People + Planet

Back From the Future

A Ouishare research program explores scenarios of how we could live, learn and work in the future.

Read 3 minutes

“There is a saying that if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,” says Sarah Eisenmann, Munich-based member at Ouishare (pronounced “we”-share) who incorporates this motto into her role in the community. Started in Paris in 2012, Ouishare – a community, network, nonprofit and think-tank – works across 30 cities in Europe, the Americas and Middle East to address societal, economic and environmental issues.

In October 2018, Ouishare Munich began a participatory futures research programme called “Back from the Future: Nudging Future-Making Citizens,” with the aim of helping Munich residents develop a sense of agency and begin perceiving themselves as co-creators of the city’s future. The project set out to explore scenarios of how we would live, learn and work in the future.

As an enabling partner, “the project was a perfect fit for Steelcase,” says Hristina Bojkova, Social Innovation Manager. “It aligns perfectly with our mission of making positive social impact in the communities where we live and work. Our company expertise on the future of work, worker and workplace also allowed us to provide ideas for the design of the workshops.”

Over 150 Munich residents participated in the Back from the Future interactive workshops, virtually traveling to the year 2036 and exploring possible futures of the city. Workshop participants produced 60 future scenarios and objects that tell stories of how we could live, work and learn in Munich in 2036.

“What we asked them is not only to imagine the future and how people would live together, but also to think about what potential daily needs [future citizens] may have” says David Weingartner, Ouishare member. “What products and objects could address those needs? It is quite different to talk about a future than it is to interact with a future scenario, represented by a tangible product.”

In a virtual event on 20th of April called the FutureBar, the two-year experiment came to an end, providing the opportunity to reflect on the learnings of the programme and formulate ideas for the co-creation of Munich’s future with its residents.

The future scenarios and objects are accessible via a virtual exhibition experience: munichfutures.com. Ouishare plans to expand the workshops throughout Europe and publish an open-source playbook for other cities to join in on the experience because they know, “if you want to go far, go together.”