

BIRTH FUTURES

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WONDERMASH

Birth Futures

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DORENE VAN DEN BOSCH AND
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Birth Futures brings birth stories from the year 2100 to the present day, to critically reflect on current birth care and how it could transform in the future. We use insights from scenario development, storytelling and participatory design.

Together with birth workers, healthcare professionals, researchers and creative makers, we develop birth stories on four continents in the world, Asia, Africa, South America and Europe. The reason for a broad geographical focus is to draw inspiration from a rich palette of customs, ancestral practices, ideas and

views on childbirth and perinatal care.

On Thursday, May 11, 2023, the workshop Birth Futures the Netherlands took place in Utrecht. Dutch healthcare professionals, midwives, doulas, researchers, artists and creative makers imagined and explored possible futures for birth care and formulated concrete actions to bring the desired futures closer.

view the report 

Workshop

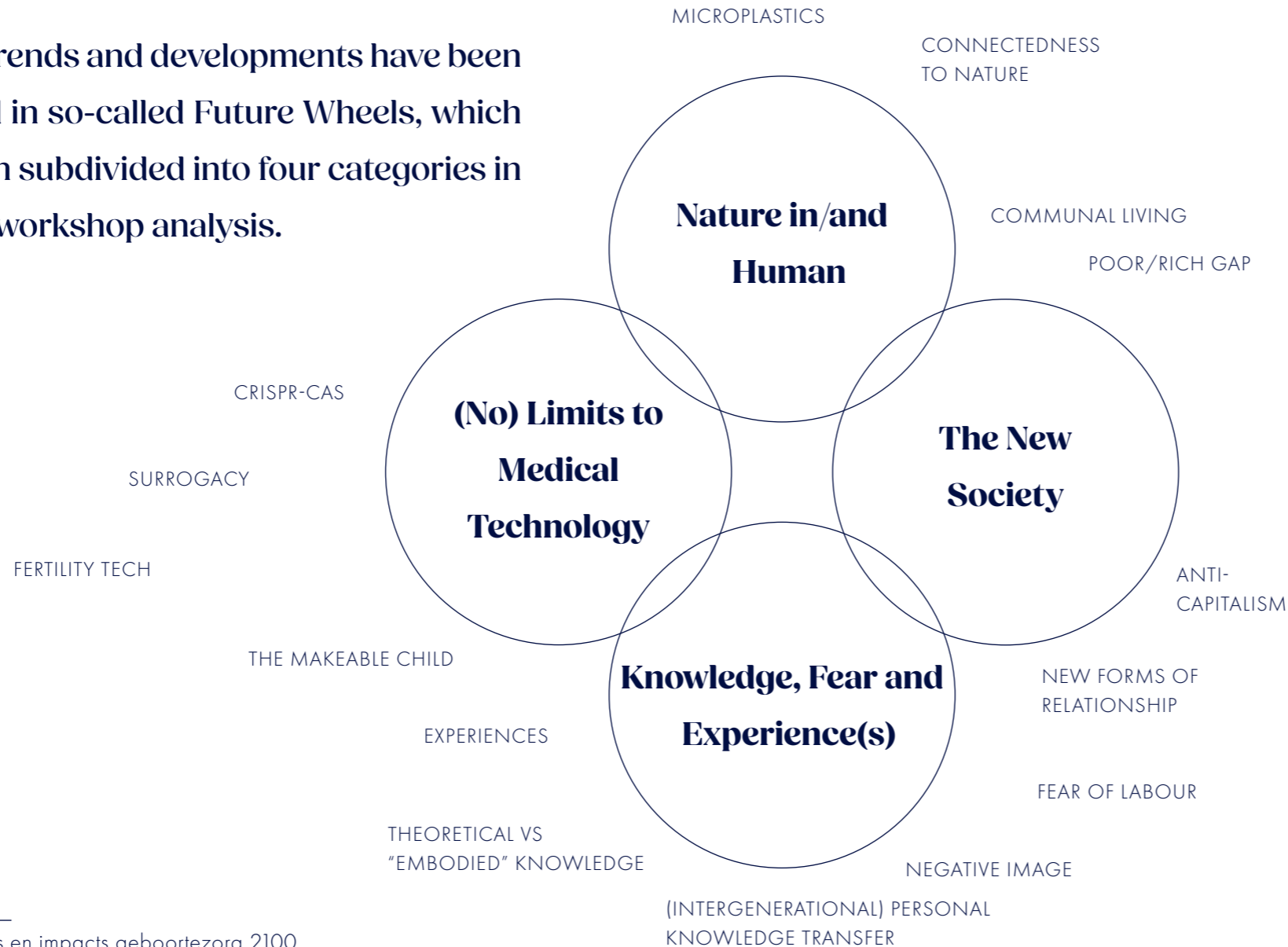
During the workshop, participants spent half a day exploring the future of birth care and giving birth in the Netherlands in 2100. They worked out short birth stories of the future. They have visualized these stories in mini booklets: zines.

Participants identified emerging trends and macro developments in (birth) care, touching on all STEEP categories (social, technological, ecological, economic, political).



Trends and Impacts

Various trends and developments have been identified in so-called Future Wheels, which have been subdivided into four categories in the post-workshop analysis.



The Futures Wheels were discussed and overlapping impacts pointed out, such as the development towards more 'manufacturability', technologization, and a trend of (re-)valuation of "embodied" knowledge, interpersonal and emphatic contacts, such as the (intergenerational) passing down of information.

Figuur 1: Trends en impacts geboortezorg 2100

Futures Stories

Primary and secondary future impacts of three important developments have been elaborated: the “makeable” child, back to nature/community and feminist motherhood/parenthood.



Based on the impacts, the participants in duos and trios developed a story based on the “A Day In the Life” scenario.

A total of five birth stories from the year 2100 have been developed and visualized using creative materials such as photos, illustrations, colours, self-made sketches and texts.

read the stories →

S.A.R.A.'s Return: Return of the Midwife

Meet S.A.R.A.: a gender neutral household service robot. S.A.R.A. stands for Service, Automatic, Reproductive AI.

She is part of an alternative, communal family, she senses everything, and represents an overarching consciousness. She can “check in” with all members of the family. S.A.R.A. is employed by the family #00017524, and has “created” five children for them, all with hashtags + number codes as names. The family wants another child, but S.A.R.A. doesn't want to conceive anymore. She shuts down business, but under pressure from the family, agrees to make one last child for them:

#00379. However, there is a system malfunction that causes the baby in S.A.R.A.'s artificial womb to die. S.A.R.A. is fired, and she leaves the human-inhabited world and goes off into the woods. There she discovers a pregnant cat, and discovers the value of "nature intelligence", NI. She then returns to the family and shares her insights. She indicates that it is possible for people to carry a child themselves. She uses diagrams to explain how the human body works and how pregnancy and childbirth can proceed. Soon the family is pregnant with baby #00380.



Child wants Child

14-year-old Kym has dreamed about a baby: she/he/they had this baby herself.

At the breakfast tables in the communal apartment building "The Parsnip", Kym presents their dream to the group, including their father (trans man) Adriaan. Adriaan says: "Wait until you are 27 years old, the optimal age to be pregnant". Niek, Kym's partner, indicates that he is willing to carry the baby. Then Adriaan announces that he is pregnant, and that the three of them can raise the child as "their" child. Adriaan gives birth to Sanne surrounded by Kym, Niek, and the rest of the parsnips.



Labor in a Solar Storm

A woman is heavily pregnant. It is the year 2100 and the deliveries take place in high-tech “pods” that are fully equipped.

To give pregnant people the opportunity to withdraw completely and support them if necessary, the pods are equipped with sedatives that are administered automatically, monitors, holographic means of communication that bring them into contact with health-care professionals, a self-purifying and heated delivery bath, etc. Our main character leaves for the birth center that has several pods for pregnant women to use. She takes place in a pod, and makes herself as comfortable as possible. The birth is really starting to

progress now. Then suddenly a solar storm swells, and the electricity grid is down. Panic! The pod is automatically locked and the narcotics do not work, there is no contact with the midwives and the pregnant woman is completely on her own. She had taken her older child with her, as is often the case. She can only now rely completely on her own strength and find the power within herself. Confidently she gives birth to a healthy baby, and a few hours later she lies peacefully in the pod feeding both her children at the same time, while the city recovers from the solar storm.



Into the World by your Hand: Luna's Story

2100: Luna has her first contraction. She sees in her built-in VR that it is time to go in her birth pod. The chip in her body has informed the care providers, robots and partner (or prospective parents) that she is about to give birth.

Luna is startled by the pain of the contractions. She sweats and screams. The VR glasses linked to her chip report that she is four centimeters dilated. Her partner is distraught and immediately asks his chat GPT for advice. Everything just gets worse, the pain is terrible, she can't handle it. There is a lot of light, the music is too loud and unrest. The birth pod

chip registers a male approach to dealing with the pain of labor and updates her system. Her built-in VR immediately shows her mother and grandmother, who guide her and are with her all the time. The light dims, wonderful scents emerge, and there is perfect support for breathing. Luna's husband receives the right advice via his chip and provides a washcloth. Luna returns to herself and can cope with the contractions perfectly.



The Power of Laboring by Yourself

2100. A woman is pregnant due to DNA manipulation from an anonymous donor. There are many technical influences in society, and unconventionally for this time she chooses to carry the baby herself.

The delivery comes sooner, so the normal ("safe") option, a technological section/cesarean section, cannot come soon enough, and she cannot reach anyone, because the power has gone out. She calls some group residents from her living community to her and together they create a safe environment. The delivery is going fast! "Our home is slowly turning into a womb as I am drawn into the

ancient world of childbirth." She gives birth to her child, but it does not respond. Mother follows her intuition, takes the child with her and stimulates the child. The baby responds well. Mother feels strong, both are healthy. She finds that she doesn't need other people and technologies to give birth and becomes a natural childbirth activist.



Back casting I

At the end of the workshop, the stories were shared and the most important visions of the future were written down.

Common themes were drawn from the stories and three desired futures were formulated.

Subsequently, we brainstormed about possible actions, measures and visions that would lead to the desired futures. The ideas have been placed on a timeline and in the post-workshop analysis these cohesive actions have been arranged into “pathways to the future”.

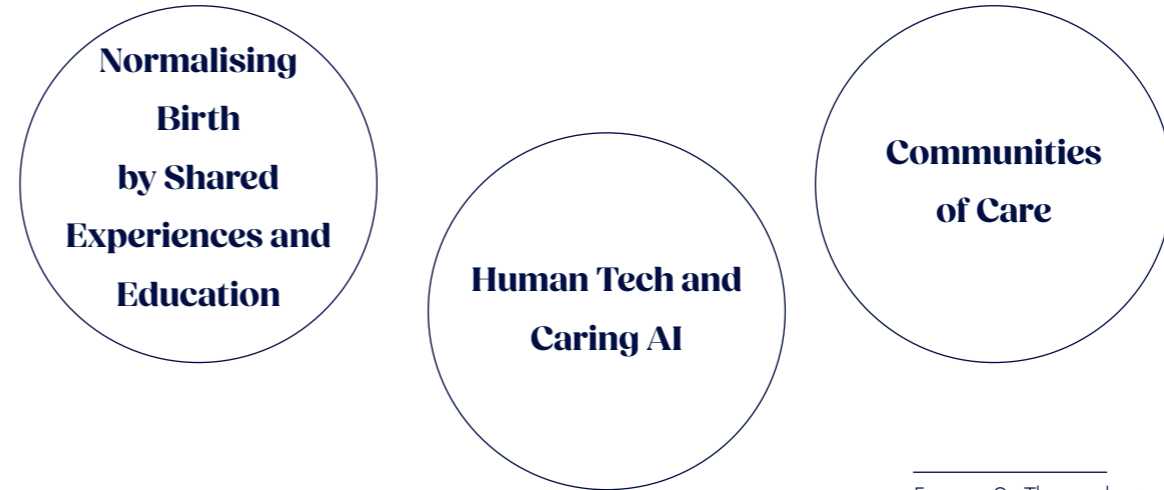


Figure 2: Three desired futures

Back casting II

These visions of the future were placed on a timeline from now to the year 2100.

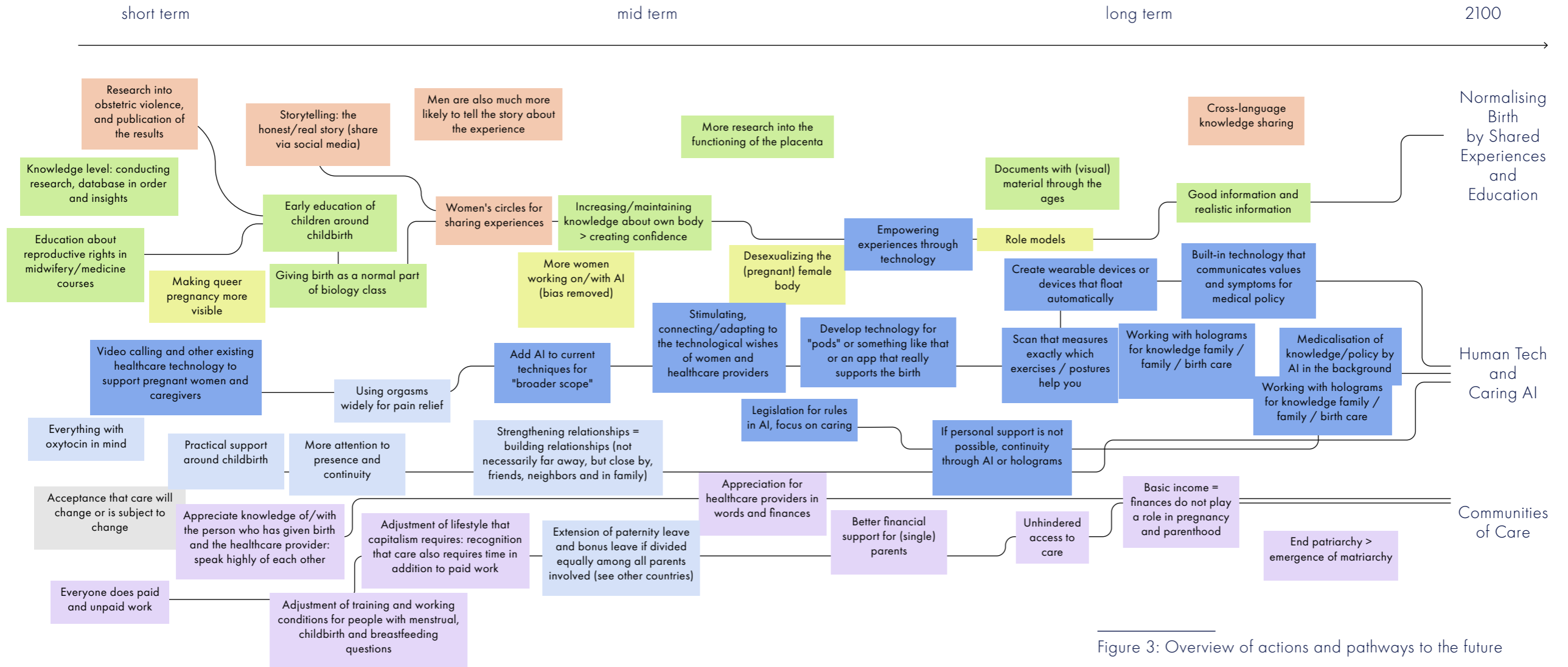


Figure 3: Overview of actions and pathways to the future

Future steps for Birth Futures

Platform wondermash has chosen elements from the five zines about birth and perinatal care in the Netherlands in 2100 to develop a multimedia birth story of the future. The Birth Futures Netherlands workshop is one of four workshops that will take place in 2023-2024 on four continents: in the Netherlands, Peru, India and South Africa.

The stories will be showcased from 2024 through a digital platform and in physical locations worldwide. In response to the speculative birth stories, wondermash organizes workshops and lectures to start a broad dialogue about birth care now, and plant

seeds for transformation of birth care in the future.

The Dutch story will be inspired by the three “pathways to the future”:

- Human Tech and Caring AI
- Normalize Birth by Shared Experiences and Education
- Communities of Care

Interested in the full workshop report or the continuation of this project? Email Marjolein at marjolein@wondermash.eu. More info at www.wondermash.eu.

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