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The impact of green and digital transitions on the role of organised civil society in the EU:
Scenarios for 2050

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SUMMARY

The digital and green transitions could significantly reshape the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the EU. The twin transition may influence both the type of engagement CSOs develop in our societies and the issues CSOs prioritise. A sense of urgency about deteriorating climate conditions, for example, could drive more direct action by CSOs.

This paper reflects on the role that organised civil society could play in 2050 by applying the future persona method to compare a set of three scenarios:
  A. A climate conscious world, where CSOs play a key role in a bottom-up governance system
  B. Digital transition leads the political and social agenda, with CSOs advocating for fair and inclusive metaverses that comply with human rights
  C. A declining Europe, where CSOs form ideological platforms in an antagonistic political context

The twin transition will likely affect both public concerns and modes of civic participation. To ensure a successful transition, it is crucial to involve CSOs imbued with a sense of public interest in policymaking and uphold mutual accountability between CSO representatives and politicians.

April 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

Few reports or studies have analysed the role civil society organisations[1] (CSOs) play in implementing the green and digital transitions and how these transitions would impact their role. However, CSOs are crucial in ensuring the implementation of the twin transitions (Joint Research Centre, 2022)[2]. It will not be possible to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2020)[3] and digital leadership without the active and determined involvement of all stakeholders and sectors in society.

The involvement of CSOs is also crucial to ensure that EU citizens understand, support and promote the twin transitions. Civil society may have better prospects of embarking in real dialogues with citizens, raising awareness and echoing citizens' voices at the national and international level.

This paper has been drafted by a group of staff members from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) that are involved in the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) network. In line with the nature of the ESPAS network, the authors of this paper wish to stress that **this paper does not in any way represent the views of the EESC** and should only be considered as a reflection exercise, in keeping with the concept of ESPAS's Ideas Papers series.

For the reader's information, the EESC contributes regularly with relevant opinions, expressing the views of EU organised civil society on the topics covered by this Ideas Paper. In this regard, appendix 2 provides a non-exhaustive list of recently adopted opinions included for reference.

2. PURPOSE AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

This paper aims to **reflect on, and trigger further reflection on, the role that organised civil society could play in 2050 through a set of different scenarios drafted on the basis of** the following questions:

- How could the digital and green transitions impact the role of civil society organisations in society?
- What impact could the twin transition have on our society and how will it affect citizens' relationships with and participation in CSOs?

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[1] The Commission defines civil society organisations as 'independent actors, organised on a not-for-profit and voluntary basis, and active in different fields, such as poverty reduction, emergency aid, human rights, environment, labour market'. From *Civil Society*, by European Commission, n.d. (https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/peace-and-governance/civil-society_en)

[2] Joint Research Centre. (2022, June 29). *The twin green & digital transition: How sustainable digital technologies could enable a carbon neutral EU by 2050.* EU Science Hub. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news/twin-green-digital-transition-how-sustainable-digital-technologies-could-enable-carbon-neutral-eu-2022-06-29_en

[3] European Commission. (2020, March 4). *Committing to climate-neutrality by 2050: Commission proposes European Climate Law and consults on the European Climate Pact.* Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_335

- How can the negative developments presented in the three scenarios be avoided?
- What role can CSOs play in implementing the twin transition based on the proposed scenarios?

By answering the questions above, the paper serves as a starting point for discussions on this topic. Specifically, this paper will help foresight practitioners, policy-makers and civil society organisations in general consider the possible impacts the twin transition could have and avoid the worst-case scenarios.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this paper is based on defining the role of civil society organisation archetypes in a set of scenarios in Europe in 2050. The **methods used to collect and analyse the information** were:
- **desk research**, mainly focused on recent foresight reports and other research on the state of CSOs;
- **regular consultation** with EESC staff to discuss the dimensions of the green and digital transitions and define the scenarios;
- two rounds of **consultations with ESPAS members**;
- **consultation with the ESPAS Young Talent Network** working group on the Ideas Papers.

Scenario analysis: The scenarios proposed in this paper are meant to serve purely as 'stress-tests'. As such, they are not claiming to predict the future or reflect the authors' preferences regarding the future. The scenarios were developed by:
- identifying extreme scenarios and revising them to create more plausible ones;
- identifying the dimensions to be considered when analysing the twin transition;
- exploring the interactions between both transitions;
- defining the main areas of major relevance for the digital and green transition.

The scenarios are based on three main dimensions:
- digital transition;
- green transition;
- role of civil society organisations.

The role of civil society in 2050 cannot be discussed without considering three additional dimensions in part one of each scenario:
- Socioeconomic dimension: what would the state of the economy, employment and social inclusion be?
- Governance dimension: what would the state of democracy and the human rights situation be?
- EU policy dimension: what would the main policy developments at EU level be?

Future persona method (Fergnani, 2019)[4]: In order to facilitate a comparison between scenarios, the same fictional organisation was applied to each scenario. Three fictional interviews set in 2050 accessible via the provided links also help to convey the message to the reader.

Limitation of the scope: The scope of the paper is limited to the dimensions outlined here. There are aspects within these dimensions which were not taken into consideration in order not to exceed the maximum length of this paper.

4. GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITIONS: DIMENSIONS

The paper focuses on analysing the green and digital transitions in potential future scenarios. It is therefore necessary to provide a short definition of the concepts featuring in this paper.

In a nutshell, the **green transition**[5] refers to a reform of our economies in which sustainability becomes the guiding principle of economic processes (European Commission, n.d.-b). Economy and ecology, which already share the same etymological root (*oikos*, house), become fully compatible in the sense that competitiveness and resource efficiency are no longer mutually exclusive.

The **digital transition**[6] refers to a radical change in the functioning of our societies and our economies (European Commission, n.d.-b). In this change, information technologies will become embedded in all sectors and economic processes, revolutionise work, and affect both our private lives and social and political interactions.

The use of the concept of **twin transition**[7] aims to stress that these transitions are happening at the same time, interacting and influencing each other reciprocally (Joint Research Centre, 2022). In isolation, the effects of each transition are already hard to assess. Together, the unknown factors increase exponentially, with innumerable potential positive and negative consequences for our societies. The twin transitions have already started to change and/or accelerate structural trends in the political, economic and societal spaces of European societies. In the next section of this paper, the scenarios show some of their potential effects.

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[4] Fergnani, A. (2019). The future persona: a futures method to let your scenarios come to life. *Foresight*, *21*(4), 445–466. https://doi.org/10.1108/fs-10-2018-0086

[5] European Commission. (n.d.). *Green transition*. Reform Support. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/green-transition_en

[6] European Commission. (n.d.). *Digital transition*. Reform Support. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/digital-transition_en

[7] Joint Research Centre. (2022, June 29). *The twin green & digital transition: How sustainable digital technologies could enable a carbon neutral EU by 2050.* EU Science Hub. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news/twin-green-digital-transition-how-sustainable-digital-technologies-could-enable-carbon-neutral-eu-2022-06-29_en

## 5.	THREE SCENARIOS FOCUSED ON THE ROLE OF CSOs

The following three scenarios have been outlined:
   A.	*A climate-conscious world - CSOs play an important role in a bottom-up governance system;*
   B.	*Digital transition leads the political and social agenda - CSOs play an important role in promoting a fair and inclusive metaverse;*
   C.	*Declining Europe - CSOs play a crucial role in a highly antagonistic political context.*

For each scenario, the paper presents the following sections:
   1)	State-of-play of the twin transitions and other related dimensions;
   2)	Role of CSOs within the scenario;
   3)	Future persona method;
   4)	Further reading and other material.

## A.	A climate conscious world - CSOs play an important role in a bottom-up governance system

> *The EU population is extremely climate conscious as harsh weather conditions impact every part of their lives. Competition has led to innovative technological developments that facilitate everyday life, but the green transition is prioritised. Circular economy practices and renewable energy have helped slow down resource depletion. Inequalities in society run deep, while CSOs defend the rights of both the planet and people.*

### 1)	State-of-play of the twin transition and other related dimensions

In this scenario, repeated climate anomalies and extreme weather conditions have led the EU population to become climate conscious. Firstly, people mostly eat meat substitutes such as lab-grown meat and insects. Secondly, the construction sector is significantly less active and more climate conscious. People no longer travel as much as the metaverse is accessible from home, and those who do use carbon-neutral means of transportation (Gerard, 2022)[8]. Thirdly, the circular economy has replaced most linear practices. Most measures agreed upon in various international agreements have been put in place but the damage to the ecosystems is irreversible (ICPP, 2021)[9].

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[8] Gerard, F. (2022, September 15). *Why the metaverse (really) matters for travel*. Accenture. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from https://www.accenture.com/us-en/blogs/compass-travel-blog/metaverse-travel

[9] 'Even in the case of a low-emissions scenario, the probability of temperature increasing over 1.5°C is more than 50%'. From *Summary for Policymakers* (p.8), by ICPP, 2021 (https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/). *IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers.* p.8. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T.K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, doi:10.1017/9781009157896.001.

Many jobs have been created, but more have been lost in the advancement of the twin transition, and reskilling efforts have not focused enough on the more vulnerable communities. Overall, the European environmental situation has improved but there are still major imbalances to be addressed. Richer communities in Europe are living in clean conditions where the weather does not reach the worst of the extremes, eating organic food (for example, microbial protein [North-CCU-Hub, 2021][10]), living longer and following circular economy practices. Meanwhile, less advantaged communities are often worse hit by extreme weather. Innovative ways of coping with the extreme weather conditions have been found; however, less advantaged people are often not able to afford such luxuries.

The EU has been forced to become more strategically autonomous when it comes to energy. Renewable energy sources are used but, due to continued high consumption, some energy is still imported from abroad. China and India are competing as superpowers to control raw materials (European Commission, 2020)[11] in space (Gamota, 2021).[12]

Regarding the digital transition, the metaverse has been greatly developed and is used wherever possible. Technologies have been developed to improve the average citizen's quality of life; however, inequalities persist as there are those who cannot afford such gadgets. Society in general is more inclusive as the digital transition has allowed for more direct civic interaction; however, digitally illiterate people are excluded from society. Despite innovation in recycling (e.g. plastic-eating bacteria (Dutfield, 2022)[13]) and the advancement of the circular economy, the pollution caused by the digital transition remains a major issue (Bianchini et al., 2022)[14].

The EU is characterised by a democratic bottom-up governing system. CSOs and citizens have demanded that EU law require all relevant EU policies, including trade policy, to promote sustainable development (European Commission, n.d.)[15]. The EU's ability to sign international agreements (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020)[16] has been used extensively to protect EU citizens' data and to prevent the importation of polluting and harmful products.

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[10] North-CCU-Hub. (2021, September 1). *Microbial Protein: a promising and sustainable food and feed ingredient*. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from https://web.archive.org/web/20221130225815/https://northccuhub.eu/microbial-protein-a-promising-and-sustainable-food-and-feed-ingredient/

[11] European Commission (2020). *Critical Raw Materials for Strategic Technologies and Sectors in the EU: A Foresight Study*. Publications Office https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/58081

[12] Gamota, D. (2021) Council post: Manufacturing in Outer Space: Not such a far-out idea, Forbes. Forbes Magazine. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/05/06/manufacturing-in-outer-space-not-such-a-far-out-idea/?sh=53d6cf3d7ce8 (Accessed: 25 November 2022).

[13] Dutfield, S. (2022, March 23). Plastic-eating bacteria: Genetic engineering and environmental impact. *LiveScience*. Retrieved December 10, 2022, from https://www.livescience.com/plastic-eating-bacteria

[14] Bianchini, S., Damioli, G., & Ghisetti, C. (2022). The environmental effects of the 'twin' green and digital transition in European regions. *Environmental and Resource Economics*, Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10640-022-00741-7 (Accessed: 29 November 2022).*84*, 877–918.

[15] European Commission (n.d.). *Sustainable development*. Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/sustainable-development_en (Accessed: 10 November 2022).

[16] Publications Office of the European Union. (2020, April 8). *International agreements and the EU's external competences*. EUR-Lex. Retrieved November 25, 2022, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/international-agreements-and-the-eu-s-external-competences.html

2) Role of CSOs within the scenario

The role of CSOs within this scenario is very strong. Thanks to the bottom-up system in which public opinion and approval are crucial, organised civil society is structurally consulted by national governments and the EU. The EESC continues to amplify the voice of civil society at the level of the EU through its diverse membership.

Contrary to the trends of the 2020s (Donáth, 2022)[17], the civic space has not shrunk, as CSOs played an important role in advancing the green transition by defending the planet and demanding that policies protect it. This led to increased membership in CSOs. By 2050, most climate-conscious citizens are active members of at least one CSO.

Trade unions and employer organisations focus on mitigating the impact on the economy of the drastic changes to the job market. They prioritise the reskilling of affected workers and, in turn, address some societal inequalities. Employers run labour-mobility programmes (Woltjer, 2018)[18] in order to maintain their workforce. Trade unions are strong in both rural and urban communities where they uphold labour standards and defend human rights.

NGOs and other CSOs also play a strong and more structured role in society. They focus on defending the planet, combatting the pollution caused by the digital transition, and fighting against the externalisation of pollution. Some environmental NGOs call for the inclusion of the climate crisis in EU Treaties in order to mainstream it in each and every policy. Other CSOs work on defending people's rights in the metaverse and on policies to further regulate the growing digital space.

3) Future persona method

Interview with 'Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth'
Date: 8 June 2050
Location: Air-conditioned studio in Brussels
Weather forecast: Scorching sun, 50°C
Reason for interview: Points distortion
Click here to listen to this revealing interview!
Background
The *Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth* association has a permanent staff of around ten people providing the day-to-day administration. The aim of the association is to combat the pollution caused by the digital transition and to monitor the

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[17] Donáth, A. J. (2022). *Report on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe* (No. A9-0032/2022). European Parliament. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0032_EN.html (Accessed: 1 December 2022).

[18] Woltjer, G. (2018). *Methodologies for Measuring the Macroeconomic and Societal Impacts of the Circular Economy*. European Union. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from https://research.wur.nl/en/publications/methodologies-for-measuring-the-macroeconomic-and-societal-impact

implementation of the 'pollution points' system (European Commission, n.d.-a)[19]. The organisation is mainly dependent on EU funds and some private donations.

Main areas of activity
   a) **Combat the pollution caused by the digital transition** by keeping citizens informed of the real pollution caused by their technological gadgets and acting as a watchdog in case the EU or its Member States enter into murky deals with companies producing environmentally harmful products.
   b) **Monitoring the implementation of pollution points** by acting as an independent complaints service where citizens can report misuse of points and be represented in the courts.

Description of the individual 'pollution points':
   - A system of individual 'pollution points', inspired by the 2005 Emissions Trading System (European Commission) System[20], was put in place by the EU to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The national governments regulate their citizens' points.
   - Each person receives 100 points per year, which are spent on, for example, travel and owning motorised vehicles.
   - There is a possibility to sell 20% of your points, with an absolute maximum of 200 points per person. Trading points is commonplace, often leaving poorer people with fewer points and lending itself to black-market resales.

4) Further reading and other material

- [Cascade Inquiry](): an initiative of experiential projects that imagine future worlds where positive climate action has been taken (Superflux, n.d.).
- [TedX talk: Why we need to imagine different futures](Jain, 2017)
- [Antonio Guterres COP27 introductory speech, min 22:30](UN COP 27, 2022)
- [TedX talk: This is the moment to take on the climate crisis](Gore, 2022)
- [TedX talk: The blind spots of the green energy transition](Lazard, 2022)
- Points system: [Some similarities to the Chinese 'social credit' system](Donnelly, 2023)
- Points system: [Peeple app](Pearson, 2015)
- Points system: Black Mirror episode, [Nosedive](Brooker et al., 2016)

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[19] European Commission. (n.d.). *EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)*. Climate Action. Retrieved November 20, 2022, from https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en

[20] Ibid

B. Digital transition leads the political and social agenda - CSOs play an important role in promoting a fair and inclusive metaverse

> *The digital transition leads the political and social agenda. The climate has continued to deteriorate. In addition, a new pandemic in the late 2030s and the expansion of super-resistant bacteria have boosted the digital transition, similar to how COVID-19 did. Anti-environmentalism has influenced the policy response, which has basically focused on climate adaptation instead of climate mitigation. Moving human activity into virtual reality platforms has been proposed as a solution to adapt to climate deterioration and extreme weather conditions. Citizens spend a large part of their working and personal lives on metaverse platforms. CSOs play a role in fighting for metaverses that comply with human rights.*

1) State-of-play of the twin transition and other related dimensions

In this scenario, **global warming has accelerated**. Periodically, Europe suffers **extreme weather conditions** that have had a major impact on the economy and society. Sea-level rise (NASA, 2022)[21] has posed great problems on Europe's coastlines. The warmer climate has caused an increase in infectious diseases (Climate-ADAPT, 2022)[22]. The intensification of climate change has continued to increase the risk of pandemics by bringing animals and humans closer together due to deforestation, urbanisation, and other factors, such as the livestock required for the meat-production industry. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic was followed by two large public health crises: a pandemic caused by a coronavirus in 2029 (Heymann et al., 2022)[23] and severe outbreaks of diseases that had almost disappeared, due to the development of bacterial resistance to antibiotics (Salazar et al., 2022)[24]. These two crises had a disproportionate impact on certain sections of the population, affecting more vulnerable populations and communities with limited medical access.

There has been extensive internal **resistance to continued implementation of the green transition**. The anti-environmentalist movement managed to gain large political power in the EU, freezing new environmental regulations and watering down existing ones. Although very radical in the beginning, this movement progressively moderated its positions. As a result, policy has been shifted from mitigation of global warming to

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[21] NASA. (2022, November). *Vital Signs: Sea Level*. Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/sea-level/

[22] Climate-ADAPT. (2022). *Managing mosquito borne disease through EYWA: a European tool to support public health authorities in preventing epidemics*. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/managing-mosquito-borne-disease-through-eywa-a-european-tool-to-support-national-authorities-in-preventing-epidemics

[23] Heymann, D., Ross, E., & Wallace, J. (2022, February 23). *The next pandemic – when could it be?* Chatham House. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/02/next-pandemic-when-could-it-be

[24] Salazar, C. B., Spencer, P. J., Mohamad, K., Jabeen, A., Abdulmonem, W. A., & Fernandez, N. (2022). Future pandemics might be caused by bacteria and not viruses: Recent advances in medical preventive practice. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, *16*(3), 1–3. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9092534/

adaptation to climate change. In this context, moving human activity into the digital world has been promoted as the solution to adapt to climate deterioration (Gibbons, 2022)[25].

The **climate emergency situation and the health crises in particular fostered this digital transformation**. In order to adapt to global warming and extreme weather conditions, Europe decided to 'move' all kind of activities, businesses, and social interactions into the digital world as much as possible. In this process, the 'metaverse' (J.P. Morgan, n.d.)[26] has played an important role. Public health measures, such as lockdowns, promoted further developments in digital communication platforms, as well as in the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) and the consolidation of the metaverse (Lawton, 2022)[27].

Due to the boost to the digital transition, the amount of data being processed and stored has skyrocketed. This had a negative impact on the climate (energy needed to cool servers and data centres). To reduce this impact, most new data centres are green centres (European Commission, 2022)[28] or are built in underground facilities (Von Hassler, 2022)[29]. In the early years, each organisation, business and public administration created its own metaverse platform. This led to inefficiencies and confusion among users. With time, metaverse platforms merged in order to provide a better service. For example, public authorities started sharing the same platforms and large tech companies (owners of metaverses) agreed on ways to merge or make platforms compatible.

In 2050, **citizens carry out a large part of their daily activities in the metaverse**. Working and studying in the metaverse is very common as most schools and universities have their own platforms. Physical meetings are dedicated to social interactions. In cities, office buildings are being replaced by residential or commercial buildings. Increasing prices of virtual real-estate are posing a real challenge to the accessibility and inclusiveness of virtual land (Bracken, 2022)[30].

The socio-economic situation in 2050 is more unequal. The public health crises had a negative effect on the economy and on citizens' welfare. However, compared with the 2019 pandemic, the world was better prepared. Digital developments (e.g. collaboration

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[25] Gibbons, L. (2022, August 4). *5 ways the metaverse can help with the climate crisis*. Blockleaders. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.blockleaders.io/news/5-ways-the-metaverse-can-help-with-the-climate-crisis

[26] According to J.P. Morgan (n.d.), the metaverse is a seamless convergence of our physical and digital lives, creating a unified, virtual community where we can work, play, relax, transact and socialise. That said, most conceptualisations of the metaverse include the use of virtual reality, augmented reality, and avatars connected by a massive network. From *Opportunities in the metaverse: How businesses can explore the metaverse and navigate the hype vs. reality*, by J.P. Morgan, n.d. (https://www.jpmorgan.com/content/dam/jpm/treasury-services/documents/opportunities-in-the-metaverse.pdf).

[27] Lawton, G. (2022, November 18). 12 top metaverse predictions for 2030. *TechTarget*. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/tip/Top-metaverse-predictions

[28] European Commission. (2022, June 7). *Green cloud and green data centres*. Shaping Europe's Digital Future. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/green-cloud

[29] Von Hassler, A. (2022, December 22). *The Pros and Cons of Underground Data Centers*. DataSpan. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://dataspan.com/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-underground-data-centers/

[30] Bracken, K. (2022, November 8). *What is metaverse real estate? An expert explains*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/property-buying-in-the-metaverse-is-the-future/

apps, metaverse platforms) were already consolidated. Global warning has also had negative effects on inequality and poverty. The energy poverty gap (e.g. cooling energy gap [Andrijevic et al., 2021][31]) has continued to increase (Mathiesen et al., 2021)[32].

The **digital transition has transformed the job market**. New jobs were consolidated and others were made redundant, thus creating social conflict and putting pressure on public budgets. New jobs required reskilling. Inequalities were exacerbated by the advanced digital skills required to find a job or create a competitive business. In these years, the gap between the tech savvy and the digitally illiterate has grown. This gap is largely intergenerational or linked to the socioeconomic backgrounds of different segments of the population.

Additionally, **not all citizens and organisations** can **access or benefit from the metaverse in the same way**. Most metaverses operate with a basic package of free add-ons or apps but the best ones need to be purchased. This has created a further deterioration in terms of equal opportunities.

Concerning the **impact on EU democracy**, the anti-environmentalist movement has exacerbated polarisation. Anti-environmentalism movements have pushed EU policies towards climate adaptation, instead of trying to tackle global warming. This polarisation trend coexisted with the so-called 'silent citizenship' phenomenon (Gest & Gray, 2018)[33], which became increasingly relevant. The EU institutions are investing public funds to increase their visibility and engage with citizens, particularly within the metaverse platforms. In this regard, the EU has launched several initiatives to promote participatory democracy via the metaverse. Additionally, due to the importance of the metaverse, the EU authorities, with the support of civil society organisations, are adopting measures to ensure a 'fair and just metaverse', aimed at making sure no one is left behind digitally in this process.

In the **geopolitical sphere**, the role of the EU has continued to decay. The measures to make the EU a digital power were only partially successful, and were not able to put the EU on an equal footing and able to compete with the US, China and India (i.e. the countries owning most metaverse and AI companies). However, the EU has at least been successful in retaining its position in the world as a soft power, mainly in the area of culture. For example, the EU's creative sector is very strong, with a prominent position in the metaverse market (e.g. non-fungible tokens, creation of virtual environments, etc.).

The **EU has launched many initiatives to protect democratic values in the new digital spaces**. For example, the EU is trying to regulate the metaverse to make it safer and more respect-based (e.g. rules on censorship, data protection, respect for human

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[31] Andrijevic, M., Byers, E., Mastrucci, A., Smits, J., & Fuss, S. (2021). Future cooling gap in shared socioeconomic pathways. *Environmental Research Letters*, *16*(9), 094053. https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac2195

[32] Mathiesen, K., Oroschakoff, K., Coi, G., & Guàrdia, A. B. (2021, July 2). Droughts, fires and floods: How climate change will impact Europe. *POLITICO*. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.politico.eu/article/how-climate-change-will-widen-european-divide-road-to-cop26/

[33] Gest, J., & Gray, S. (2018). *Silent Citizenship: The Politics of Marginality in Unequal Democracies*. Routledge.

rights, competition law, etc.). The EU wants to: ensure that 10% of the land in the metaverse is offered to CSOs; strengthen consumers' rights protections; ban low-quality virtual reality glasses that causes health problems; and finance organisations aimed at protecting users from personal data abuses or breaches.

Despite its efforts, the EU has encountered many difficulties in imposing these regulations and governance structures in the metaverse. It has created major tensions with the big tech company owners of the metaverse platforms. Additionally, it has been a cause of internal divisions between Members States due to their different approaches.

2) Role of CSOs within the scenario

The role of civil society organisations has been **greatly impacted by the developments in the digital transition**. Over recent years, CSOs have been required to adapt, modifying their role in society as well as their *modus operandi*. Most CSOs have joined the metaverse to gain visibility, interact with citizens, and deliver on their organisational objectives.

To a certain degree, the role of workers' organisations has been challenged by the boost to the digital transition. The high number of people in non-standard or precarious types of employment (e.g. temporary workers, self-employed or workers in the informal and gig economy) has contributed to further declining trade union membership (ILO, 2021)[34]. Despite this, workers' organisations have readapted their role and have played a very active role in demanding decent working conditions in the new digital spaces. They have been calling for measures to address the consequences for the mental and physical health of digital workers and digital users. For example, demanding limits to long working hours; social measures to address the isolation of digital workers; and financial support to address the use of inadequate equipment for operating in the metaverse (Eurofound, 2020)[35].

The social partners (businesses and trade unions) have been very active in promoting the reskilling of workers. There has been a focus on supporting those in more difficult situations due to the digital gap. Some CSOs have called for a system to redistribute the benefits generated by AI and automation (e.g. some pilot projects were launched to tax robots or AI [Chand et al., 2022][36] in order to support reskilling programmes financially).

Together with public funding support, workers' organisations and NGOs have joined forces to promote or create fair, diverse, equitable and inclusive metaverses that comply

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[34] ILO. (2021, July). *Trade unions in transition: What will be their role in the future of work?* International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Labour-Relations/trade-unions#introduction

[35] Eurofound. (2020). *Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age* (TJ-04-20-008-EN-N). Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/telework-and-ict-based-mobile-work-flexible-working-in-the-digital-age

[36] Chand, V., Kostic, S., & Reis, A. (2020). Taxing Artificial Intelligence and Robots: Critical Assessment of Potential Policy Solutions and Recommendation for Alternative Approaches. *World Tax Journal*, *12*(4), 711–761. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4223104

with respectful rules and values (e.g. non-abusive consumption techniques, fair working conditions, protection of citizens from any form of surveillance, as this is an intrusion on the fundamental rights to the protection of personal data and to the right to privacy [EDPS, n.d.][37]) CSOs have been lobbying to introduce a legal framework to deal with security and safety concerns in the metaverse, such as cyberbullying, discrimination, hate crimes, sexual harassment and identity theft. In addition, some organisations are focused on ensuring that citizens can benefit from the metaverses, regardless of their level of personal wealth.

3) Future persona method

Interview with 'Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth'

Date: 8 June 2050
Location: Metaverse, inside the digital 'safe room' of NGO
Weather forecast: simulated heavy rain (metaverse app)
Reason for interview: Data breach.
 	
Click here **to listen to this revealing interview!**
 	
Background
The *Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth* association has a permanent staff of around ten people providing the day-to-day administration. The organisation is staffed by people who style themselves as 'meta-Robin Hoods'. The association's budget depends on public funds and private donations.
 	
Main areas of activity
- The **administration** manages legal, HR and financial compliance. An important function is to formulate bids for projects paid for by public money and to collect donations. For example, the organisation receives EU funds (from the MetaHorizon 2060 programme) aimed at ensuring a fair and respectful metaverse. They also benefit from private donations from wealthy citizens worried about the impact of the digital transformation.
- **Metaverse activities** to promote a respectful and regulated metaverse that complies with human rights. They provide two main services:
   ○ *Peacekeepers:* staff avatars do rounds, walking around the metaverse monitoring users' activities in order to identify any potential breaches or threats to users' rights to a respectful and safe experience in the metaverse.
   ○ *Collecting and processing complaints:* The association has a secured virtual space in the metaverses to collect users' complaints, open 24/7. Once

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[37] EDPS. (n.d.). *Our work by topics: Surveillance*. European Data Protection Supervisor. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from https://edps.europa.eu/data-protection/our-work/subjects_en

> collected, the staff will work with the company owning the metaverse or with public authorities in order to deal with the complaints. The association has a legal service to support potential victims.
> - **Networking and lobbying** public administrations and tech companies to promote a more regulated and respect-based metaverse.
> - A **legal service,** including staff dedicated to investigating potential breaches, defending metaverse users from potential criminal or harmful activities. This means also launching court cases when required.

4) Further reading and other material

Artists and culture creators have reflected on the implications of the virtual worlds that have played a role in our lives and societies for decades. Already in the 1930s, some fictional authors reflected on it in their work. For example, Laurence Manning (Liptak, 2016)[38] described how people could be connected to a machine to replace their senses, and Stanley G. Weinbaum (Norman, n.d.)[39] created a fictional model for virtual reality. Today, the topic of the metaverse attracts even greater attention due to the limitless potential and real applications of the digital world. The following list suggests further reading and other material on the subject:

- Millennium project (*The Millennium Project*, 2023)

- NVIDIA Earth-2 project (Huang, 2021)

- Second Life (Linden Lab, n.d.)

- Vision 2050: Time to Transform (Wbcsd, 2021)

- AI 2041. Ten visions for our future (Lee & Qiufan, 2021)

- The future of international NGOs in a post-pandemic world (Cortada, 2021)

- Tron (Lisberger, 1982)

- Snow Crash (Stephenson, 1992)

- Ready Player One (Cline, 2011)

- Don't Worry Darling (Wilde, 2022)

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[38] Liptak, A. (2016, July 3). *How science fiction writers predicted virtual reality*. VentureBeat. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://venturebeat.com/media/how-science-fiction-writers-predicted-virtual-reality/

[39] Norman, J. M. (n.d.). *'Pygmalion's Spectacles,' Probably the First Comprehensive and Specific Fictional Model for Virtual Reality*. History of Information. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?entryid=4543

C. Declining Europe - CSOs play a crucial role in a highly antagonistic political context

> *European countries in 2050 are affected, to a higher or lower degree, by social strife spreading in a steadily declining economic context. The European Union is pressured by the weight of debt (public and private) and by the environmental crisis. Weak leadership, ideological and identity-based divides and the influence of enemy powers generate a pre-civil war feeling.*

1) State-of-play of the twin transition and other related dimensions

In this scenario, the digital transition continues to transform social interactions and labour contexts. Europe has also continued to **lag behind** the US (Smit et al., 2022)[40] and China (Michelsen et al., 2021)[41] in terms of innovation. With an older work force and low-skilled immigration, digital technologies have not improved labour productivity as much as for its global competitors. **Cyberactivism** takes precedence over face-to-face interactions.

The green transition is necessary due to the **energy crisis**. The investment in renewable energies causes more aggressive competition for rare earths and metals across the globe, while at the same time externalising pollution from the developed North to the global South. Climate change puts further strains on farming and fisheries, with **rising food costs** affecting the already impoverished middle and lower classes. Nevertheless, resistance to innovation and the distrust of technology prevent a more productive and resilient farming sector, which also makes Europe an unattractive area for skilled workers. Environmental regulations further force the production of food downwards (Pascoe, 2022)[42].

European countries remain broadly liberal democracies, with market economies and welfare states. Nevertheless, the **political system is undermined by partisan polarisation[43] and aggressive social conflict**, politically motivated criminality (terrorism, vandalism, hacking) and disinformation, both resulting from foreign interference and from the negative socioeconomic context (Brennan, 2017; Klein, 2020).

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[40] Smit, S., Tyreman, M., Mischke, J., Ernst, P., Hazan, E., Novak, J., Hieronimus, S., & Dagorret, G. (2022). Securing Europe's competitiveness: Addressing its technology gap. In *McKinsey & Company*. McKinsey Global Institute. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/securing-europes-competitiveness-addressing-its-technology-gap

[41] This tendency might now be stronger, but a study already pointing in this direction prior to the full-fledged Russian invasion of Ukraine. Can be read in 'Global economy: USA and China leading the way, Europe lagging behind' by C. Michelsen et al., 2021, *DIW Weekly Report* (http://hdl.handle.net/10419/233518).

[42] Pascoe, R. (2022, June 5). What's all the fuss about nitrogen in the Netherlands? *DutchNews*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.dutchnews.nl/features/2022/06/whats-all-the-fuss-about-nitrogen-in-the-netherlands/

[43] The multiparty system in most European countries can potentially reduce the type of bipolarisation we see in the US (Klein, 2020). Nevertheless, Left/Right blocks can reproduce this type of political tribalism in multiparty parliamentary democracies, a tendency that is occurring naturally in most democracies, as explained by Klein (2020) and also in Brennan (2017).

Indeed, Europe is split between the **financial demands of protecting the future** (digitalisation, green transition, defence) and the **present demands of an instinctively conservative electorate (both on the left and the right)** focused on maintaining the status quo. Welfare payments (pensions and healthcare) drain public finances. As the EU turns to printing money well above the real creation of value, the euro loses international credibility and its status as a reserve currency fades out.

Between institutional vetoes, opposing national interests and ideological conflicts, the EU struggles to navigate a geopolitically unstable world. As the United States retreats from being the military protector of Europe (Zeihan, 2022)[44], other powers (China [Liang & Xiangsui, 2015][45], Russia, and the Middle East[46]) pressure the EU both militarily, competing for resources, and through social campaigns (both cyber campaigns and the financing of CSOs), thereby fuelling an antagonistic political environment. Disinformation and radicalisation amplify social divides (Houellebecq, 2016; Fukuyama, 2022; Murray, 2022)[47, 48, 49].

2) Role of CSOs within the scenario

The evolution of CSOs in this scenario **largely corresponds to the future scenarios described in the EESC's 2017 study** on the evolution of civil society (Divjak & Forbici, 2017)[50]. It is fuelled by digitalisation, loss of long-term civic engagement, loss of trust in institutions, populism and the blurring of the lines between party politics and CSO advocacy (Divjak & Forbici)[51].

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[44] Such retreat, already visible in later years in the US, is hypothesised as inevitable by Zeihan (2022). Zeihan, P. (2022). *The End of the World is Just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization*. HarperCollins Publishers.

[45] China as a warring nation using all resources at hand is described by Liang & Xiangsui (2015). Liang, Q., & Xiangsui, W. (2015). *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (Reprint ed.). Echo Point Books & Media.

[46] The so-called *Qatargate* was revealed after the first version of this paper, but it broadly confirms what is written here. The soft power of MENA countries in Europe is in no way smaller than the soft power of Europe in MENA countries. The fact that the scandal remains attached only to Qatari corruption, and that the second country named in the process (Morocco) can escape the controversy, is a further indicator of the influence held by some third countries.

[47] In the Western world the former consensus around liberal democracy, market economy, welfare state, secularism and individual rights is failing with the growth of both reactionary right and the identity-based left, as described by Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[48] The discredit of the material and cultural achievements of the West – and thus, of Europe – affects almost all areas of knowledge, civic and political institutions and its cultural heritage, as described by Murray, D. (2022b). *The War on the West*. Broadside Books.

[49] A scenario of direct confrontation in a still functioning democracy between two radically opposed poles – a nativist block on the right and a religious block on the left can be found in Houellebecq, M. (2016). *Soumission*. Flammarion. The author expressly mentions Wahabi influence in French politics, something that after *Qatargate* sounds obvious, but has not been so until recently.

[50] Divjak, T., & Forbici, G. (2017). *The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030* (No. 978-92-830-3737–8). European Economic and Social Committee. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-04-17-886-en-n.pdf

[51] Ibid. As described in pp. 32 and 33 of the study.

The decline of traditional parties[52] (or their complete collapse in some European countries, such as France and Italy) is part of a larger trend across the Western world, as was the collapse of the pillarisation system in Belgium and the Netherlands (Mair, 2013). A **rearrangement of political and civic engagement occurs**. Socioeconomic class and materialism-based ideologies have lost relevance to the benefit of increasingly radicalised **identity-based politics**[53] (race, religion) (Fukuyama, 2018). 'Materialistic politics' (based on economic interests and scientific facts) is replaced by 'spiritual politics', where emotions trump facts (Moisi, 2010)[54].

These trends, observable since the 2000s, have matured in the second quarter of the 21st century. Organisations that helped structure social dialogue in European social market economies, such as trade unions and employer organisations, by 2050 see their role as mobilisers of social interests reduced. The gig economy (Sanz De Miguel et al., 2021)[55] has emptied trade unions and the rise of managerialism above corporate ownership[56] has emptied employer organisations (Galbraith, 1967). **Instead of interest-based organisations solving conflicts through socioeconomic bargaining, CSOs now form ideological platforms**. CSO/party mutual entryism is widespread: politically ambitious individuals create new CSOs ('movements') to gain political power and become appointed to company or public body boards; parties create movements to advance their agendas; leaders are recruited from or fabricated by these movements ('De Harde Val Van Godenkind Sihame El Kaouakibi,' 2021)[57].

CSOs must conform to a specific ideological agenda, and facts (events, technologies, scientific documents) that are helpful are used to support that agenda. Unhelpful facts are discarded. **Disinformation is widely used to fill in the gaps. Technology plays a significant role**, as a daily mobiliser of citizen engagement, but also as a means of

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[52] Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. Verso Books.

[53] The primacy of tribal identities (such as ethnicity or religion) has defeated, in this scenario, any sort of aspiration to universal principles of fairness. Fukuyama, F. (2019). *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (Reprint). Picador.

[54] In Europe in particular two emotions dominate: fear (from a population that is demographically old and emotionally conservative, regardless of whether they are left- or right-wing) and humiliation (especially with the immigration of populations from formerly colonised countries). Moisi, D. (2010). *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World* (1st ed.). Anchor.

[55] For an assessment of the gig or platform economy and its implications for workers' rights, see Sanz De Miguel, P., Bazzani, T., & Arasanz, J. (2021). *The definition of worker in the platform economy: Exploring workers' risks and regulatory solutions* (No. 978-92-830-5404–7). European Economic and Social Committee. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/definition-worker-platform-economy-exploring-workers-risks-and-regulatory-solutions

[56] Galbraith, J. K. (1967). *The New Industrial State: Planning and the Modern Corporation*.

[57] A good example of the merger between identity-based politics, 'social entrepreneurs' capturing public funds for private gains and political parties willing to buy out social activists for electoral gains is the scandal surrounding Sihame El Kaouakibi, see 'The hard fall of divine child Sihame El Kaouakibi' (transl.). (2021). *De Tijd*. Retrieved on 19 January 2023, from https://www.tijd.be/politiek-economie/belgie/vlaanderen/de-harde-val-van-godenkind-sihame-el-kaouakibi/10295588.html.

producing disinformation. For example, deepfakes will become a common form of propaganda and a way to spread hatred towards opposing factions (Lee & Qiufan, 2021)[58].

Political violence becomes recurrent. Some CSOs, depending on their ideological purism, are involved in vandalism, threats to opponents, and violent demonstrations. For example, organisations under the cover of some well-intended policy goal may vandalise the headquarters of other political parties. Larger CSOs from each political faction may keep their distance from these violent eruptions, but will in any case dismiss the violence from their side and emphasise the violence from opposing ideological groups, while guaranteeing legal and financial protection for their supporters. Political confrontation might thus also take on a legal nature, in parallel with direct confrontation. Specifically, **legal battles** to defend their members and attack the members of other organisations, or even to contest the right of other organisations to exist [Gentleman, 2022] [59]), will be part of the normal activities of CSOs in 2050.

3) **Future persona method**

Interview with 'Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth'
Date: 8 June 2050 *Location: Brussels, street* *Weather forecast: Scorching sun, 48°C* *Reason for interview: leak of whistle-blowers' personal data* **Click here to listen to this revealing interview!** **Background** The *Citizens for Change Speaking the Truth* association has a permanent staff of around ten people providing the day-to-day administration. The board is made up of people who style themselves as 'social entrepreneurs' and hold paid positions dependent on political appointments in public bodies and private or semi-private companies. The number of advisors (IT, communications, legal affairs) fluctuates according to the electoral cycle and the capacity to capture public funds and international donations. *Main areas of activity*   a) The **administration** manages legal, HR and financial compliance. An important task is to formulate bids for projects paid for with public money and to collect donations, especially from international donors (companies, governmental organisations, think tanks and individuals).

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[58] For an example of how deepfake, convolutional neural networks and GANs can be politically mobilised, read the short story 'Gods Behind Masks' (and the subsequent technical explanation) in Lee, K., & Qiufan, C. (2021). *AI 2041: Ten Visions for Our Future* (1st ed.). Currency.

[59] For an example of what this might look like in the future is the ongoing legal battle of Mermaids organisation against the LGB Alliance, where the first is trying to strip the latter of its charity status see Gentleman, A. (2022, September 9). Judge to consider trans charity's appeal to strip LGB Alliance of legal status. *The Guardian*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/sep/09/trans-charity-mermaids-appeal-lgb-alliance-status

b) **Community management** (monitoring and coordinating online activism, e.g. with dedicated 'digital engagement officers') is a crossbeam of the organisation's activity. Without it, the organisation cannot show its social influence, pressure politicians or obtain public money or international donations.

c) **Networking** with political parties and like-minded national, European and international organisations, is both a way to feed content to their members and to gather strength from allies. It is also an important mechanism for the career development of staff and board members.

d) The production of **policy** studies, materials and events supporting the organisation's political vision remains an important element. It feeds online activists, public demonstrations and the political parties that are part of the organisation's ecosystem.

e) Finally, strong **legal and para-legal** capabilities (including staff dedicated to investigating events and creating supportive content) are needed both to defend the organisations' activists that are engaged in court cases due to their (online or offline) activities and to launch court cases against rival activists and organisations.

4) Further reading and other material

This scenario is fundamentally inspired by the cycle of order and disorder in world powers and civilizations, as proposed by **Ray Dalio (2021b) in *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed and Fail***. This scenario corresponds to stages 5 and 6 ('the Decline') of his diagram of internal order (p. 153). In the freely available compendium of graphics (Dalio, 2021a)[60] the author offers a schematic but more detailed description of these two stages (steps 13 to 18, p. 6) and the main indicators (p. 7).

The geopolitical situation in this scenario is the **evolution of the description made by High Representative Josep Borrell on 10 October 2022**[61]. Europe is isolated in a very aggressive world where it can find hardly any allies and instead external interests stir conflict on the continent.

The **EESC study on *The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030*** (Divjak & Forbici, 2017) gives good insights into what these warring CSOs could look like, as well as how to mitigate it (something we do not attempt to do here).
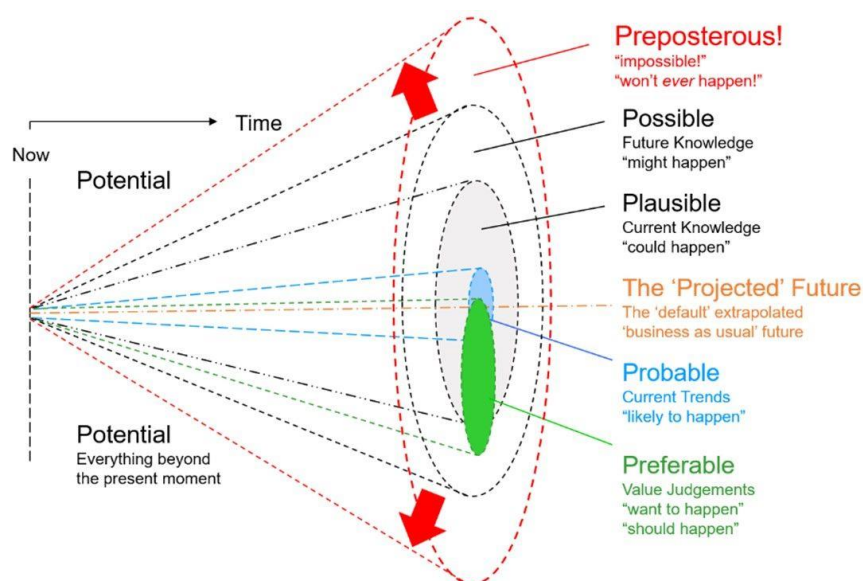
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[60] Dalio, R. (2021a). *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.economicprinciples.org/DalioChangingWorldOrderCharts.pdf

[61] Borrell, J. (2022, October 10). *EU Ambassadors Annual Conference 2022: Opening speech by High Representative Josep Borrell*. EEAS. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-ambassadors-annual-conference-2022-opening-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell_en

Finally, **Robert D. Putnam's 2020 book *The Upswing*[62]** describes how the United States experienced what he calls a social *I-We-I* swing (egotism, community thinking, egotism again). In the Gilded Age (the *Belle époque* in Europe), its society enjoyed the first true example of globalisation (open borders for migration, international travel and free trade) as well as economic and technological progress, while suffering political strife and strong inequalities (economic, racial and sexual). From around the 1910s and until the mid-60s, it moved towards growing social cohesion, through a booming civil society in which individuals took care of each other and of the common good. As a reaction against the weight of communitarian thinking, and also as a product of the fight for individual rights, it fell into an individualism that can be seen everywhere from economic inequality to individualised religion. In this third scenario, we argue that, like in the original Gilded Age, in this *new* Gilded Age political polarisation is ever growing, through a synthesis of the *I* that seeks new '*We's'* (through political and identity-based tribalism) to fill the void left by the disappearance of a sense of national community and social duties.

6. CONCLUSIONS ON THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE NEAR FUTURE

As explained, this paper is intended to serve as a stress test. It therefore does not claim to predict the future. In this context, it is useful to refer to the future cone, which gives us an overview of the range of possible future scenarios. The authors have tried to avoid the level of the 'preposterous', but to at least imagine possible scenarios that do not necessarily serve as predictions, but rather as stress tests.

Adapted from 'Big History and Anticipation: Using Big History as a framework for global foresight'[63]

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[62] Putnam, R. D. (2020). *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*. Simon and Schuster.

[63] Voros, J 2017, 'Big History and anticipation: Using Big History as a framework for global foresight', in Poli, R. (ed.) *Handbook of Anticipation: Theoretical and applied aspects of the use of future in decision making*, Springer International, Cham. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-31737-3_95-1.

The scenarios depicted in the report are useful in determining how the twin transition will affect the role of civil society. To provide an overview of the conclusions we can draw from the three scenarios, we return to the four original guiding questions:

- How could the digital and green transitions impact the role of civil society organisations in society?
- What impact can the twin transition have on our society and how will it affect citizens' relationships with, and participation in, CSOs?
- How can the negative developments presented in the three scenarios be avoided?
- What role can CSOs play in implementing the twin transition based on the proposed scenarios?

The digital and green transitions could greatly affect the role of CSOs in society. The twin transition influences both the type of engagement CSOs develop in our societies and (more importantly) the type of issues CSOs are likely to address.

Consequently, *the twin transition is changing both the nature of the issues that citizens are concerned about in our societies and the ways in which citizens participate* in public life and CSOs. A sense of urgency about the climate, for example, may lead to an increase in direct action. The ubiquity of the digital world, on the other hand, may make people less willing to participate in in-person activities, but online activism may become more common. As seen here, these trends may contradict each other, but they may also lead to new forms of activism. Exactly what these will look like depends on various factors, including how authorities and political parties conduct public discourse.

To *avoid the negative developments imagined in the three scenarios* it is important to guarantee that a few elements are respected:

- CSOs must be involving in *consultations* on public policies. While the decision-makers are the politicians elected by citizens, CSOs are a source of information that can help both citizens and politicians learn about topics of social relevance and facilitate debate;
- CSOs must have *a notion of the public (common) good*. Though they might represent special/ sectorial interests, and in the tradition of social concertation, they must take into consideration the impact of their proposals in several dimensions and on other social groups. The use of foresight is not only useful for policy-makers and public authorities; CSOs themselves can apply techniques such as the STEEPED wheel and the Bias wheel (Van Woensel, 2021)[64].

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[64] In Van Woensel, L. (2021). *Guidelines for foresight-based policy analysis*. European Parliamentary Research Service - Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA). Retrieved on 20 March 2023, from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/en/document/EPRS_STU(2021)690031, pp. 17-23.

- As part of that notion of the common good, individuals, CSOs and politicians must *keep each other and themselves in check*. As a source of inspiration, Timothy Snyder's (2017) 'twenty lessons'[65] provide a wealth of simple advice, such as taking responsibility for the fate of the world, maintaining professional ethics, being wary of paramilitaries and other forms of direct action, believing in truth/verifiable facts, and investigating policy claims.

In this sense, *CSOs may play a crucial role in ensuring a successful digital and green transition*. Among the advice given by Snyder is the practice of what he calls 'corporeal politics', meaning to 'get outside', to get away from computer screens and to 'stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers'. In the previously mentioned 2020 book, *The Upswing*, Robert D. Putnam notes how there are currently a large number of civil society organisations in Washington DC. Despite this, the local branches of these organisations that kept social cohesion and solidarity so strong throughout many decades have now been reduced to a small fraction of what existed in the past.

The 2018 EESC study [*The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030*](#) provides a wealth of strategies to address the many issues touched upon in these scenarios, and it remains a useful tool to be revisited. Among the topics tackled in the study are demographic changes (p.38), economic crises (p.42), digitalisation (p.44), populism (p.46) and the shrinking civic space (p.48) (Divjak & Forbici, 2017).

The EESC's unique feature in the Brussels policy-making constellation is that it does not simply represent civil society (there are plenty of civil society organisations represented in Brussels), but that its members are anchored in their national constituencies, working on the ground, and convening in Brussels to debate with players with different (if not opposing) viewpoints. This work of 'social concertation' at a European scale, done with players that have to answer directly to the civil society of their countries, thus plays an important role in promoting Snyder's 'corporeal politics'. This link to civil society in all 27 Member States, at their national, regional and local levels, is of prime importance in ensuring a successful green and digital transition. As Putnam (2020) writes (pp. 338-339):

> *No one party, no one policy or platform, and no one charismatic leader was responsible for bringing about* [a more open and cohesive society throughout the 20th century]*. It was, instead, the result of countless citizens engaging in their own spheres of influence and coming together to create a vast ferment of criticism and change—a genuine shift from 'I' to 'we'.*

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[65] Snyder, T. (2017). *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Random House.

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APPENDIX 1. DRAFT SCENARIOS MATRIX

Dimension / Scenario	EU-Democracy	Socio-economic situation	Digital transition	Green transition	CSO role
SCENARIO 1. **Green focus**	• Democracy prevails • EU is focused on signing international agreements to protect its citizens (against externalisation of pollution and against the use of hazardous chemicals to make products/technological gadgets)	• Richer European communities practice circular economy and eat organic food • Less advantaged people are not able to afford the technologies to cope with the extreme weather conditions	• Innovative digital gadgets improving quality of life are created • Unequal opportunities in the digital transition between rich and poor • Pollution caused by digital transition is very problematic	• Very climate-conscious EU population • Many international agreements have been respected, but it was still too late to reverse the damage • Extreme weather conditions	• CSOs are strong on social rights • Trade unions and employer organisations focus on reskilling those left behind in the twin transitions • CSOs lobby for the inclusion of climate crisis action in the EU Treaties • NGOs are active in furthering climate action
SCENARIO 2. **Digital focus**: **CSOs promoting human rights**	• 'Silent citizenship' phenomenon damaging democracy • Risk of exclusion of citizens not integrated	• Public health crises impacted the economy and citizens' behaviour • More resilient economy thanks to	• Digital transition • Expansion of the metaverse • A large portion of daily activities take	• Anti-environmentalist movement, which evolves into a more moderated movement	• CSOs are required to adapt to the digital transition • CSOs dedicated to ensuring a fair and

in the metaverse	into the new digital tools • EU policies aimed at regulating the metaverse • Tension between public authorities and tech companies	enhanced digital tools • Gap between the tech savvy and the digitally illiterate • Intergenerational crisis	place in the digital world	defending climate adaption (vs climate mitigation). • Extreme weather conditions • Public health crises • Evolution of digital transition is influenced by climate warming	respectful metaverse • Social partners activities are impacted
SCENARIO 3. **Declining Europe**	• Weakened leadership across all levels of government • Citizenship vs tribal affiliation (identity-based politics) • Atomisation of governance • Democracy of networks of groups	• High inequalities • Increasing debt and declining economic growth • Inflation fuelled by competition for raw materials, low productivity, reduced active population and quantitative easing, with the euro losing its status as a reserve currency	• High divergence in the use of digital tools • Digital tribalism reflecting deep social divisions (echo chambers) substitute open political debate • Fake news, politically motivated news and opinion makers substitute evidence-based decision-making (activism wins over rationalism)	• Food security – both at macro and micro level – re-emerges as a political issue • Lack of overall strategy due to poor governance and competing demands • Financing of the green transition increasingly difficult due to the declining economical context	• Large differences of power among CSOs • Several CSOs no longer exist • Constellations of ideologically close organisations with different levels of institutionalisation fighting different constellations of equally ideologically coherent CSOs

APPENDIX 2. REFERENCES TO FORWARD-LOOKING EESC OPINIONS

The Strategic Foresight Report 2022 identified 10 areas of action needed to strengthen opportunities and minimise the potential risks relating to the interaction between the green and digital transitions up to 2050.

The following EESC opinions have looked into those areas, providing the views of civil society organisations. These opinions are not linked to the Ideas Paper prepared, but are included as further material for the reader.

1.   Strengthening resilience and open strategic autonomy in sectors critical for the twin transitions via, for instance, the work of the EU Observatory of Critical Technologies.
- [A strategic vision on energy transition to enable sustainable development](). Adopted 27 October 2022.
- [Roadmap on security and defence technologies](). Adopted on 14 July 2022
- [How will given industrial ecosystems contribute to the strategic autonomy of the EU and the wellbeing of Europeans?]() Adopted 19 January 2022

2.   Stepping up green and digital diplomacy, by leveraging the EU's regulatory and standardisation power, while promoting EU values and fostering partnerships.
- [Geopolitical impact of energy transition](). Adopted 21 on September 2022
- [A new framework for free trade agreements, economic partnership and investment agreements that guarantees the real involvement of CSOs and the social partners and ensures public awareness.]() Adopted 23 March 2022
- [The global gateway](). Adopted 18 May 2022

3.   Strategically managing supply of critical materials and commodities, by adopting a long-term   systemic approach to avoid a new dependency trap.
- [Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability](). Adopted 24 March 2021
- [Digital Mining in Europe: New solutions for the sustainable production of raw materials (own-initiative opinion)](). Adopted 18 September 2020

4.   Strengthening economic and social cohesion by reinforcing social protection and the welfare state.
- [Action plan for the social economy](). Adopted 18 May 2022
- [8th Cohesion report](). Adopted 18 May 2022

5. Adapting education and training systems to match a rapidly transforming technological and socio-economic reality as well as supporting labour mobility across sectors.
- [Learning and employability package](). Adopted 18 May 2022
- [Higher education package](). Adopted 23 February 2022

6. Mobilising additional future-proof investment into new technologies and infrastructures.
- [A new European innovation agenda](). Adopted 15 December 2022
- [Public investment in energy infrastructure as part of the solution to climate issues](). Adopted 16 September 2022
- [Roadmap on security and defence technologies](). Adopted 13 July 2022

7. Developing monitoring frameworks for measuring wellbeing beyond GDP.
- [The sustainable economy we need (own-initiative opinion)](). Adopted 23 January 2020
- [Effort Sharing Regulation](). Adopted 8 December 2021
- [Beyond GDP measures for a successful recovery and a sustainable and resilient EU economy (own-imitative opinion)](). Adopted 8 December 2021

8. Ensuring a future-proof regulatory framework for the Single Market, conducive to sustainable business models and consumer patterns.
- [Single Market emergency instrument](). Adopted 15 December 2022
- [A competitiveness check to build a stronger and more resilient EU economy](). Adopted 15 December 2022

9. Stepping up a global approach to standard-setting and benefitting from the EU's first mover advantage in competitive sustainability.
- [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey Strategy 2022](). Adopted 23 February 2022
- [Standardisation strategy](). Adopted 18 May 2022

10. Promoting robust cybersecurity and secure data sharing framework to ensure, among other things, that critical entities can prevent, resists and recover from disruptions.
- [Cyber Resilience Act](). Adopted 15 December 2022
- [Communication on cybersecurity strategy](). Adopted 27 April 2021