaginaries can arise and later inform strategies and collective action.

- **GOLDEN SPIRAL⁹**

A narrative framework structured around four questions: **who, why, how, and what**. Beginning with who helps anchor stories in lived experience and source energy before defining ambition or action. As Michel Bachmann suggests, starting with who recognises where energy comes from and aligns everything that follows.

- **DISCOURSE OF THE COLLECTIVE SUBJECT (DCS)¹⁰**

Is a qualitative research method that organizes and analyzes individual testimonials to form a single, coherent discourse, representing the shared thoughts, beliefs, and values of a specific social group. It acts as a “synthetic” speech, constructed from key expressions and central ideas, allowing researchers to capture collective social representations as if a “collective person” were speaking.



Instructions

1. PREPARATION

NAMING THE CHALLENGE, SHAPING THE INTENTION

The first and most important step in a participatory futures process is to clearly define what is calling the group into action. This can either start from a **shared challenge** that needs to be addressed or from a **desirable vision of the future**, from which a problem or tension becomes visible. If it is not yet possible to formulate a precise problem, defining a **thematic area** is already valuable, as it helps identify the people who should be involved in horizon mapping and, ideally, in later collective action.

A simple and effective way to frame a shared challenge is to use the structure:

“We are concerned about ___ because ___.”

This format helps articulate both the issue and why it matters, grounding the conversation in something relevant rather than abstract concepts.

From this framing, formulate a **guiding question** that will act as a trigger for dialogue. Good guiding questions invite imagination rather than solutions, and often begin with how or what,

to open space for participants to describe elements, relationships, and possibilities. Examples include:

“What does a fair future look like in relation to this theme?”

“What would this territory need in order to be a healthy, viable place for all people?”

Using *how* or *what* encourages participants to imagine futures in concrete and relational terms, rather than limiting responses to opinions or diagnoses.

In the ARAMA project, we reflected on how inequality in Brazil is deeply connected to access to land, territory, and housing. Since the country’s foundation, land ownership has been a central mechanism for concentrating power, while issues such as agrarian reform, urban and coastal real estate speculation, environmental protection, land demarcation, and climate vulnerability have remained marginal in public policy. Because of this historical context, land and territory became the core theme of the process. Participants were invited to respond to a single, open question:

“Based on your experience and lived reality, what does a just future look like?”

It is also essential that the group convening the process has an initial sense – however open-ended – of what could follow the horizon mapping. This might include developing a manifesto, a policy proposal, an artistic intervention, a spatial project, or another form of collective output. Having this output in mind helps guide the process, while remaining flexible to ideas that emerge from participants themselves.

In the case of ARAMA, the team knew from the outset that the process would lead to a visual artistic installation for COP30, aimed at public awareness, and to a systematised body of material delivered to policymakers to support advocacy within institutional spaces.

WHO SHAPES THE FUTURE?

Once the challenge, guiding question, and initial intention are defined, the next step is to identify **who should be involved** and **where the process needs to happen**. Participatory futures depend on intentionally bringing together people whose experiences, knowledge, and perspectives are directly connected to the issue being explored—especially those who are often excluded from decision-making spaces.

Start by mapping **territories** and **communities** that are affected by or engaged with the challenge. Whenever possible, work through **trusted networks and relationships**, as trust is essential for meaningful participation. Local organisations, community leaders, movements, cultural groups, and informal networks can help make connections and ensure invitations are grounded and respectful. In parallel, you may also use open calls, short questionnaires,

or invitations to existing groups and networks related to the theme, especially when working across wider geographies.

In the ARAMA project, participant selection prioritised people historically marginalised in debates about land, territory, housing, and property. This included individuals directly affected by injustice, as well as activists, members of social movements, civil society organisations, impact-driven entrepreneurs, and researchers working to advance justice. This mix helped create a dialogue that was both grounded in lived experience and connected to broader systemic perspectives.

For the horizon mapping conversations, we recommend working with **small groups of up to seven participants**, as this size supports deeper listening, trust, and meaningful exchange. If your process requires engaging larger numbers of people, consider dividing participants into smaller groups and running parallel sessions, with a light methodological adaptation to support collective synthesis. This approach preserves the quality of dialogue while allowing insights to scale.

PREPARING THE GROUND

Before any activity begins, it is essential to prepare the conditions that make meaningful participation possible. This includes caring for the practical, emotional, and relational needs of participants – especially those who may be in more vulnerable situations. An accessible, welcoming, and safe space is not a logistical detail; it is the foundation for trust, openness, and deep engagement.

Choose venues that are easy to reach, physically accessible, and culturally appropriate for the group. Ensure safe transport is available and organized according to each participant's needs. Arrange materials in advance so facilitation can flow smoothly and participants can easily engage without unnecessary barriers. Whenever possible, invite participants to arrive a little earlier than the official start time, allowing space to settle in, connect informally, and have something to eat. This helps create a gentle transition into the collective work and supports a more grounded beginning.

In the ARAMA project, encounters were intentionally held in spaces that already embodied dreams of justice within their communities – such as community centres, libraries, educational initiatives, and places that provide access to learning, care, or cultural expression. When working with traditional communities, including Indigenous and Quilombola groups, facilitators travelled to the territories and held the workshops in locations chosen by the participants themselves. This choice reinforced respect, autonomy, and a sense of belonging, helping participants feel at ease and recognised.

Whenever possible, the encounters were followed by a shared meal, one of the most ancient

human habits. Offering food after the session extended the space for connection, allowing conversations sparked during the design process to continue informally and strengthening relational bonds among participants. **In ARAMA, catering was also local and according to tradition.** In participatory futures work, these moments of care are not peripheral – they are integral to building the collective conditions for imagining and shaping futures together.

Equally important is the careful selection of the visual materials that will be used during the process. When working with magazines or image-based resources, ensure they reflect a wide diversity of race, ethnicity, gender identities, income realities, religions, geographies, body types, abilities, and ways of living. Representation directly influences imagination: participants are more likely to project themselves into the future when they can see lives, bodies, and contexts that resonate with their own experiences. Homogeneous or stereotypical imagery can silently limit what feels possible or legitimate to envision. Curating diverse and inclusive materials is structural choice, it expands the horizon of collective imagination and affirms that multiple futures, rooted in different identities and territories, are equally valid and visible.

2. HOLDING THE COLLECTIVE SPACE

Facilitating a participatory futures encounter is less about directing outcomes and more about holding a collective space where trust, imagination, and deep listening can emerge. Below is a step-by-step guide to support this process.



1. OPEN THE SPACE WITH TRANSPARENCY AND PRESENCE

Begin by introducing yourself and sharing why you are guiding the group. Explain who you represent, the organisation behind the process, and what will happen with the material co-created during the session. This transparency helps build trust and sets clear expectations from the start.



2. CREATE A MOMENT OF ARRIVAL AND CENTRING

Depending on the group and cultural context, offer a brief moment of centering. This could include music, breathing, silence, food, or another grounding practice. Cultural sensitivity is essential here: Indigenous communities, for example, may value opening rituals such as songs or traditional expressions. If participants do not know each other, invite brief introductions including names, what they



do, and how they relate to the central theme.

3. EXPLAIN THE ACTIVITY AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Let participants know they will use the available visual materials (in ARAMA, magazine images) to respond to the guiding question defined earlier. Explain that they will later share their story using a narrative framework that begins with who and unfolds through the Golden Spiral (who, why, how, what).



4. IMAGE SELECTION AND SILENT EXPLORATION

Invite participants to browse the images freely, noticing which ones resonate with them. They may cut or tear images, especially if there are participants with motor difficulties. This phase usually lasts between 10 and 20 minutes and is ideally done in silence, allowing intuition and emotional connection to guide choices. In larger groups, a co-facilitator can help answer questions and support focus. A common question is whether participants need one image for each part of the spiral; ideally yes, but if this is difficult, deeper questions during sharing (e.g. *What drew you to this image? What does it represent for you?*) can help complete the narrative.



5. STORYTELLING AND COLLECTIVE COMPOSITION

Once images are selected, inform participants that conversations will be recorded and notes taken for later systematisation. Invite each person to practise futuretelling individually, placing their images on the spiral – who at the centre, followed by why, how, and what. Let them create their social fiction freely. Encourage deep listening among the group and take notes throughout. When the individual collages are complete, allow them to naturally connect and overlap, forming a collective panel. Invite participants to reflect on what



stands out, how ideas connect, and what they would add or remove.

Adaptation for larger groups (without co-facilitators)

If the group has more than seven participants and no co-facilitator is available, adapt the process. Subdivide the big group into smaller groups of 7 or fewer participants and distribute one Golden Spiral template per small group. After quiet image selection, ask participants to write their future story individually, starting from a prompt related to the guiding question (e.g. “*A fair future for me is...*”). Invite the sub-group to choose a note-taker. Ask participants to read their texts aloud to their small groups, place images accordingly on the spiral, and have one representative take notes of what was said, creating a collective text that represents them all. The goal is for the small group to synthesise their stories into a single story and register it carefully, ensuring detailed documentation. Invite each sub-group to present their final outcome to the whole group. In the scenario you have multiple texts to analyse and prepare the final DCS.

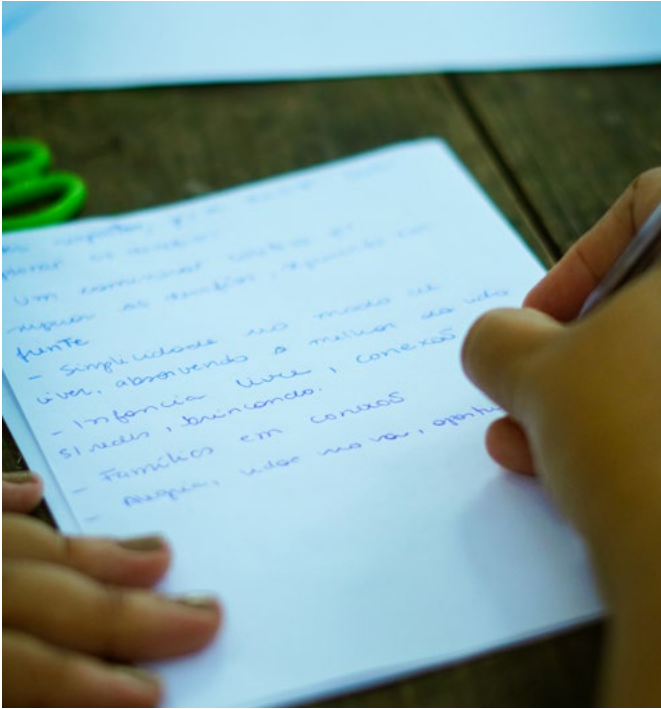


As the facilitator, move through the sub-groups throughout to invite reflection with questions such as: *What resonated most? How do the ideas connect? What would you add or remove?* This moment helps participants begin weaving connections across narratives – an important step for later synthesis.



8. APPRECIATION, CLOSING, AND CARE

Offer time for the group to appreciate and celebrate the artwork created over the Golden Spiral. Invite reflection on what may be missing or underrepresented and whether anything else should be added. Close by



asking how participants are feeling and what they are taking with them from the experience. Use a closing ritual or checkout practice you are comfortable with, and invite participants to a shared meal if possible.

9. DOCUMENTATION AND CLOSURE

Before leaving the space, ensure all materials are collected, conversations are documented, photos of the group and artworks are taken (with consent), and data is safely backed up to the cloud. These steps are essential for honouring the contributions made and enabling meaningful follow-up. for honouring the contributions made and enabling meaningful follow-up.

3. FROM EXPRESSION TO INSIGHT

This phase marks the transition from expression to meaning. It is when stories, images, gestures, and spoken reflections generated during the encounters are transformed into insight and collective orientation. Systematisation begins with the careful organisation of all materials produced throughout the process, including written texts, facilitation notes, audio recordings and their transcriptions, as well as visual outputs such as collages and collective panels. This organised set of materials constitutes the analytical corpus from which collective sense-making can emerge.

By processing this material, facilitators are able to identify not only what participants think about a given theme, but how they think, what values underpin their perspectives, and how these viewpoints are distributed across the social field.¹⁰ The focus is not on individual opinions in isolation, but on the shared narratives, convergences, tensions and aspirations that become visible when voices are read together. This interpretative step is essential for revealing collective imaginaries and future orientations that may not be immediately apparent during the encounters themselves.

The main objective of this phase is to synthesise these multiple expressions into a single, coherent narrative, referred to in this guide as the Dream Manifesto. **In the ARAMA project, this manifesto represented both the shared dream of the group and a public statement oriented toward action. It articulated a desired future while simultaneously addressing policymakers and organisations with strategic power to enable its realisation. In this sense, the manifesto functions**

as a bridge between imagination and transformation: it gives form to collective desire and positions it within broader social and political arenas.

To support this synthesis, we recommend the use of the Discourse of the Collective Subject (DCS) methodology, even when applied in an adapted and non-academic form. The process involves identifying Key Expressions – literal and meaningful excerpts drawn from interviews, written narratives, and recorded conversations – and then distilling the Central Ideas that capture the essence of these expressions.¹¹ These elements are woven together to compose a final discourse, often written in the first person singular, allowing the collective voice to appear as a unified subject without erasing its plurality. Through this approach, fragmented individual testimonies are transformed into a systematic yet authentic representation of collective thought.

The use of artificial intelligence can also support this stage, particularly in tasks such as transcription, clustering themes or drafting preliminary syntheses. When used, AI should be understood as a methodological aid rather than a substitute for human interpretation. Ethical care is essential, especially given that many generative technologies do not offer robust legal data protection. At a minimum, personal data, identifiable details and precise locations should be removed or anonymised. Ultimately, the responsibility for interpretation, narrative coherence and validity, and political positioning of the Dream Manifesto rests with the facilitation and research team, grounded in the relationships of trust established throughout the process.

4. TURNING VISIONS INTO MOVEMENT

Once the collective material has been synthesised and organised, the process moves into a decisive phase: transforming shared visions into concrete movement. This is the moment to translate what was imagined, articulated and systematised into the outcomes initially envisioned at the beginning of the journey – while remaining open to adjustments and shifts that may have emerged along the way. What matters here is intentional alignment between purpose, audience and form, ensuring that the collective energy generated does not dissipate but instead finds pathways for continuity and impact.

At this stage, returning to the logic of the Golden Spiral can help guide strategic decisions. Key questions include: Who is the intended audience for these outputs? Why is it important for this audience to understand what was created through the process? How do we intend for this material to be used? What do we want people to feel, reflect on, or act upon when they encounter it? These questions support coherence between intention and execution, helping to shape outputs that are not only expressive, but also mobilising.

In the ARAMA project, two clear outcomes were defined from the outset: a public artistic intervention at COP30 and a formal delivery addressed to policymakers. For the first outcome, we designed an exhibition whose conceptual foundation drew directly from the spiral framework

and elements inspired by nature. The exhibition design process was developed in collaboration with a design and production studio, which supported the logistical, operational and technical aspects required to bring the concept into physical form. A central metal structure connected ground and sky, creating an ascending path that held the final artistic panels, printed in cotton, containing the collective collages, selected quotes from participants, and the signatures of all contributing artists. Each panel also included a QR code linking to a virtual exhibition, where photos and videos of the process and outcomes were made available in English and Portuguese.

The structure was intentionally designed to be lightweight, modular and easy to assemble, allowing it to travel to different events and spaces, both indoor and outdoor. As one of the main objectives was to present the exhibition at the People's Summit in Belém, Brazil, during COP30, the layout was strongly informed by the surrounding landscape, drawing inspiration from trees, gardens and the river, reinforcing the connection between territory, nature and justice. It was easily adapted to an indoor event where ARAMA was invited to be displayed, the Global Artivism Convening, in Salvador, Brazil.



For the second outcome, directed at policymakers, we produced a print book with an accessible and engaging design, carefully curated to foster connection with the reader. The publication contextualised the creative and participatory process, included a concise executive summary, and presented clear recommendations for policymakers. These recommendations were informed by the collective Dream Manifestos and taken one step further into tangible pathways for transformation that took into account the different layers and complexity of the systems involved. This step allowed the collective visions to inform ongoing policy debates, support democratic movements already in motion, and inspire initiatives capable of advancing a fair future – one articulated by those who experience injustice most directly.



By coordinating actions in this way, participatory futures processes can move beyond reflection and expression, sustaining momentum over time and anchoring collective imagination in forms that influence public discourse, institutional agendas and concrete decision-making.

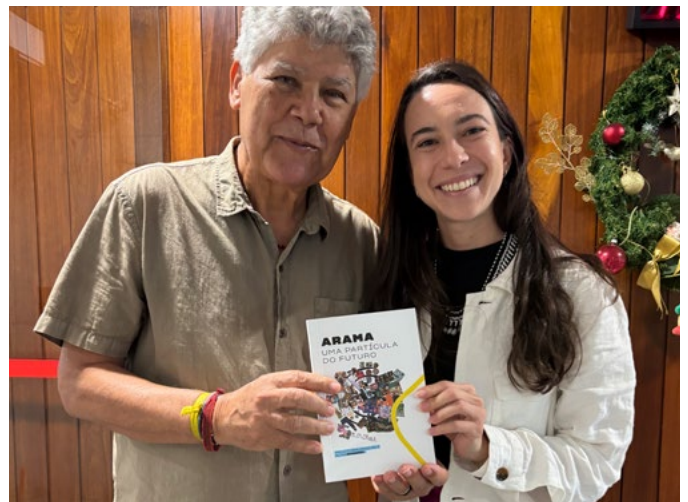
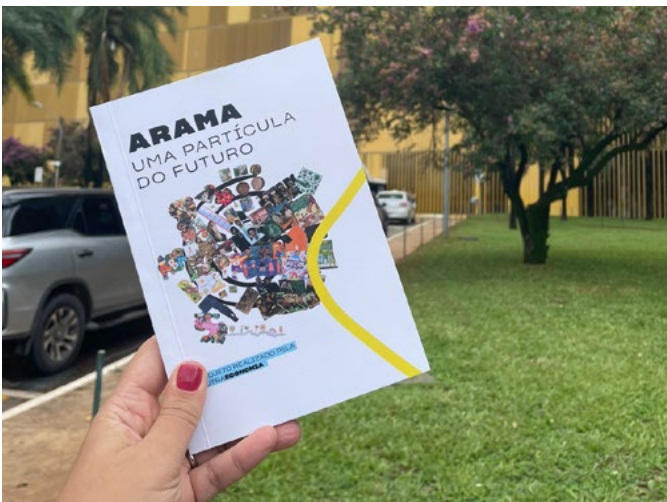
5. FULL CYCLE

After having taken these collective dreams outwardly, sparking a wave of discourse and change, it is important to return to the beginning and to nurture the soil that gave the first harvests. The people are the change, and it is important not just to amplify and uplift the voices and stories gathered throughout the process to an external audience, but continue in constant engagement and relationship with everyone that took part in building these collective dreams.

From the outset, **we had an intention of returning to the communities a high-quality, durable version of their collective dream artwork, both as a form of gratitude for their participation and to continue to encourage the pursuit of justice in those territories, with the panel being a living anthem of hope.** We consider this an indispensable part of the process, as it is our belief that while these exercises can guide society-wide transformation, they are tools for social cohesion, and serve the function of giving clarity and direction to the groups that created them in their ongoing collective action.

With the production of the print books, we decided instead to distribute copies to all participants

and/or their community centers. This adaptation presented a unique opportunity to archive their territory's dreams while also promoting a wider perspective and greater solidarity amongst the participants from different workshops, so they could engage in depth with the totality of their collective dreams woven together.



Insights

DESIGN AS EXPERIMENT

Participatory futures work benefits greatly from being approached as an experiment rather than a fixed formula. Prototyping and iteration allow facilitators to test assumptions, refine logistics, adjust materials, and calibrate time use before scaling the process or engaging large groups.

Running a pilot session makes invisible challenges visible—what limits or helps participants to join the session, what confuses participants, what takes longer than expected, and what truly supports collective imagination. This experimental mindset not only improves the quality of the experience but also prevents unnecessary costs and resource waste, ensuring that energy, care, and attention are invested where they matter most.

DESIGNING FOR DIFFERENCE

Designing participatory futures means actively planning for diversity rather than treating it as an exception. Tools and formats should be adaptable so that literate and non-literate participants, elders and children, and people with different physical abilities all have equal opportunities to express themselves. This requires clear, simple instructions that explain only what is essential for the process to flow, avoiding unnecessary complexity or technical language. Artistic materials should be accessible to different bodies, abilities, and ways of engaging, allowing participants to choose how they want to contribute, for example. Always presume the group will be diverse – and design for inclusion from the start, not as a later adjustment.

CARE IS NOT OPTIONAL

Care, trust, and emotional safety are not add-ons to participatory futures work – they are core design principles. **In ARAMA, this commitment shaped every operational decision. We intentionally prioritized services led by women, Black and Indigenous people; chose venues located in peripheral or vulnerable areas that function as spaces of resistance, care, and hope within their communities; and ensured safe transportation and welcoming accommodation for all participants. Catering included vegetarian and vegan options, respecting different bodies, beliefs, and needs. Care also extended beyond the encounters themselves: sharing back with participants all the photos, videos, productions, and collective results, as well as keeping them informed about all project developments, exhibitions, and launches, helped reinforce trust and a sense of belonging and togetherness.**

Maintaining a thoughtful database of contacts enabled ongoing connection, honoring participants not just as contributors to a process, but as co-creators whose struggles, knowledge, and futures matter – and who should be equipped with tools and materials that can continue to support their work beyond the project.

RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND THE PROCESS

Participatory futures do not end with the activity itself. When people share experiences, imaginaries, and hopes, facilitators take on an ethical responsibility for how these collective outputs are owned, made visible, and used. It is essential to be transparent from the beginning about purposes, audiences, and forms of dissemination, and to treat what is created not as extractable data, but as shared authorship that requires consent, recognition, and care.

This also means being attentive to power and protection: ensuring fair visibility, crediting participants as co-creators of their outputs, and safeguarding sensitive personal or territorial information—especially when using digital or generative technologies. Responsibility beyond the process sustains trust, reinforces collective ownership, and helps ensure that the futures imagined together are carried forward with integrity and respect.



Tips

Before You Begin – preparing the conditions for depth

The quality of a participatory futures process is shaped long before people arrive in the room. Preparation means paying attention to logistics, materials, and relationships with the same care given to the method itself. Choose spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and culturally meaningful. Circular room setups are strongly recommended: they accommodate more people, reduce perceived hierarchies, and naturally support eye contact, dialogue, and a sense of shared power. Invest time in curating materials that reflect the identities, bodies, and lived realities of participants – representation in images, colors, and tools directly affects engagement and the richness of the narratives that emerge.

Facilitating With Intention – inclusion is a design choice

Inclusive facilitation is not neutral; it is intentional. Always presume diversity in literacy, age, mobility, language, and forms of expression, and design accordingly. Explain only what is necessary for the process to unfold, using clear, simple language and demonstrating rather than over-instructing. Artistic resources should be accessible to different bodies and abilities, and flexible enough to allow people to adapt them to their own ways of expressing. Facilitation is less about control and more about holding a space where different rhythms, voices, and forms of participation are equally valid.

Staying With the Process – continuity builds trust and meaning

Participatory futures gain strength over time. Maintaining coherence and integrity means staying

connected to participants beyond the workshop itself. Build and care for a contact database (with consent) so people can be informed about outcomes, next steps, exhibitions, publications, or policy engagements linked to what they helped create.

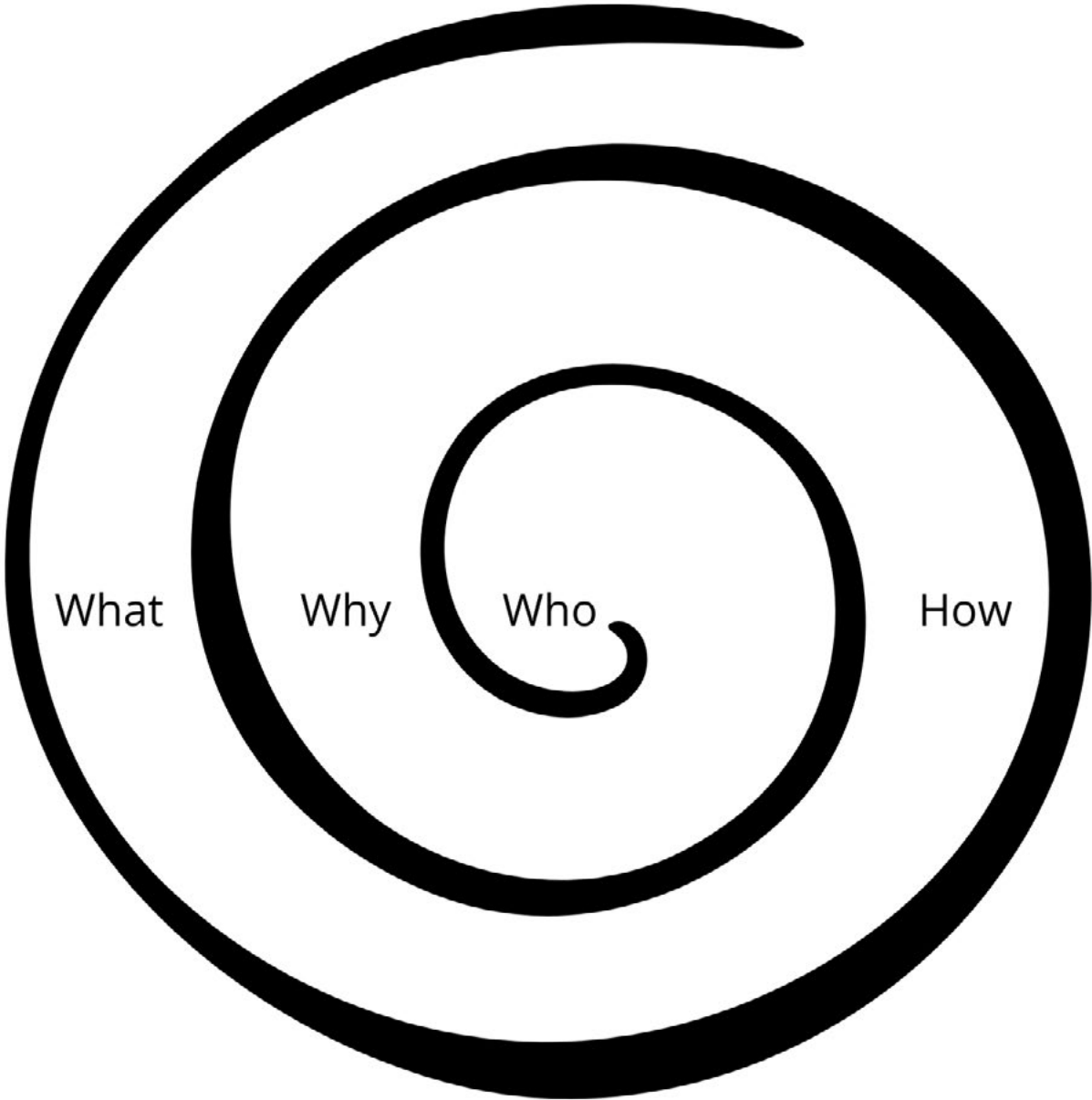
Making Everything Visible - recording, sharing, and returning materials sustains collective futures and get people closer

All professional photographers and videomakers hired to document the workshops and the designer behind the book and this guide are connected to the territories that took part in ARAMA, resulting in a rich diversity of visual perspectives. If this is not possible, designate at least one team member to consistently document the process. High-quality documentation is not an accessory – it shapes memory, legitimacy, and the afterlife of the work. When participants see their contributions respected, shared, and carried forward, the process becomes not a moment, but a movement.



Template

The Participatory Futures Spiral



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