

MENTAL TIME TRAVEL TO THE ACTIVE MALL OF THE FUTURE

Experiences from the STYLE Workshop

"As the time capsule opens 10 years from now, you find yourself in the lobby of an Active Mall – a place that is a heaven full of interesting things to do..."

The STYLE project took the Futures Conference participants on a journey to the Active Mall of the Future. While some enjoyed the visit, others looked for the exit.

Sensing Futures Through the Mental Time Travel Method

In futures studies, Mental Time Travel works both as a mind-opener technique and data collection method. It guides workshop participants to an imaginary space where they can vision and experience alternative futures. The STYLE project sought to test whether the Mental Time Travel method supports workshop participants' creativity, and whether it can be used to promote innovation processes, for example, in identifying demand for future services and products.

The STYLE session at the Futures Conference took the participants both online and on-site on a journey to an Active Mall. The session began with a short introduction to the method and continued with the exercise. The actual time travel lasted for 17 minutes, fol-

lowed by an individual reflection and a group discussion. While some enjoyed their journey, others felt less comfortable at the destination.

"Look for the Exit and Get Out to Breathe"

For some participants, the visit to the Active Mall was not relaxing or enjoyable. The word 'mall' sparked resistance in some travellers. It reminded them of busy and noisy shopping malls and overstimulating environments when they would have preferred a space where they could be alone. Moreover, many participants did not like being indoors or around technology. They favoured 'real life' over 'virtual experiences': thus, more traditional outdoor spaces, where they could engage in physical activity and get fresh air.

"Flying in the Sky & Total Freedom"

Other participants were able to vision numerous enjoyable activities and experiences. For instance, AR technology was strongly present at the Active Mall, where visitors could time travel, space travel, fly, or go for walks in various destinations globally. The Active Mall as space became a 'not space', as described by one participant; the boundaries of the Active

Mall became multi-dimensional. Interestingly, many participants were able to feel different sensations during their travel: hearing birds sing, feeling the wind on their skin, smelling aromatics, seeing the Northern Lights, and being able to touch different textures, for example.

Taking the Best Out of All Experiences

As in any futures workshop, there are no right or wrong answers in Mental Time Travel. All images give valuable insight into the characteristics of the future destination. Mental Time Travel is a personal journey, and some may be unable to reach the time travel destination in the first place. In our workshops, it was interesting to notice that both experiences at the Active Mall, the good and the bad, were strongly connected to nature: whether it was looking for the exit to go outdoors, experiencing it through technology, or creating a space that is both; a non-space, where the visitor can be both outdoors and indoors. Engaging in physical activity in nature is valuable for many; however, there are countless other opportunities to bring the natural environment around. Finally, it is up to the traveller to imagine and decide. ●