

FOUNDERS MEETING - REPORT

The Plurality University is what we all decide to make of it. Our workshops on December 1 have helped clarify what it could or should be, and what we could do together within it. It also raised a number of open questions and issues that need to be dealt with in the coming months.

During the Founders' Meeting, friendships were born, projects discussed, ideas shared and challenged. This is also what the Plurality University is about. We hope that together, by investing a bit of our respective time and resources, we will sustain the drive towards creating this community to live on!

Saturday's workshops allowed us to make progress on the Plurality University's *raison d'être*, as well as on the actions it might undertake. Through all the material we collected (individual contributions, videos, paperboards, your final presentations), we have tried to create an accurate recollection of your collective work. The raw material is available online (see appendix 1). The synthesis that follows tries to give shape to this material, while still reflecting our rich interactions. We eagerly await your comments!

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How to Provide Feedback ?

We welcome feedback on everything, but particularly on two questions:

- Are there things you'd like to comment or improve in the synthesis and raw reports?
- What have we entirely missed? What was left unsaid?

When commenting actions, we'd love you to do it in the spirit of improving the proposed action to the format that would make you or your organization want to take part in it!

You each have different ways of working and use different communication tools. Choose whichever preferred channel for responding: email, comments on the pdf or Word documents, changes or comments in the text versions, etc.. We will collect and share all of your feedbacks as they come.

Objectives: What Does the Plurality University Stand For?

The discussions during the Founders' Meeting highlighted 4 possibilities and related high-level objectives for the Plurality University, to which each Founder may allocate different levels of importance:

Influence the Future

Use imaginaries to open up more “thinkable futures”, even beyond what is imaginable in our current frameworks.

Pluralize Future Imaginaries

Question dominant assumptions about the future and broaden the circle of who takes part in conversations about the future.

Share Ideas, Resources & Projects

Create a platform to facilitate relationships, interactions, collective actions, and project-building.

Build up Futures capacities

Make many more people “futures-literate”, but also change the content of “futures literacy”.



► **Objective: Influencing the Future**

“The Plurality University aims at influencing how futures will be framed and discussed and eventually what they may be, by:

- Using imaginaries to broaden the scope of “thinkable futures” and hence, of possible alternatives;
- Making the previously unimaginable, imaginable: discovering other futures, thinking along different paradigms, interacting with other human and non-human intelligences.”

Here, the focus is on **The future.**

Content: the plural stories, images, and metaphors that make many alternative futures present in our minds.

Research: the ability to reflect on those contents, what they say, how they are produced, what paradigms they are built upon.

Influence: the complex link with corporate, public, and civil society debates, decisions, and action.

What this should NOT be	What actions could be related to this objective <list of possible actions discussed during the workshops>
<p>Staying limited to western, techno-centric, economy-centric, patriarchic... visions of the future.</p> <p>Finding a single “right” vision of the future.</p> <p>Storytelling, illustrating pre-cooked visions of the future.</p> <p>Academic.</p>	<p>“Futures fragments”: each member gifts a fragment of the future to the community.</p> <p>“U+ Day”: a day during which many locations around the world share diverse visions of the future on one same topic.</p> <p>“Futuramas”: curated maps, catalogs and glossaries of futures concepts, knowledges, methods, visions, images, stories..., as well as of U+ participants.</p> <p>“Ecology of Knowledge”: a multifacet program on plural, new and traditional forms of knowledge in relation to the future.</p> <p>“Infiltration”: a program using imaginary productions and abilities to help decision-makers and other actors on the ground to reframe their expectations and attitudes towards the future.</p> <p>“Reading Circles”: diverse interpretations of existing works of art, design and fiction in relation to the future.</p> <p>An international Research Network on plural futures, their content, production, and link to institutional, corporate and civil society action.</p>



► Objective: Pluralizing Future Imaginaries

“The Plurality University aims at questioning dominant assumptions about the future and broadening the circle of who takes part in conversations about the future, by:

- Proactively seeking and including non-dominant or invisibilized points of view;
- Creating spaces and opportunities to discuss futures through the lens of imaginaries, challenge each other’s assumptions, explore blind spots.
- The Plurality is therefore a place where constructive disagreement is encouraged, within a set of collective values that promote empathy, symmetry and openness.”

Here, the focus is on **Imaginaries.**

Proactive diversity (including: gender, abilities, social, cultural, geographic, species): make currently non- or under-represented futures, and those who imagine them, full participants in global conversations about the future.

Productive controversy: challenge and confront images of the future, embrace complexity and uncertainty.

What this should NOT be	What actions could be related to this objective < list of possible actions discussed during the workshops >
<p>Dogmatic. Bland. Self-congratulatory. Paternalistic. Formulaic. Tokenistic. Elitist Ethnocentric.</p>	<p>In all Plurality University projects, place particular emphasis of the diversity of participants and images of the future.</p> <p>“Exiled Capacities”: a curatorial and/or affinity-based process to challenge our own ways of thinking, doing and being.</p> <p>“Reverse training”: first, change the futurists by immersing them within communities and having them build their credibility, rather than the reverse.</p> <p>“Story Club”: help write, transmit, discuss the future stories that already exist within the communities.</p> <p>Work with NGOs and institutions already on the ground, introducing Futures as a leverage for self-confidence and self-reliance.</p> <p>“Mediation & Translation”: increasing exposure to other images of the future, facilitating translation...</p> <p>“Fictionalizing Controversies”: using arts, design and fiction to facilitate interactions on complex, controversial issues.</p>



► **Objective: Building up Plural Futures Literacy**

“The Plurality University aims at making many, many more people “futures-literate”, but also changing the content of “futures literacy”. It does this by:

- Focusing on non-futurists: students, children, professionals, disadvantaged communities;
- Considering futures literacy, not as a specific body of knowledge to be taught, but as an ability to challenge our assumptions, to imagine different futures, and to engage with others’ futures.
- Use stories, images and metaphors as material for and outputs of futures literacy training.”

Here, the focus is on **Capacity building:** build abilities to imagine and discuss futures, then act upon them; create and share reusable educational tools.

Learning by doing and interacting: experiment with methods where learning takes place along collective action.

New and Plural Knowledge: expose oneself to new and/or different paradigms, embrace uncertainty and diversity.

What this should NOT be	What actions could be related to this objective < list of possible actions discussed during the workshops >
<p>Top-down. An academic discipline. Conformist. For specialists. Reserved for expensive higher education institutions.</p>	<p>“U+ Lab”: coproduce and experiment new form of futures literacy education with groups of students. “Child Futures”: just as the “Savanturiers” program allows schoolchildren to produce legitimate academic research, work with children to learn futures literacy by producing futures. “Reverse Learning”: ‘re-educate’ futurists from the point of view of non-dominant communities. “Imagination Toolkits”: tools and methods to help non-dominant communities formulate their vision of the futures, reflect on them and share with the world. “Action Learning”: training civil servants and corporate decision-makers to ‘pluralize’ their approach of the future.</p>

¹ <https://les-savanturiers.cri-paris.org/>



► **Objective: Sharing Ideas, Resources and Projects**

“The Plurality University is a platform that helps its members, and possibly others, to:

- Generate and deepen relationships;
- Learn from one another by sharing content, practices, questions, projects;
- Build common projects, help projects find partners and funding;
- Give visibility to projects, produces, people and communities;
- Work across national, language and disciplinary borders;
- Coordinate collective actions.”

Here, the focus is on **U+ as a Community** (or a community of communities): facilitate relationships, interactions, affinity grouping, companionship, and the birth of a common identity.

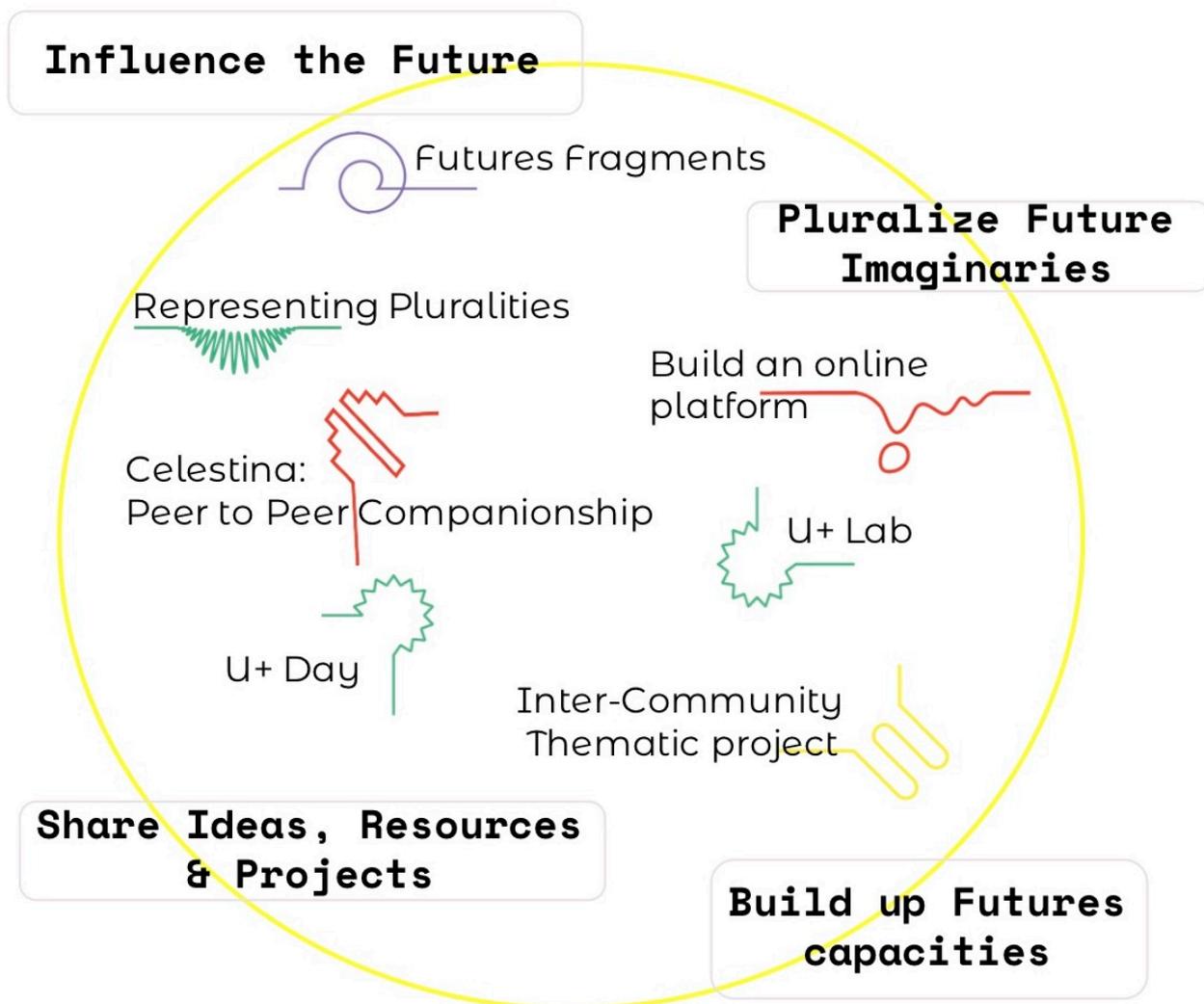
Projects: a network in which projects can emerge, be discussed, find partners and visibility, gain credibility towards funders...

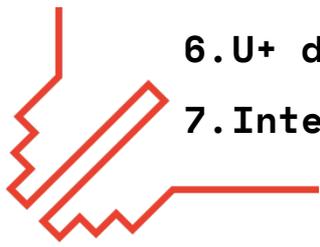
Tools: generic services to facilitate interaction, collaboration, knowledge management and publication.

What this should NOT be	What actions could be related to this objective < list of possible actions discussed during the workshops >
<p>A funding mechanism. Monolingual. Just online and if online, just accessible in a few countries. Google-based.</p>	<p>“Quick Collaborations”: simple, low-commitment sharing initiatives – “Futures Fragments” (see ‘Influencing the Future’), Futures Digests, Exquisite Cadavers...</p> <p>“PluraliTinder”: a project-related exchange program for individuals in different countries, with a focus on those who are least likely to travel extensively.</p> <p>“Local U+”: local U+ communities events, dinners, projects, etc.</p> <p>“Common Projects Factory”: a process to submit projects for peer review, improve them, find partners and raise credibility for fundraising.</p> <p>“Microfunding”: helping projects gain exposure, translate contents, cooperate internationally, etc.</p> <p>Online Tools: crowdsourced directory, forum, chat, collaborative publication.</p>

Actions: What Should the Plurality University Do First?

What follows describes several of the “collective actions” that were discussed during the Founders’ Meeting. Collective actions are typically undertaken under the Plurality University’s name; they should involve as many members as possible, and be open to others; they may involve financial expenditures and will require time by the currently small U+ staff (1.2 persons).



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- 1. Futures Fragments**
 - 2. Representing Pluralities**
 - 3. Building an online platform**
 - 4. Celestina: Peer to peer companionship**
 - 5. U+ Lab**
 - 6. U+ day**
 - 7. Inter-Community Thematic project**
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These projects are both possible in France and internationally. It is highly unlikely that we will be able to carry out more than 2-3 such actions in 2019: the staff is currently tiny (1.2 persons), and the funding is not secured yet. Therefore, the discussion should be about how we can

- (i)* enriching the projects below, or adding to the list, before
- (ii)* choosing what to do first.

Again, the actions will only make sense if many of you take part in them. Therefore, we would ask you to read and comment them as a potential participant would, looking for the conditions that would make your participation easiest and most meaningful!



▶ 1. Potential Project: Futures Fragments

A mutual “gifting” of fragments about the future: stories, images, experiences, etc.

After seeing Aarathi's “humanitarian futures” video and reading the Octavia Butler short story shared by Mimi, I have decided what my gift to the Plurality University founders will be: my experience with young children of building an exhibition on the future of their city.

The gift collection is becoming quite a thing. It shows how diverse futures can be, how different contexts and approaches can produce very different futures on the same topic and also, how hard we all need to work in order to attract even more diverse people than our present crowd.

Anyway, through this, I also got to know several members better and even discussed my next project with three of them. I've also volunteered for the curation group that will work on the upcoming publication.

What?

“Futures Fragments” is a simple process whereby founders are asked to share a simple piece of content with the community, it's built upon:

- The “fragments” can be in any digital form, they can be contents created by the member, or by some other person or group;
- To share a fragment, one just posts a file or link and adds a little information: credits, a very short description, “why I wanted to share this”, and tags;
- All content is immediately available on the website and can be commented;
- After enough fragments are collected, a collaborative curation process will work towards designing a publication and/or exhibit based on the collected work.

Who?

All Plurality University members are invited to gift fragments; anyone can comment.

Why?

This project is a simple way to kickstart a community, facilitating interaction between people as well as building up common contents. It provides a content base for future projects: thematic projects, events, publications, mappings.

How?

This project mostly happens online. The publication can also be coordinated online. After building the platform and before the publication, it requires very little resources.



▶ 2. Potential project: Representing Pluralities

Vocabularies, catalogs and maps to facilitate discovery, interaction and representation

How many expressions do we use to describe climate change? What is design fiction, who in the Plurality University's community works on that subject? Do they treat the subject differently? What stories or works of arts exist on interspecies communication, and what does "interspecies communication" mean? Am I right in thinking that North Africa and the Middle East are terribly under-represented in the Plurality University today? How truly diverse is the community, when looking at its members, or their productions?

What?

The aim of this project is to find ways of gathering and presenting/representing information on the U+ community, its work, and the words it uses.

The information could be made available in a variety of ways: directories, multilingual glossaries, maps, curated catalogs, etc.

These would be used to a variety of ends: search for persons, projects, productions, methods; "translation" of words and concepts into different languages or contexts; reflection and research on the Plurality University itself and its community, etc.

Who, How?

Creating a simple directory and a glossary could be a good starting point. Information entry would be mostly crowdsourced to U+ members (and possibly others).

The creation of catalogs, maps and other accesses or representations would be done through projects led by U+ members and/or external researchers, developers, students, etc. This could become an interesting field for experimentations and research.

Why?

This project would help "materialize" the U+ community in all its diversity. It would provide useful tools for matching, discovery, discussion, collaboration, and reflection.



▶ 3. Potential project: Building an online platform

Facilitating interactions, collaboration and publication

Can I share a paper I just published with the Plurality University's community? Can someone submit its Portuguese translation? Who in the community writes science-fiction? Who has new info to share? If I have a project, can I discuss it within the network? Where can I access the latest discussions on the Plurality University's governance? How do we collaborate on the ongoing Collective Projects within U+?

What, Why?

The Plurality University should eventually provide:

- A directory of members and possibly institutions;
- Means of communication between members (1 to 1, groups);
- Tools for collaboration and collaborative publication;
- Tools for group discussion and possibly decision;
- The support for Collective Projects;
- The support for the Plurality University's governance.

Who?

Accessible to all Plurality University members.

How?

The platform should focus on enabling communication, collaboration and content publication, rather than centralized publication and knowledge management. It should be simple, independent of the dominant web platforms and social networks, multilingual (in terms of interface but, most importantly, of content).

The platform will likely be built step by step, starting with a crowdsourced directory, interpersonal and group interactions, and whatever is needed to support collaborative work around 2019's other Collective Projects.



► 4. Potential project: Celestina, Peer to peer companionship

An exchange chain for people in different countries, based on their work, interest, and abilities.

Thanks to U+'s Celestina program, Tamanda, a pillar of Lilongwe (Malawi)'s Story Club, is invited for a month in Singapore's ArtScience Museum. Working with local artists and makers on the "Singapore 2219" event, she will leverage Woelab's urban experience to offer visions of post-climate change resilience.

After returning to Lomé, Alice will write her personal takeaways about the Singapore event and urban futures, while the Museum will publish a portrait of Alice and what she brought to its event. In return for inviting Alice, CMU's Imaginaries Lab will now invite a Singaporean artist-activist for a full term of work with its researchers and students. And the chain grows.

What?

This project is an exchange program between institutions and people within the U+ network. A connecting and dating system lets U+ members express needs for cooperation, skills or inputs related to imaginaries and futures issues. Individuals are invited to work for some time in a remote institution, ideally on a project and within a group: This is not an artist's residence, but a way to generate interactions, mutual knowledge and ongoing collaborations. At the end of the residences, both the traveler and the receiving institution are required to produce or share publicly available material useful to all.

The program is based on a "transitive companionship" principle: those who invite a person can then more easily suggest a person to be invited somewhere else in the network.

Who?

Anyone is eligible; however, the project should give priority to individuals who do not normally get to travel extensively, or at all. All receiving organizations are eligible, provided they can offer lodging and a work environment.

Why?

This project is a way to strengthen the network, provide new opportunities to those of its members who are currently least able to travel, generate new inspirations for everyone as well as lasting relationships. Furthermore, by its collective production, it will give visibility to U+ as well as its members.

How?

Initially, this would work as a manual brokerage system, with no specific funding. After an initial experimentation, a platform would be built to collect offers and demands, and maybe attributes priority points to those who have hosted someone. U+ could manage the platform, provides administrative help and contribute to some travelers' expenses if needed.



► 5. Potential project: U+ Lab

A “living lab” for action learning material and methods on plural futures literacy

At the end of 2019, 1,300 first-year students at France's Lyon Business School will get a new, compulsory course called “Disrupted Futures”.

The course was designed as a living laboratory on how to become “futures literate” through practice, collective research and experimentation. A lot of space was left to speculation, radical uncertainty, and discussions on cultures and values. Artists, science-fiction writers and activists found their way to EM Lyon, with some reservations at first (it's a business school, after all).

This “lab” with real students was also a testing ground for new approaches, especially those using arts, fiction and design to help explore different futures. It brought together creators, researchers and practitioners looking for new ways to effectively create systemic change. The research, teaching materials and experience were all shared.

What?

U+ Lab is a real (although still emerging) project at EM Lyon (France). Several of those present at the founders' meeting were already involved in designing it.

The project could become more valuable to all by sharing with the whole U+ community: asking for references, materials and comments, and sharing back all materials, experiences and evaluation. It could also provide “Action Research” opportunities. Eventually, U+ Lab could become a networked living lab producing Action Research on how to spread a “plural futures literacy”.

Who?

Initially, students, teachers and U+ members. Soon after, involve professionals and other groups.

Why?

Many of U+ members belong to or work with educational institutions and could be involved in U+ Lab. Building plural futures capacities in future and current professionals is of high importance. Also, there are big opportunities for projects that reach out to other, less visible communities, built together with students, artists and members of these communities.

How?

Based on the French project, an online collaboration mechanism could be set to initiate sharing, and build up from there.



▶ 6. Potential project: U+ Day

One topic, one day, many locations and events, many more futures

“Our Space” is the topic of the “U+ Day”, which takes place on October 15, 2021. How can we be part of Space’s futures, How can Space help us imagine other futures, including for Earth?

From Clichy’s Citizen University to Lomé’s Woelab, to Phoenix’s Center for Science and Imagination, more than 30 exhibitions, workshops, demos, events, etc. address the same issue on the same day, each in their own way. Some are the results of long-term collective projects, some present existing works by creators active on the topic, others are one-off participative events for kids, makers, professionals, etc.

The Plurality University helps coordinate the events and provides a meeting place for ideas, people, and projects. It makes all local events and their productions visible through a virtual exhibition. It has also assembled a team whose work will be to extract knowledge and insights from the process and its outcomes: What has emerged? What can we learn? What points of convergence or difference? Which new questions or issues should be discussed?

What, How?

U+ Day is a single day distributed event during which as many U+ members (and others) organize an event around the same future-oriented topic. Each participant chooses what they will do and how: there can be as many shapes of events and types of content as there are locations.

The topic is chosen collaboratively several months ahead of U+ Day. It must be easily understandable and meaningful to most people; illustrate the value and benefits of plurality in looking at futures; and resonate with the agenda of a significant number of U+ members this year.

U+ provides guidelines, tools for visibility, and ways of sharing during the preparation towards U+ Day. During U+ Day, it provides the platform to help events share among one another and be accessible globally by remote audiences. After U+ Day, it curates the contents into a publication and/or exhibition, and facilitates a reflexive work on what can be learnt from the plurality of events and contents.

Who?

All Plurality University members, their institutions and any other participants who wish to organize an event around the topic?

Why?

This project is a lightweight, yet powerful way to mobilize the U+ network around a common topic and objective. It has the potential to be highly visible locally as well as globally. It can quickly gather rich and highly diverse material for publication, comparative studies, education, future projects, etc. It provides a concrete illustration of the value of plurality in terms of practice, communities, cultures.



▶ 7. Potential project: Inter-Community Thematic project (In development)

Note: *This project is still somewhat vague, but the idea was articulated at different moments during the event: How to make the Plurality University truly diverse by making it meaningful and useful to underprivileged or underrepresented communities? And how does that challenge current “futuring” methods and attitudes? Input is badly needed on this still-unrefined idea!*

A group of U+ members have been discussing their thoughts and experience on how to include underprivileged communities in discussions about the future, and how this challenges their own practice and attitudes.

Petra, who has been using a bottom-up documentary theatre approach with a Roma community in Hungary, has formed a tight relationship of mutual trust. In agreement with the community, she asks members of the community if they would be interested in opening up a dialogue on futures with the U+ group and workshop different ideas for a week on a specific theme related to what the group feel they need to express. U+ group and this community learn from each other.

What, How?

If the Plurality University intends to “broaden the circle of who takes part in conversations about the future”, it is not enough to be open, it must be proactive towards diversity. How to achieve that in a non-patronizing way, in a way that will make sense to communities currently not represented inside U+ and often not present in conversations about futures?

The idea would be to start with one or two pilot projects in cooperation with members who have already established a link with such communities. The process could start by a process of mutual learning, whereby futurists and artists would learn from the community, while members of the community would be invited somewhere else in the network. A following stage would involve working with the community to express their images of the futures and confront them with other futures.

Who?

As we are still cultivating the idea, this pilot project could be realized between a small number of U+ members and a community already very familiar to at least one member of U+.

Why?

As much as it would give visibility to different communities on how they imagine their futures, this project would also allow U+ members to learn from these communities and revisit their current approaches. Mutual learning and challenging is key to this approach.

Next Steps

Again, this initiative and these projects are only possible if we all work to make them happen. We really hope we can count on you to stay involved!

Please comment this report and add whatever ideas you believe has been missed before the end of December. We will incorporate your remarks and come up with a final report at the beginning of January.

The next steps will then be:

- To collectively choose the 2-3 collective actions that we definitely intend to undertake in 2019;
- To implement the output of the “governance” discussion (see appendix for the link);
- To raise the necessary funding for our collective work: we have already started to work on it, however any suggestion or introduction is more than welcome!

Appendix: Raw Takeout of the Founders' Meeting

The raw takeout of the Founders' Meeting can be found online in various forms:

Governance:

Google doc: <https://frama.link/uplusgovernance>

List of desirable 'Accomplishments':

Pdf: <https://frama.link/uplusachievements>

Text version: <https://frama.link/uplusachievementspad>

Visions of the Plurality University in 10 years:

Pdf: <https://frama.link/uplusvisions>

Text version: <https://frama.link/uplusvisionspad>

Workshops on Actions:

Paperboards (pictures): <https://frama.link/HP2kqmYx>

Pictures of event:

<https://frama.link/2NBjdJ5c>