

# Imagining otherwise: The role of Generative AI in collective prefiguration

## Supervision team

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## Research project

**Summary:** Generative AI (GenAI) is increasingly used for ideation and planning but may constrain imagination by reinforcing normative patterns. This project explores how GenAI affects the practice of imagining alternative socio-technical futures of prefigurative communities—groups creating equitable alternatives through lived experimentation. By working with these communities, we aim to understand how GenAI supports or limits radical future thinking – more specifically in prefigurative communities’ practices of i) *Embodying Futures in the present*, ii) *Horizontal organisation*, and iii) *Constructive Resistance*. The project will produce both a critical account of GenAI’s impact on collective imagination and a framework for its responsible, justice-oriented use, blending artificial and community expertise to envision more socially just futures.

**Introduction and Rationale:** Generative AI (GenAI) has rapidly entered mainstream use as a tool for ideation, creative exploration, and future planning. Its perceived ability to support the generation of novel ideas has made it attractive to individuals and organisations seeking to reimagine futures. However, while these technologies offer potential, they also risk homogenising imagination by surfacing the most statistically common or already-available ideas.

At a time many describe as suffering from a crisis of imagination—where political, social, and environmental challenges require radically new approaches—GenAI may both help and hinder. This project critically explores this tension by examining how GenAI intersects with prefigurative communities: groups that model more equitable, sustainable futures through their everyday practices and organisational structures. We aim to assess how GenAI systems influence or interfere with prefigurative imagination, and to develop a framework for collective intelligence for prefiguration, in which GenAI and community members co-produce more just and creative visions of the future.

## Objectives:

1. **Empirical understanding and critical assessment:** Investigate how prefigurative communities engage with GenAI for imagining futures. Explore the limitations and possibilities of GenAI in supporting radical imagination.
2. **Framework development:** Co-develop with communities a framework for “collective intelligence for prefiguration” that recognises both human and AI forms of knowledge and creativity.

3. **Ethical and political insight:** Provide guidance on how to use GenAI responsibly in socially transformative contexts.

*Methodology:* The project adopts a **participatory, interdisciplinary, and iterative** approach, drawing on methods from Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), digital civics, critical design, and social movement studies.

### **Applicant skills/background**

This project requires: background in Human-Computer Interaction or Interaction Design; Prototyping, Design or Computer Science skills; good understanding of the fundamentals of research methods, and in particular qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, ethnographic work; being able to work in interdisciplinary teams of researchers; self-motivated individuals with good project managements skills.

### **References**

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