SCENARIO PLANNING
AS A COMPLEMENT TO TRADITIONAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES FOR CITY DEVELOPMENT

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Background

Already half of the world's population lives in cities. And more and more people arrive in them every day. To accommodate this growth, the slow, organic emergence of cities we know from mediaeval times onwards is too slow for the task. We need to replace it with rapid, purposeful and guided 'city development'. While necessary to provide reasonable shelter and living conditions for a life worth living, the speed with which this needs to happen is at odds with our deep-seated human yearning for change to be tied to human, not technological, rhythms.

We are well aware of this dilemma and have developed a variety of stakeholder engagement processes (SEPs) to solve the problem. But traditional SEPs all suffer from being open-ended: they engage people, they generate countless future possibilities – because every voice needs to and *is* being heard – but there is no way to tie it all together. No overarching narrative emerges that allows everyone to feel involved with, and contributing to, a larger common good. No framing occurs.

Instead, normal engagement processes leave too many loose ends. Expectations are raised, but not fulfilled, resulting in frustration, distrust and conflict. The "resolution" of these loose ends leads to long, costly and acrimonious court battles, slowing down our ability to provide adequate living conditions in a timely manner.

Hence, it is time to take a fresh look at the issue.

The key weakness of traditional SEPs is their open-endedness. Open-endedness is, by design, vague and leaves a vacuum. Since people abhor vacuums they fill it with their own conclusions, privately and independently of what others may see or think. They all live in bubbles of their own reality. What we need instead is a common, scalable and fractal agreement of what needs to be done. *Fractal*, so that each person involved sees their particular place and role in the overall result. *Scalable*, so that the result works on the city, neighborhood and dwelling level. *Common*, so that all are aligned to something larger than each of them individually – the result is not a mosaic or kaleidoscope, it is a common frame one can inhabit with pride and purpose.

An effective and proven process to achieve all that is through the creation of transformative scenarios.

Scenarios – The Big Picture

What are scenarios?

Scenarios are plausible, challenging and internally consistent stories of alternative future developments. Rather than asking '*will* something happen or not' they shift questions about the future to 'what can *I* do *if* this or that were to happen'? Second, they allow the re-organization and re-prioritization of decisions I can take today to increase the likelihood of a future I desire tomorrow. Either way, scenarios increase your power to influence the future.

How do scenarios create closure?

Through interviews and workshop work in small and plenary groups, participants are guided by professional facilitators to develop two independent axes of what the most uncertain and, at the same time, most important drivers are that determine the future of the particular issue, in our case city development. Putting the two drivers at right angles to each other creates four quadrants in which participants develop four divergent worlds of the future. These four worlds become the *frame* in which actual development takes place.

To reach this level of closure the work is inter-laced with generative – i.e. 'pie in the sky '– work phases. Thus, a rhythm of work is established that creates strong alignment around the four worlds. Creating *four* worlds also avoids the other undesired outcome of traditional

SEPs, namely 'choice' by autocratic fiat. Scenarios are *not* a least common denominator, instead they are rich, nuanced and challenging narratives in which the future will unfold.

Who participates in the creation of scenarios?

People affected by the development and those undertaking the development, augmented by carefully selected remarkable experts, all guided by professional scenario facilitators.

How long does it take to create the scenarios?

6 to 12 months in which several dozen open ended interviews, two 3-day residential workshops, about six core team meetings, the professional writing of the scenarios and the public release event take place.

Who runs the project?

A scenario project is run by a core team consisting of:

- a project director, who co-leads the team, is an experienced facilitator and interviewer and can run projects on time and on budget. He or she is the plenary facilitator.

- a communications director, who co-leads the team.

- four small-group facilitators

- a writer / editor

- one or two researchers

- an organizational wizard, who is responsible for the logistics of everything, i.e., who organizes the interviews, the meetings of the core team and the workshops, who oversees the production, and who keeps everybody on their toes. This person is also the 'CFO' of the project.

People from your company should be part of this team.

Sometimes it is useful to establish an *advisory board*. The board has five to seven members, meets three times during the project in person and is available to the project by phone, Skype and e-mail. The board's task is 1) quality control and 2) improving all aspects of communication primarily by giving the project access to the board members' networks.

What are the results of a transformative scenario process?

1. Scenarios are *stories* of possible future developments. They are the agreed framing of controversial issues. As stories, they are easily communicated, remembered and spread by word-of-mouth. People who hear them can easily find their own place in them, as individuals and as groups. A rollout strategy is developed and implemented by all participants – thus resting on the shoulders of authentic people.

2. Scenarios are *frames* within which more concrete actions and novel solutions can be developed and evaluated. This happens in a series of implementation projects that we can help you get started, but should ideally be done by you and the participants themselves.

3. Scenarios are *testbeds* for your corporate strategy to adapt to, shape or transform the future. We can assist you during this work.

What are the benefits of scenario work for city development?

1. Having been taken very seriously, people are aligned to a limited set of alternative futures they themselves helped create.

2. By casting the net initially very wide, by tapping purposefully into the wisdom of the crowd and by tolerating more than one future truly novel solutions are possible.

3. Participants re-perceive reality and become productive and creative option- and solution generators. They become allies in making the development work for themselves and others.

4. People reach agreement and a common understanding of the issues and their solutions. Participants are ambassadors of the stories and the framing that was agreed upon, thus significantly reducing opposition, delays and vandalism during the implementation of the development.

Is there a downside to scenario work?

Yes, by embarking on such a process you empower all participants, outsiders as well as your own people, to help create their own future. This happens rarely in our world today – which makes participation in a transformative scenario process terribly exhilarating and motivating. The surest way to destroy this trust is to run participants through the exercise and at the end reassert your unilateral power. In other words, if you consider a scenario process, be prepared to *share* power. Take a good, honest look at yourself and your company. If you are not willing or able – for whatever reason – to share some of your power with the participants of the process, then scenarios, most likely, are not for you – at least not now.

What next?

If you are the reading kind and need more concrete detail on the *how* of scenario work, read the next section. For even more in-depth information we recommend that you read our book "Scenarios: How to Create them and Why you should"
http://www.blue-way.net/read.html

If you are the talking kind, call or email us to set up a first meeting, entirely without obligation, to discuss further.

SCENARIO WORK – MORE DETAIL

Transformative scenarios are a well-established method to address seemingly intractable problems (Courtney et al 1997, Kahane, 2012). They tap into the deep yearning of most people to create a better future for themselves and others. As a result, they produce better narratives than if this were done by one or two 'expert master-minds'. Better in the sense of more stringent, more challenging, more plausible, more resilient and more novel. And better in the sense of motivating ordinary people to actually do something. It is well worth the effort. Transformative scenarios follow a clear methodological process (van der Heijden 2005; Golüke 2016), which is given below, albeit in a very compressed form.

Creating the stories

Driving question
The question that drives the entire project, developed in close cooperation with you.

Interviews / Conversations
We interview 50 to 75 'remarkable people' about different aspects of the driving question. The interviews are open-ended and are more like conversations in which the interviewer speaks very little. The purpose is to bring the full range of concerns, views, hopes and fears of the interviewees with respect to the driving question to the fore. The conversations are confidential.

Analysis of the interviews
All recorded conversations are transcribed, and the identity of each interviewee is removed. After removing the questions, the core team analyzes the responses to discover main themes, subthemes, and questions. These are then organized into a paper made up of selected quotes from the anonymized interviewees, which will be 1) presented as pre-rea-

ding for the first workshop, will be 2) used in scoping further research and 3) in designing the first workshop.

Two uncertainties

In a first 3-day residential workshop, about 24 participants develop two independent drivers that are both the most *uncertain* and at the same time most *important* ones that determine the future of the driving question.

There are two difficulties: 'most uncertain' and 'two'. Somehow, we are conditioned to be highly suspicious of uncertainties; we seem to have to know – even if we have to fake it. Not to know is often considered a weakness. But the paradox is that to have any chance to ensure that what we do has an effect, we actually need to embrace uncertainty. If everything is already certain, then there is, quite literally, nothing you can do to make any difference at all.

Once that mental resistance is overcome, the next difficulty is 'two'. We resent having to commit ourselves to such a small number. Instead, we want options, choices, room to maneuver, ten or more action items. And so we become 'list generators', forgetting that some things are more important than others; and also forgetting that having ten or more key points you have to act on may force you to be busy, but not necessarily effective. The insistence on, and the process of reaching agreement on the two drivers are the key elements of transformative scenario processes that bring forth closure.

Plotlines

The two uncertainties become the axes of the space in which the imagined realities emerge. Put at right angles to each other they define a space of possible futures that are all plausible, challenging, novel and consistent – both internally and in relation to the real world. Starting at the center of the axes, each of four small groups takes a quadrant and sketches a first story describing that future. They will then work all the way to the edge of the quadrant – i.e. throughout the entire time-space.

Causal stories with titles

In a second 3-day workshop, about two months after the first, the fragments created so far are crafted into two to four transformative scenario narratives by the participants. The key to a compelling story is the switch from chronology to causality. Most people start with chronological narratives because this is how we look at life and it is how history, overwhelmingly, gets taught. But chronology condemns you to be reactive. If time drives everything – as a chronological view presumes – then what can you do? Nothing at all – you can only sit and wait – often anxiously. Instead, participants are required to look for reasons and logic. A causal view empowers people to see and use entry- and leverage points to shape a system to a desired end. To transform, in other words, our cities to serve their inhabitants, rather than the other way around.

Most of us are expert 'consumers' of narratives, but few of us are equally skilled creators. Hence, at this stage the role of an expert scenario writer to assist the participants becomes essential to the success of the project. The role of the writer is critically important because that person's responsibility is to serve the group. While it is true that everybody in the core team's role is to serve the group of participants, everybody but the writer also has the obligation to drive, to motivate and to encourage the participants to deliver their absolutely best that they are able to give. Thus, it is the writer who becomes the voice, the advocate of the participants in the work of the core team (and the overall process).

Causal systems models of each narrative

Stroh (2015) argues that social change becomes possible if people have a causal, dynamic and systemic understanding of the forces that work against change as well as the forces that promote the change. To help people gain this understanding and to give them both

leverage and entry points for change, the core team, with the help of some participants, will create visual representations (causal loop diagrams) as well as causal stories of each of the narratives created.

APPLICATION – WALKING THE TALK

Compelling alternative narratives are the agreed framing of the city development in question. Framing narratives are, as Akerlof and Shiller (2009:51) remind us, how we give meaning to our lives: "The human mind is built to think in terms of narratives, of sequences of events with an internal logic and dynamic that appear as the unified whole. In turn, much of human motivation comes from living through a story of our lives, a story that we tell to ourselves and that creates a framework for motivation. Life could be just 'one damn thing after another', if it weren't for such stories."

However, the narratives, the *imagined* realities, must become *real*. We must *apply* the scenarios to make better decisions in the here and now for an uncertain future. This task requires a keen and truthful understanding of our strengths and weaknesses; it also requires a deep understanding of the room to maneuver we have; and it requires the ability to consider the set of decisions we take as variable possibilities and, last but not least, it requires capabilities to act together. This can be started in implementation workshops (IW).

Note that IWs are *not* part of the scenario creation process, because, ideally, they are run by you and some of the participants. However, we have been involved in such work and we briefly share our experiences.

Implementation workshops (IWs)

Each of the IW workshops lasts two days and is focused on selected professional audiences. The goal is to turn ideas into concrete actions. We convene a dozen[1] participants around a particular theme (for example, centered on *concepts* like mobility, third spaces, sustainable consumption, inequality or centered on specific *sectors* like educational reality gaming or healthcare, etc.) where the IW workshop participants develop the desirable socio-technical path for their theme area against the narrative frames of the future developed in the scenario creation process.

In the morning of the first day participants are presented with the narrative frames, ideally done by a mix of a participant or two from the scenario creation process and one or two members of the core team. The IW participants then work in small groups for a couple or three hours. The small groups form around their personal choice of which scenario they really want to see come true. In the small groups they develop options, strategies, actions, decisions that would, if implemented, lead to their preferred narrative becoming much more likely, even true.

In the late afternoon of the first day, in a plenary setting, they report to each other what they have come up with and accept comments for improvements from the others. After a joint dinner, they re-assemble the next day in their small groups again and essentially create a logically linked (business) plan of action for their portfolio of ideas that they came up with the previous day. The aim is to be able to transfer all this into a work plan with resource requirements, time requirements, funding sources, publications, communication strategies, etc. – a concrete back-casting exercise, in other words. Just before lunch they again reassemble in the plenary and report to the others their plan of action, which includes the 'appointment' of two or three people from the IW responsible for getting their plan implemented.

Once started, the series of IWs often take on a life of their own and need a very light hand in running them. What is critical, however, is to organize a bi-annual conference where the IWs 'mavens', 'salesmen and -women' and 'connectors', in Gladwell's sense of the words

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1   Our aim is that about seven participants (Miller 1956, Gladwell 2000) from each workshop will, in the end, form a new theme-based core team that drives the change in each particular theme. As people inevitably drop out, it is best to start with a dozen so that we are sure to end with about seven.

(Gladwell 2000), and 'practitioners' who actually make the transition real, meet to make the system – the city – tip towards the desired outcome.

Scenario roll-out

As Harari notes (2015:35): "Telling effective stories is not easy. The difficulty lies not in telling the story, *but in convincing everybody else to believe it.* … Yet when it succeeds, it gives Sapiens immense power, because it enables millions of strangers to cooperate and work towards common goals" (emphasis added).

The narratives

The roll-out consists, first, of the narratives being written up and widely distributed in traditional and social media. The release will happen at a well-organized public event carried live on the internet. The document (there will be versions of it tailored to the respective distribution channels) will be carefully designed for impact, readability and share-ability. The narratives will also be turned into short, 5 to 10 minutes each, visuals. Whether this will be films, documentaries, or animated cartoons will be decided between the project team and you.

Second, the narratives, causal loops and causal stories will be presented in conferences, preferably as key-notes, and in special events for companies, (neighborhood)-organizations, municipal departments and NGOs.

Third, participants will be available for interviews to traditional and social media.

While the core team plays a key role in this part, the legitimacy and authenticity of the narratives will be significantly enhanced by using the participants themselves in all three forms of communication. They will be the ambassadors of the new imagined realities.

What next?

Give us a call or send an email to set up a first meeting, entirely without obligation, for further discussion.

We look forward to working with you!

FINALLY, WHO ARE WE?

Ulrich Golüke has run scenario projects comparable in size, ambition and complexity for over 20 years for the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, foundations, universities, companies and high school teachers. He is an associate professor for Scenario Planning at the Business School of Lausanne. He has 40 years of experience of systems modelling in health care, shipping, real estate, climate change and macro-economics under social and resource constraints.

Andrea Cederquist has years of experience in social change management and communication working for NGOs, corporations and academia. She is a trained biologist and holds a M.Sc. in Environmental Management and Policy. Her practical and theoretical knowledge of social innovation comes from her experiences in CSR-reporting in the private sector, working as a campaigner within the NGO sector, and through her current academic engagement in the field of transformational learning processes, strategic communication and social entrepreneurship. Her research interests are about theories of change relating to societal transformation and sustainability. She taught for many years sustainability communication and marketing at the Kiel School of Sustainability (Christian Albrecht Universität zu Kiel), Germany, with a focus on campaigning and communications for societal change. Currently, she works on an energy citizen change project ('Energiebürger') for the Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig Holstein.

We have between us access to a professional network of people who will make up, with your team, the rest of the core team (and advisory council, if desired).

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