



2025 Strategic Foresight Report

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Uncovering European Desirable Futures

Introduction

In an era of unprecedented transformation, resilience is no longer a reactionary stance but a proactive, systemic, and cultural strategy. The European Union stands at a crossroads where resilience must transcend crisis response and become a foundation for redefining prosperity, democracy, and quality of life in a multipolar world.

This report embraces Radical Optimism and Lucid Optimism as guiding principles. Radical Optimism is not naive hope—it is a deliberate act of reimagining possibility, asserting that even within constraints, alternative futures can be designed. Lucid Optimism, as described by Joël de Rosnay, acknowledges the weight of reality while choosing to act towards beauty, agency, and meaningful transformation.

Resilience is therefore not just about endurance—it is about reinvention. Whether in geopolitics, economy, urbanism, or digital governance, the EU must craft a future that is desirable rather than merely survivable. This requires bold choices, from cultivating cultural sovereignty and cognitive autonomy to reshaping economic models towards vitality rather than extraction.

By identifying levers of desirable resilience, this report aims to empower policymakers, designers, and change-makers with a framework for foresight-driven action—one that does not merely anticipate but actively designs the future.

Objectives

To help ensure the EU's long-term resilience in all relevant policy areas:

- Connecting different EU policy initiatives under a cohesive resilience strategy.
- Informing EU policymakers on long-term resilience planning across key areas like global power, prosperity, quality of life, and democracy.
- Providing policy recommendations and building on prior foresight work, integrating new strategies such as the Competitiveness Compass and Preparedness Union strategy.

Key questions

Main Challenges x Main EU strengths to build resilience

What are the main challenges to long-term EU resilience, and what strengths does Europe possess to build resilience?

Resilience Vision for 2040

How would you characterise a resilient EU in 2040?

Societal and Intergenerational Resilience

How can we ensure a resilient society and fairness between generations?

Critical Policy Actions

Which key policy actions should be initiated today to strengthen EU resilience by 2040?

Synergies and Tensions Across Policies

What crucial synergies and tensions exist between various EU priorities that may help or hinder long-term resilience? How can these synergies be enhanced and tensions mitigated?

Optimising Foresight

How can the European Commission improve its strategic foresight approach to better design policies for a desirable future?

Co-Methodology & Approaches

Integrative & Dual Foresight

This report builds on a dual foresight approach, blending design research, strategic foresight and cultural analysis to detect emerging transitions across industries, societies and ecosystems.

01 The Designer & Design Researcher Perspective

Our approach is rooted in the singularity of the designer's viewpoint, blending speculative, participatory, and experiential methodologies to explore futures through qualitative depth and systemic complexity.

We recognise that innovation is not only technological but also artistic, social, and cultural, demanding multidimensional lenses to anticipate change.

02 Opening Foresight to Participatory Design

We combine academic research and business-oriented foresight, ensuring that insights remain rigorously informed yet pragmatically applicable.

Our foresight is iterative and participatory, engaging stakeholders, creatives, and strategists in the exploration of plausible, desirable, and speculative futures.

03 Integrating Cultural Contradictions & Local Manifestations

We do not only track technological advancements; we also identify the cultural tensions and emergences shaping transformation.

Weak signals of change are often born at the periphery, in artistic movements, underground communities, and alternative practices—our methodology prioritises these margins to anticipate shifts before they reach the mainstream.

04 Beyond Predictions: Fiction, Potential & Transition

We apply Strategic Foresight, Fiction-Design, Potential Design, and Transition Design methodologies to map possibles, probables, and speculative scenarios.

This combinatory approach enables us to identify disruptive trajectories while remaining adaptive to the nonlinear nature of change.

Forewords

From Designing Potentials to Designing Hope

Research, creation, and design projects are not merely disciplines but “dimensions of action”—active approaches that are adjacent while also supporting our ongoing transitions rather than dictating them.

These approaches allow us to:

1. Explore shifting contexts, identifying the forces shaping tomorrow,
2. Perceive their early manifestations, tracing the faint signals of emerging change,
3. Embrace and mitigate uncertainty, integrating complexity rather than resisting it,
4. Act as a force for proposition, offering alternative visions,
5. Combine different methodologies, daring to challenge convention,
6. Impact through new frameworks, embedding transformation at multiple scales,
7. Reframe perspectives and pathways, shaping new narratives,
8. Consciously open towards unexplored futures, expanding the limits of possibility.

These are not static ambitions but assertive, resilient movements that allow us to reimagine the interdependencies between humans and the planet. Within this shift, resilience emerges as a foundational principle, unifying these explorations through a commitment to rethinking the “desirable”—how we live together, how we design transition, and how we empower agency in times of crisis.

Philosophers, system thinkers, and change scholars such as Joël de Rosnay, Christian Delécluse, and Michel Serres remind us that we are both the witnesses and the architects of one of the most significant transformations in human history. We are shifting from a society of information to a society of recommendation, where collective intelligence, open-source methodologies, and fluid adaptability—what De Rosnay calls “life streaming” or “flow”—become essential tools for navigating this change.

This fluidity translates into a necessary reframing of how we educate, innovate, and govern. We are moving from seasonal cycles to complex, interconnected, and simultaneous societal movements, where multiple temporalities coexist. To be at the core of transformation is to question it while simultaneously reshaping its course. As Michel Serres describes in “Petite Poucette”, today’s generations are no longer defined by historical memberships but by new relational geographies—expanding beyond national, cultural, and digital boundaries into networked and shared forms of belonging.

Envisioning Europe 2040: Towards a Radical and Lucid Optimism

Design, as both a critical and pragmatic practice, operates in this tension between present and future. It does not passively accept the status quo but proposes new frameworks, exploring the subtle interstices where change takes root. This is why we advocate for Radical and Lucid Optimism—a perspective that acknowledges challenges while deliberately choosing to amplify beauty, agency, and innovation.

Lucid optimism, as de Rosnay describes, is not about blind idealism but about choosing to recognise and create moments of transformation, even within crisis. It means navigating uncertainty as an opportunity, rethinking desirable futures with imagination and evidence-based foresight.

In this report, we do not merely forecast trends; we highlight key levers of desirable resilience, crafting future-proof recommendations where innovation is not just a pursuit of the new, but a vehicle for regenerating meaning, agency, and collective well-being.

Report Content

Summary

Uncovering the macro-trends acting as levers of desirable resilience in the 4 key areas of EU policymakers:

1. Global power: United Futures & Resilient Alliance
 - a. Collective Autonomy & Allyship Value
 - b. Climatic Pioneer & Energy Sovereignty
 - c. Cultural Powerhouse
2. Prosperity: Post-Growth Economy & Vitality Renaissance
 - a. From Regenerative to Vital Economy
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 - c. Post-Industrial & Durable Natality Policy
3. Quality of life & Wellbeing: Regenerative Wellbeing
 - a. Biophilic & Humane Smart Cities
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 - c. Intergenerational Housing Models
 - d. Equitable Health
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4. Democracy: Civic Awakening
 - a. Ethical Artificial Intelligence Technologies
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2040 Global Power

United Futures & Resilient Alliance

By 2040, Europe has emerged as a United and Resilient Alliance, leveraging strategic autonomy, progressive climate leadership, and cultural influence to navigate an increasingly multipolar world. Despite global fragmentation, the EU has strengthened regional cohesion, transatlantic partnerships, and alternative trade networks, ensuring its role as a diplomatic, economic, and cultural force shaping a desirable ground for collectiveness.

Levers of resilience:

- **Collective Autonomy & Allyship Value:** The EU can reinforce internal cohesion while expanding global influence through a dual-axis resilience strategy, deepening regional integration while expanding transatlantic partnerships.
 - **Safety Union:** With the aim to prioritise self-sufficiency in defence, energy, and critical supply chains, the EU must establish a collective union integrating Ukraine and Schengen-border states into a joint resilience pact covering energy independence, military coordination and supply chain circularity.
 - **EU-Canada Pact:** Explore regulatory harmonisation for potential EU-Canada deeper integration from mutual mobility to aligned digital governance and security collaboration as well as research and development initiatives.
 - **Alternative Trading & Expanded Economies:** Developing stronger ties with Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia to create alternative trade routes.
- **Climatic Pioneer & Energy Sovereignty:** Reducing dependence on fossil fuels and permitting the EU to become the world transitional energy pioneer.
 - **Hydrogen Sovereignty:** Build a EU Hydrogen Sovereignty Act, mandating reserves to secure autonomy for the next century.
 - **Decentralised Energy:** Implementing decentralised solar, battery, and microgrid networks to mitigate centralised power infrastructures blackouts.
 - **Plural Durable Mix:** Shift defence infrastructure toward transitional and resilient energy (hydrogen, low-carbon materials, climate-adaptive bases).
- **Cultural Powerhouse:** The EU's art, philosophy, history, and patrimony will become a geopolitical pillar in the face of decaying American ideals, aligning NATO obligations with UN-led stability missions. The EU has the potential to adapt and provide new ideals of desirability for the Western world to adapt and not only embrace but support a non-western world order, proving its resilience power.
 - **European IP:** Position European culture, intellectual heritage, and creative industries as pillars of geopolitical resilience, aligning NATO obligations with UN-led stability missions while fostering diplomatic bridges beyond Western hegemony.
 - **New ideals of desirability:** Frame European cultural innovation as a model for adaptability, embracing non-Western perspectives and collaborations to reinforce global stability and shared prosperity.

- Safeguarding heritage: To fully position EU Cultural power, implement a Cultural Sovereignty Act to protect indigenous traditions, languages and regional cultural autonomy.
- Mytho-political Narratives: Leverage European cultural mythologies & archetypes reinvesting in narratives and fictions that transcend populations to foster a sense of togetherness and communal European strength, positive future-facing messages and engagement. Bridging tradition and modernity, offering aspiration that resonate across diverse populations. This approach might reinforce soft power while inspiring shared vision of the future, positioning the continent as a global leader in cultural diplomacy.

2040 Prosperity:

Post-Growth Economy & Vitality Renaissance

By 2040, Europe has redefined prosperity beyond traditional economic metrics, embracing a Post-Growth Economy & Vitality Renaissance, where well-being, creativity, and ecological regeneration shape a new model of sustainable abundance. Despite past dependencies on hyper-industrial capitalism, the EU has successfully transitioned towards ecosystemic vitality, agronomic sovereignty, and equitable social infrastructures, ensuring that prosperity is measured not by extraction, but by the thriving of both people and planet.

Levers of resilience:

- From Regenerative to Vital Economy: Reframing economies to target and nurture ecosystemic vitality indicators: in terms of biodiversity, human health and human labour:
 - Beyond Neutrality: Regulations should not only focus on preserving but on how to positively impact regional ecosystems health and vitality, echoing the “One Health” model, assessing non-human and collective health mentalities.
 - Beyond GDP: Implement ecosystemic vitality indicators spanning biodiversity, human health and labour resilience, as central metrics of desirable prosperity, ensuring economic growth aligns with planetary and social regeneration.
 - Low-Tech, Decarbonisation & Regionalised Production: While regulating compulsory carbon footprint reductions in infrastructures and industrial developments, incentivise regionalised material sourcing, ensuring economic and patrimony security. Phase out planned obsolescence by mandating reparability and circularity in industrial product design, funding low-tech innovation hubs and biotechnologies VC.
 - Positive Innovation: Establishing guidelines and investment supports to prioritise innovation initiatives that generate more resources and energy than it consumes or absorbs.
- Agronomic Sovereignty: From tackling food security to implementing desirable agricultural change:
 - Implement EU-wide agronomic sufficiency laws to scale permaculture, and localised food ecosystems.
 - Empowering citizens when it comes to food security by providing municipalities with resources to implement community gardens and aeroponics local farms.
- Post-Industrial & Durable Natality Policy: To counteract the commodification of fertility and the impending reproductive crisis, the EU must ensure equitable access to hormonal health, fertility treatments and sustainable family planning.
 - Financial incentives for durable family planning, addressing the EU’s population decline without coercive pro-natal strategies but resilient ideals and infrastructures. Including affordable childcare, flexible work policies and intergenerational care.

- Recognise endocrine disruptors and environmental toxicity structural issues by regulating pollutants and investing in preventive hormonal care.

2040 Quality of Life & Wellbeing:

Regenerative Wellbeing

By 2040, Europe has embraced Regenerative Wellbeing, pioneering a post-productivist society where slow living, sensory pleasure, and ecological intelligence define a new standard of quality of life. Despite global instability, the EU has positioned itself as a leader in human-centred urbanism, equitable healthcare, and cognitive resilience, ensuring that joy, collective well-being, and intergenerational solidarity become the cornerstones of a thriving and future-proof society.

Levers of resilience:

- **Biophilic & Humane Smart Cities:** The future of smart cities must shift from a purely technocentric approach towards a biophilic and human-scale urbanism, prioritising quality of life, neighbourhood connectivity, and ecological intelligence over data-driven optimisation alone.
 - **Neighbourhood Networks & Social fabric:** Policies should foster localised interconnectivity where public spaces, services, and communities are designed to encourage informal interactions, shared resources, and social cohesion.
 - **Biological & Regenerative intelligence:** Cities must become living ecosystems, integrating interspecies-compatible solutions, adaptive architecture, and decentralised green infrastructures to enhance biodiversity, and urban well-being. Emerging educational initiatives, such as the Grenoble Master's in Urban Planning, reflect this shift, training future planners to work with organic and symbiotic urban systems.
 - **Beyond the Digital Grid:** While digital connectivity remains vital, the next phase of smart urbanism should embrace biophilic intelligence—taking inspiration from plant networks, fungal mycelium, and ecological interdependence—to reimagine infrastructure, transport, and housing in a way that is both technologically advanced and deeply humane.
 - **Neuro-Architecture:** Integrate neuro-architectural principles into urban planning and building regulations, ensuring that spatial design actively enhances cognitive and emotional wellbeing, transforming the built environment into a public health asset rather than an aesthetic commodity.
- **Leisure & Solidarity Urbanism:** Safeguarding collective hedonism by ensuring access to free cultural spaces, nightlife and nature within urban environments. Investing in interspecies architecture and “humane”-centric design such as those prioritising joy, inclusivity and wellbeing to create urban landscapes that foster mental health, social cohesion and creative expression:
 - **Positive Urbanism:** The integration of joy-driven urbanism into city planning should be financially supported, encouraging projects that prioritize communal engagement, shared experiences, and artistic accessibility.

- Architectural Joy: Architectural programs like Thomas Heatherwick's Humanise campaign at Loughborough University, set to launch in 2025, align with this vision by reshaping architectural education to focus on emotionally resonant and socially enriching spaces. The EU can scale similar initiatives to embed well-being into urban development at a systemic level.
 - Cultural Vibrancy: Public funding mechanisms, including European Urban Innovation Funds, should support experimental urban projects that blend art, nature, and communal experiences, reinforcing resilience through cultural vibrancy.
 - Supporting communities: Incentivise co-inter-poly-trans communities, fostering multi-generational, cross-cultural, cooperative living models.
 - Neighbourhood networks: Supporting municipalities and cities to build bridges, platforms and spaces fostering neighbourhood meetings and social interactions, from architectural extensions to social parks and vegetal spaces.
- Inclusive Housing Models: To counteract increasing social isolation as well as to address diverse communities needs beyond solely aging populations, EU urban policies should promote inclusive design, co-living and multi-generational exchange when it comes to the housing crisis:
 - Legislative incentives for adaptive housing models, including intergenerational residences, cooperative living spaces, and modular housing, can facilitate dynamic urban communities that are adaptable to demographic shifts.
 - Cities should integrate public-private partnerships to create shared living arrangements that blend social care, accessibility, and flexible housing design, ensuring housing solutions remain inclusive and future-proof.
 - Funding should be directed toward pilot projects that demonstrate the economic and social benefits of these housing models, fostering community-driven resilience in urban centers.
 - Adaptive Habitats: Designing public living spaces as well as supporting inclusive architectural projects when it comes to housing for people with disabilities, leveraging modular, adaptive and neuro-design practices.
- Equitable Health: To counteract bio-social stratification driven by techno-sovereignty and biotech-nationalism, EU policies must ensure equitable access to health innovation, preventing longevity from becoming an exclusive privilege of the ultra-rich.
 - Decentralised Health Data Governance: A European health data commons must be established to prevent monopolisation of genetic and biometric insights by a handful of corporations, ensuring data sovereignty remains in the hands of citizens and public health institutions.
 - Preventative Climatic Healthcare: Policy focus should shift toward accessible preventive health ecosystems, addressing climate-induced health disparities and ensuring that wellness is a collective right, not a social class marker. Mitigate environmental disasters and their health and wellbeing impacts on populations by implementing mandatory climate risk assessments across cities and industrial supply chains.

- Cognitive Sovereignty & Mentally Resilience: The EU must establish cognitive resilience and equitable care infrastructures to counteract the dual threats of AI-driven cognitive warfare and a collapsing care system amid a rapidly aging population.
 - Cognitive Warfare: Policies should regulate neurotech and AI-driven pharma to prevent monopolisation of cognitive performance, ensuring public control over neuro-wellness innovation. Investment in public mental wellness hubs, akin to universal healthcare, will mitigate the post-care culture crisis and rising mood disorders.
 - Care as the Future of work: With elder care set to become the largest employment sector, the EU must reframe care labour as skilled, well-compensated work, integrating AI-enhanced elder care, intergenerational housing models, and preventative cognitive health into urban and economic planning.
 - State of Eco-Anxiety, Shorter-attention span & Chronoception Abilities: Addressing rising eco-anxieties from populations as well as ensuring cognitive wellbeing to empower psychological wellness amid fear of uncertainty and faster life paths favouring burn-outs phenomenons and information overloads. Anticipating the different partnerships between private and public health, cultural and technological institutions to foster creative and accessible mental health innovations.

2040 Democracy:

Civic Awakening

By 2040, Europe has redefined democracy through Civic Tech Governance, pioneering ethical AI, participatory decision-making, and decentralised digital sovereignty to ensure democratic resilience in an era of declining liberal institutions. Despite the global erosion of democratic norms, the EU has positioned itself as a beacon of civic empowerment, where transparent governance, robust media ecosystems, and future-ready education cultivate an engaged, critically informed, and digitally sovereign citizenry, reinforcing Europe's leadership in ethical governance and inclusive civic participation.

Levers of resilience:

- **Ethical Artificial Intelligence Technologies:** Becoming the global leader in ethical AI governance, ensuring AI-driven policy decisions still align with human values.
 - **Bioenhancements & Job Employment:** The EU must establish regulatory frameworks that balance innovation in human enhancement with ethical labour protections, ensuring that cognitive, biological, and AI-augmented performance does not exacerbate workplace inequalities or erode fundamental workers' rights.
 - **Cyber Sovereignty & Trust Infrastructure:** The EU must establish a European Cyber Defence Initiative that safeguards digital sovereignty, election integrity, and information ecosystems, ensuring resilient democratic processes through AI-driven disinformation countermeasures, decentralised verification systems, and cross-border cyber governance.
 - **Decolonised AI Justice:** The EU must enforce transparent, bias-free AI governance by regulating algorithmic discrimination, promoting decolonised data ethics, and ensuring social media platforms implement robust protections against digital harassment, fostering an equitable and inclusive digital ecosystem.
- **Future-ready Education:** Empowering current youth for the upcoming European citizenship.
 - **Resilient Pedagogy & Critical Optimism:** The EU must embed a new educational model fostering critical resilience, equipping youth with systemic thinking, scientific literacy, and solution-driven agency to navigate ecological and social crises while shaping a desirable Europe for 2040.
 - **European Poles of Excellence & Scholar Sovereignty:** Establish EU-funded independent research institutions and cross-disciplinary schools of science, design, and ethics, safeguarding scientific integrity from global tech hegemony and external censorship, while positioning Europe as a cultural-intellectual superpower.
 - **Informational Shading & Neutrality:** Redesign curricula to cultivate a neutral but engaged perspective, training the next generation in journalistic, scientific, and creative methodologies that counter misinformation, foster nuance, and transform knowledge into democratic tools for societal resilience.

- Benevolent volunteering: Integrating a communal civic passport for European citizens to facilitate citizenship engagement and reciprocal support, nurturing European solidarity development initiatives (from education exchanges to professional reconversions and cultural synergies).
- Media & Information Resilience: To fortify democratic resilience, the EU must shield public discourse from authoritarian influence, strengthen independent journalism, and cultivate a collective European informational identity in the face of disinformation warfare and media fragmentation.
 - Legislative Firewall Against Foreign Influence: Enact protective laws limiting foreign lobbying, dark money in media ownership, and disinformation operations, ensuring EU information sovereignty against external political and corporate manipulation.
 - Decentralised Media & Cultural News Hubs: Invest in regional cultural powerhouses and independent journalism networks, creating hyper-local but interconnected information ecosystems that reinforce European literacy, local storytelling, and civic engagement.
 - A Collective European Vocabulary for the Information Age: Foster a shared European knowledge infrastructure, through education, public broadcasting, and multilingual media initiatives, ensuring citizens can navigate decentralised information landscapes with clarity, critical thinking, and a strong cultural foundation.
- Carbon Equity & Inclusive Durability: To prevent carbon tracking from becoming a tool of social stratification, the EU must ensure decarbonisation policies prioritise systemic accountability over individual discipline or morality, while fostering equitable access to durable living.
 - Corporate Responsibility: Strengthen corporate carbon taxation and supply chain accountability to prevent the shift of net-zero enforcement on to consumers.
 - Decentralised Carbon governance: Explore publicly owned carbon monitoring frameworks that empower communities rather than reinforcing top-down social credit systems, ensuring transparency and democratic oversight.
 - Intersectional Environmentalism: The EU must embed intersectional environmentalism at the core of its sustainability policies, ensuring that the interconnections between climate action, social justice and economic resilience is addressed.
 - Climate Passports & Eco-Citizenship: As heatwaves, water scarcity, and coastal flooding displace over 50 million people globally, the EU shifts from crisis response to preemptive climate migration management, prioritising skilled refugees while fueling ethical debates on exclusionary humanitarianism.
- Post-Nation-State Models: EU should experiment with Decentralised Civic Networks, giving citizens direct power over local policies.

Authors

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Adrien is a strategic foresight consultant and trend forecaster, specialising in radical signals of change across industries—from luxury, consumer goods, and beauty to food, technology, and environmental shifts. As the Founder of Cadiot Agency and Foresight Director at the speculative design Parisian studio Imprudence, he collaborates with leading global brands such as L'Oréal Group, BNP Paribas, Ubisoft, Lacoste, and LVMH, crafting future scenarios and opportunity territories through deep cultural analysis. His expertise lies in deciphering emerging behaviours, socio-political transformations, and design futures, offering a distinctly European perspective on possible and desirable futures and strategic anticipation.

Recognised for his work in trend forecasting, speculative design, and cultural analysis, Adrien has contributed to publications including Dazed Digital, Slate, and Le Monde, and gave lectures and participated in jury committee to European Design and Commerce schools positioning him as a leading voice in the future of European trend forecasting and cultural foresight. Adrien publishes printed annual editions and digital bi-annual reports on key shifts and trends impacting culture, brands and society to provide insightful common grounds for both clients and non-clients.

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Emilie is a designer, PhD doctor, international researcher and University and Design school professor. Specialised in Potential Design, Anticipation Design, Inclusive Design, Color-Design and Transition Design, she participates in projects which invent sustainable futures now, with professionals, universities and students. Working for sustainable futures, she collaborates with international institutions like Harvard University, MIT Labs, Cambridge University, Montréal University and french local organisations like Toulouse University, Artois University, Strate-Design School and Cadiot Agency. By Research<>Cre<>Action, she transforms potentials into possibles (Research), experimentations in projects (Creation), and realisations in actions (Action) for anticipation, sustainable development and inclusive societies. Working with students in Transition Design, co-design and participative design are fundamental to drive purposefully new resilient futures scenarios, solutions and prototypes. She publishes in different french design scientific reviews and conferences, see further detailed information at emilieroulland.com.

Annexe

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