TIAS LAB

Imagining the city of the future

Methodological report of a multi-stakeholder workshop

Pontevedra · 18 June 2024 · Postgrowth S.A.: Pontevedra project



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POST-GROWTH INNOVATION LAB

Universidade Vigo

Concello de Pontevedra

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AT A GLANCE

Executive summary

Imagining the city of the future was the workshop that closed the citizen science process of Postgrowth S.A.: Pontevedra. During the 2023-2024 school year, 230 students from five schools had investigated four cases on the ecological transition of Pontevedra through 90 interviews. The workshop, held on 18 June 2024, placed that research in the hands of 19 people with very different profiles so that they could compare it and turn it into proposals.

19 participants with diverse profiles	**4** cases explained by the students	**5** working challenges	**10** cross-cutting proposals
90 interviews behind the cases	**10 years** time horizon of the proposals, from 2024 to 2034	**3.5 h** of workshop in one morning	**21** municipalities receive the results

The workshop combined two activities. In the first, a speed dating rotation, participants moved in small groups through four stations where the students of each case explained their research, their results and their open questions. In the second, a focus group, the same people put forward ideas on five challenges, four linked to the cases and one cross-cutting challenge on a decent life, and arranged them in time along a line between 2024 and 2034. Meanwhile, a central table made up of students and professional staff gathered what came out of each table and grouped recurring ideas in real time.

This pooling of ideas gave rise to the cross-cutting ideas that the team later organised into ten proposals. Their guiding principle is to prioritise collective benefit over private interests, and their content ranges from public services and participation to ecological limits, local initiatives and education. The proposals were published in a policy agenda and in a social recommendations guide, sent to 21 municipalities in the Pontevedra area.

The main lesson

The workshop worked as a space for meeting and comparison. Sharing the evidence first, working in small groups and connecting them through a central table made it possible to move from four cases to common ideas in a single morning. The weak point came afterwards. The material from the tables was not recorded systematically and the subsequent drafting produced a general document, which lost much of the concreteness and the time ordering worked on during the workshop.

01
What is the workshop?

Purpose and place in the project

Postgrowth S.A.: Pontevedra was a social science citizen science project on the role of innovation in the ecological transition of Pontevedra. Throughout the 2023-2024 school year, the students identified 467 challenges, chose four case studies, designed and conducted 90 interviews and analysed the results with the Post-Growth Innovation Lab team. Each case produced valuable conclusions on its own, but environmental and social challenges are connected and are usually addressed in isolation.

The Imagining the city of the future workshop was designed to take that step. Its purpose was to compare the four cases, identify what they had in common and turn the findings into clear proposals for public debate and decision-making, with the students in a leading role. It was the last activity of the participatory process and the one that connected school research with people working in politics, research, teaching, technical fields, entrepreneurship and neighbourhood life.

Objectives

- Compare the four studies by the students and identify common patterns.
- Turn the findings into clear and practical proposals for public debate.
- Give young people a meaningful role in a conversation with professional and institutional actors.
- Enrich the research by the students with the professional, institutional and local knowledge of the participants.

Participation and reach

The selection of participants sought a diversity of perspectives, without aiming for statistical representativeness. The groups were also formed to mix profiles, so that different viewpoints coexisted at each table.

Indicator	Figure
Workshop participants	19 people
Profiles	Policymakers, researchers, teachers, technical staff, entrepreneurs and members of the public
Students	Students from the four case studies and the five schools, in varying numbers depending on the school
Municipalities that received the agenda and the guide	21

02
How was it organised?

Division of roles

The Post-Growth Innovation Lab team designed the methodology, prepared the students, selected the profiles, organised the materials and the space and moderated the activities. The students had two roles. In the first part they explained their case at their own station, and in the second part some students were in charge of taking what came out of each working table to a central table. The participants contributed their experience, asked questions, made proposals and ordered ideas.

Preparation

The workshop was prepared in the final weeks of the process. The students of each case prepared a short explanation of context, method, results and open questions. Participants received an invitation with the organisation of the day and a brief description of the workshop, deliberately concise so as not to influence the results. The team also prepared the panels for each challenge with a timeline between 2024 and 2034, the sticky notes and the support material. The workshop was held on the Pontevedra campus during the international conference ESEE2024, at which the students also gave 28 presentations.

Programme of the day

Stage	Planned duration	Content
Welcome	About 15 minutes	Presentation of the Postgrowth S.A.: Pontevedra project and of the attendees.
Part one. Speed dating	Just over an hour	Rotation through four stations, one per case, in groups of four or five people and rounds of about ten minutes.
Break	30 minutes	Coffee and informal conversation.
Part two. Focus group	90 minutes	Brainstorming, ordering of ideas in time by challenge and final discussion with the pooling of ideas from the central table.

The duration corresponds to the programme sent to the participants, which planned a morning of three and a half hours.

Ethics and recording

The workshop applied the same ethical requirements as the rest of the project, which follow the protocol of the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings and the Environment (CEISHMA) of the Universidade de Vigo and data protection law.

- All participants received an information sheet about the workshop.
- Adult participants signed the informed consent and the image rights authorisation.
- Each student signed the informed consent and the image authorisation together with their family or guardian.

- Participation was voluntary and anyone could withdraw without consequences.
- Proposals were recorded without attributing them to specific people.
- Photographs and signed documents were stored in the Universidade de Vigo institutional cloud, with access restricted to the team and protected by password.
- Attendees also received a certificate of participation in the conference.

No systematic transcript of the sticky notes or count of ideas per challenge was kept from the material produced at the tables.

03
How was it done? Step-by-step methodology

Methodological principles

The design started from a simple idea. Before deliberating, everyone needs a shared understanding of the evidence. That is why the workshop began by getting to know the cases from those who had researched them and only afterwards moved on to proposing. The second principle was to work in small groups to make it easier for everyone to speak, with a mechanism that connected what happened in each group. The third was to use visual tools, such as sticky notes and panels with a timeline, which offer ways of taking part different from arguing out loud.

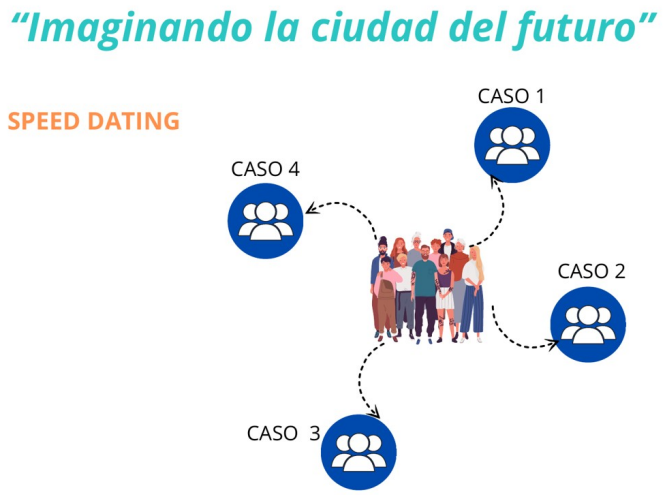


Figure 1. First part of the workshop. Rotation of the groups through the stations of the four cases.

Step 1. Getting to know the cases (speed dating)

Participants were divided into groups of four or five that rotated through four stations. At each one, the students of a case explained the context, the method, the findings and the questions that remained open. The cases were water pollution, the decline of rural areas, mental health and green spaces, and employment in Pontevedra. Attendees asked questions and contributed their experience, so the exchange went both ways. This first part served an educational purpose, because by the end of it everyone knew the four cases and could compare them.




Conversations between students and participants during the workshop.

Step 2. Proposing ideas (brainstorming)

In the second part, each person wrote ideas for improvement or solutions for the challenges associated with the cases on sticky notes. Writing before speaking allowed ideas from people who spoke little in plenary to enter the conversation.



Ideas written on sticky notes at one of the tables.

Step 3. Ordering ideas in time by challenge

Participants were redistributed into groups assigned to a specific challenge. Each group arranged the ideas along a timeline between 2024 and 2034, added those that were missing and removed those that were not convincing. The challenges were formulated as open questions.

Challenge	Working question
Employment	How can green employment be promoted in the municipality of Pontevedra?
Green spaces	How can we guarantee access to green spaces in the municipality for the population in order to generate well-being?
Rural areas	How do we help people live well in rural areas?
Water	How do we guarantee that the population has access to clean and healthy water?
A decent life	How do we guarantee a decent life for the whole population of Pontevedra?

The first four challenges correspond to the case studies. The fifth, a decent life, was added as a cross-cutting challenge to capture what ran through all of them.



Figure 2. Second part of the workshop. Five challenges, each with its own panel of ideas ordered between 2024 and 2034.

Step 4. Connecting the tables (central table)

While the groups were working, some students gathered what came out of each table and took it to a central table. There, students and professional staff pooled those ideas and tried to group them into categories in real time. This mechanism made it possible to see which ideas appeared in several challenges at once, which is exactly what the workshop was looking for.

Step 5. Pooling of ideas

In the final part, some of the cross-cutting ideas identified by the central table were discussed in plenary. In that conversation the lines that later shaped the agenda began to emerge.





Group work during the workshop on 18 June 2024.

Step 6. Subsequent drafting and dissemination

After the workshop, the professional team grouped the ideas into ten cross-cutting proposals and drafted a policy agenda, published in September 2024, and a social recommendations guide in more accessible language. Both documents were sent to Pontevedra City Council and to 21 municipalities in the metropolitan area.

04
What came out of the workshop?

The ten proposals

The table summarises the ten proposals into which the team organised the ideas from the workshop, with examples of the specific ideas, drawn from the tables and from the case studies, that give them content.

Proposal	Specific ideas that support it
1. From private benefit to collective benefit	Free drinking water points in the municipality. Investment to prevent leaks and improve wastewater treatment.
2. Quality public guarantees	Universal accessibility in spaces and services. Care programmes for older people and people with disabilities. Local employment and tailored training.
3. Quality public services	Mental health care integrated into support networks. Public transport designed for territorial cohesion and the connection between city and countryside. Safe travel on foot and by bicycle.
4. Public participation	Workshops, neighbourhood meetings and assemblies that include older people, young people, migrants and people with disabilities. Participation in land-use planning.
5. Community life	Cultural activities in public space. Neighbourhood agreements on waste, plastics and mobility. Mutual support networks.
6. Community spaces	Civic centres, urban gardens, neighbourhood workshops, repair cafés and local markets. Spaces for intergenerational encounters.
7. Limits to ecological and social impact	Restrict polluting activities near bodies of water. Public data on consumption and discharges. Regulate tourist pressure and tourist housing.
8. Sustainable local initiatives	Organic farming and direct sales. Cooperatives and small projects. Investments that benefit the local area.
9. Interconnectivity and resilience	Alliances between local producers and restaurants. Channels for collaboration between the city and the nearby countryside.
10. Communication and education	Raise awareness of the local initiatives that already exist. Digital formats and channels to reach the people furthest from formal channels.

Ideas that cut across the cases

The comparison between cases placed a common principle at the centre, prioritising collective benefit over private interests. It also showed that the transition of Pontevedra goes beyond urban planning, because it involves the management of natural resources, social justice, community networks and coordination between institutions, businesses and community groups. The proposals combined technological measures, such as sensors to monitor water quality, with social measures, such as the shared use of abandoned land to produce more local food.

Taken together, the proposals broadened the view of the transition of Pontevedra. The sustainability model of the municipality, internationally recognised, has focused its efforts on the

compact city, and the proposals also included the rural parishes that surround it and the relationships that link both spaces.

Outputs

- Policy agenda for a just ecological transition in the municipality of Pontevedra, published in September 2024.
- Social recommendations guide with practical guidelines for the public.
- Distribution of both documents to Pontevedra City Council and to 21 municipalities in the metropolitan area, compared with the 9 planned in the project.
- Public record of the action on the website of TIAS lab, the public participation living lab of the Universidade de Vigo.

05
Lessons learned

What worked

The workshop offered a direct dialogue between young people and people from politics, research, education, business and civil society. Participants learned about findings and concerns arising from research led by young people, and the students explained and defended their work before an adult and expert audience.

The sequence also worked. Speed dating gave everyone a common basis before proposing, the small groups made participation easier and the central table prevented each table from being isolated. The comparison between cases helped to go beyond sectoral solutions and to recognise shared causes, tensions and needs.

What should be improved

The main weakness lay in the move from the workshop to the document. The material from the tables was not recorded systematically, so today it is not possible to know how many ideas came out or how they were distributed across challenges and years. The agenda was drafted afterwards by the team and turned out to be a general text, with little traceability back to the specific ideas from the tables and without the time ordering between 2024 and 2034 that was worked on at them.

The label of multi-stakeholder workshop does not in itself guarantee balance, because the knowledge, interests and capacity for influence of each person are different. Finally, the documents reached 21 municipalities without any mechanism to know what was done with them.

Methodological lessons

1. **Share the evidence before deliberating.**

The initial exchange serves an educational purpose and puts everyone in a position to compare. Recommendation. Keep a first part in which those who did the research explain their work to those who are going to make proposals.

2. **Small groups need a connecting mechanism.**

The mixed central table of students and team made it possible to see in real time which ideas were repeated across challenges. Recommendation. Keep it and give whoever coordinates it a template to record the categories as they emerge.

3. **What is not recorded is lost.**

Without systematic photographs of the panels or transcription of the sticky notes, the move to the final document depended on the memory and interpretation of the team. Recommendation. Photograph each panel, transcribe the notes at the end and keep the time ordering as part of the result.

4. **The final document must preserve the voice of the workshop.**

An agenda drafted after the event tends towards the general. Recommendation. Build the document from the recorded material, with each proposal linked to the specific ideas and to their time horizon, and return a draft to the participants before publishing it.

5. **Multi-stakeholder does not mean balanced.**

Diversity of profiles does not in itself equalise the capacity for influence. Recommendation. Balance the groups taking into account knowledge, interests and influence, and moderate so that the most authoritative voices do not close the discussion.

6. **Handing results to institutions requires follow-up.**

Sending proposals to many municipalities broadens the reach and does not ensure any use. Recommendation. Agree with the receiving institutions, before the workshop, on a commitment to respond and a moment for review.

Recommendations for replicating the workshop

- Keep the sequence of speed dating, brainstorming, time ordering by challenge and central table.
- Design the recording of the material from the outset, with photographs, transcription and a count by challenge and time horizon.
- Draft the proposals from the recorded material and validate them with the participants.
- Agree a response mechanism with the institutions before handing over the results.

06
Conclusion

Imagining the city of the future showed that a well-sequenced workshop can turn four school research projects, in one morning, into ideas shared by young people and people with professional, institutional and local experience. The key lay in getting to know the evidence first, then making proposals in small groups and connecting those groups through a central table.

The workshop also left a lesson about what comes afterwards. The value of a space like this depends on documenting what it produces and turning it into recommendations that preserve its concreteness. When recording fails and drafting moves away from the tables, the result loses much of the richness of the conversation that made it possible.



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