

Rob Hopkins: When Imagination Takes Power

(Written by Sue Elliott – HOPE media officer Qld)



Photo Credit: Mark Chilvers

When Rob Hopkins asks, “*what if?*” it’s never just a daydream. It’s a challenge. For him, imagination isn’t a luxury — it’s activism. From co-founding the global Transition Towns movement to his more recent ventures in podcasting, theatre, music, and art, Hopkins has spent two decades proving that the futures we long for are not only possible, but already within reach.

From Transition Towns to Imagination Activism

In 2005, Hopkins helped launch Transition Town Totnes in the UK, sparking a movement that spread to thousands of communities worldwide. The idea was both simple and radical: empower local people to respond to climate change and resource challenges by building resilience close to home. That meant local food systems, renewable energy projects, community gardens, and the rediscovery of shared skills.

“If we wait for the governments, it’ll be too little, too late; if we act as individuals, it’ll be too little; but if we act as communities, it might just be enough, just in time,” Hopkins has often said — a line that became a rallying cry for the Transition movement.

Transition Towns showed the power of grassroots action. But along the way, Hopkins noticed something troubling: many people struggled to even picture a positive, thriving future. *“It seems as though most of us have less and less space to think creatively or imaginatively ... imagination seems increasingly harnessed to create demand for things nobody really needs,”* he observed. Without imagination, the scope of action shrank.

The Podcast That Asked, “*What If?*”

In 2020, Hopkins launched *From What If to What Next*, a podcast designed to tackle that imagination deficit. Each episode paired two guests with a provocative question: *What if our cities were designed for play? What if work was centred on care and creativity? What if we fell in love with the future?*

Listeners weren’t just hearing ideas — they were guided through future visualisations of preference in an immersive way, short exercises that let them imagine what life in 2030 might feel like if bold action were taken today. The podcast became a kind of training ground for the imagination.

As Hopkins put it: *“The future isn’t something we stumble upon — it’s something we actively create or fail at.”*

As a playful extension, he created the “Ministry of Imagination.” Guests were sworn in as Ministers and asked to propose three bold policies. By the end of the series, more than 600 imaginative policies had been collected in a *Ministry of Imagination Manifesto*. Ideas ranged from whimsical to practical: a Ministry of Global Joy to ensure policies create delight, artistic leave from work so everyone has time for creativity, even pretzel-shaped door knockers to remind us of the importance of bread.

Spin-Off Creativity: Books, Music, and Performance

Rather than slowing down after the podcast, Hopkins has accelerated into new creative territories.

In 2025, he released a new book, *How to Fall in Love with the Future: A Time Traveller’s Guide to Changing the World*. Written as a playful “time travel manual,” the book immerses readers in the sensory details of a possible 2030. Birds sing in tree-lined streets. Rooftop gardens feed local communities. Community-owned energy grids hum with shared power. The future isn’t just an idea — it becomes a place you can almost smell, touch, and long for.

Hopkins is also collaborating with electronic musician Mr Kit on *Field Recordings from the Future*, a project that collects soundscapes from places that “already sound like the future should.” These recordings are transformed into ambient music, immersive installations, and live performances — “time portals” into futures worth longing for. The project has already won crowd-funded support, with plans for vinyl releases and touring shows. Alongside this, he is teaming up with Belgian cartoonist Thomas Liera on a comic series that illustrates these imaginative journeys, while also running workshops, courses, and theatrical performances to help communities practice future-thinking in creative, embodied ways.



With Mr Kit, for *Field Recordings from the Future*. Photo Credit: Alice Carfrae.

Why It Matters Now

Hopkins insists that imagination is not a distraction from action — it’s the foundation of it. “*We must imagine while we build, always both,*” he reminds his audiences, echoing activist Mariame Kaba. Without imagination, political will stalls and cynicism flourishes. With it, entirely new possibilities open up.

“The future is beautiful,” he often says. “But to get there we have to believe in it.”

At a time when despair too often dominates conversations about climate change, Hopkins’ projects feel deliberately joyful, multi-sensory, and hopeful. They invite us to fall in love with a future where communities thrive, joy becomes a policy metric, and resilience is woven into everyday life.

Imagining Our Own “What Ifs”

Nearly 20 years after the first Transition Town took root, Rob Hopkins is still pushing boundaries. From community gardens to global manifestos, from podcasts to music and art, his imagination activism continues to evolve. The common thread is always the same: the invitation to ask *what if?* — and then to act as if that better future were possible.

New Venture: GRASP Festival, Denmark

Most recently, Hopkins took centre stage at GRASP Knowledge Festival in Denmark, where he helped open and close the event with his signature blend of art, activism, and imagination. He joined a panel alongside thinkers like Kate Raworth, Phoebe Tickell, and Jacob Rask, where the aim was clear: “*to crank our cynicism suspenders and help us fall in love with the future.*” Across the festival weekend, Hopkins led immersive experiences including *Town Anywhere* — a workshoping of 2035 futures with community building materials like cardboard, sticks, string, and tape — and in evenings he presented **Field Recordings from the Future**, his “time-machine” soundscapes with collaborator Mr Kit, turning the festival into a portal to possible futures. This venture exemplifies how Hopkins continues to take imagination from idea to stage: public, participatory, and deeply sensual.



GRASP-2025. Credit Flemming - Bo Jensen. Speaking at the GRASP festival in Denmark

His message is disarmingly simple, yet radical: **imagination is power. By daring to picture a thriving world, we make it possible to bring that world into being.**

To learn more about Rob Hopkins and what he does you can visit his site at: <https://www.robhopkins.net/>

To learn more about his field recordings from the future visit:
<https://www.fieldrecordingsfromthefuture.co.uk/home>

To purchase his new book visit: <https://www.robhopkins.net/the-book/>