

Collaborative Futures: Integrating Foresight with Design in Large Scale Innovation Processes-Seeing and Seeding the Futures of Europe

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Abstract

Large scale societal and political changes can be enabled via open and collaborative innovation processes in which diverse interests collaborate to co-create the future. These social learning processes do not claim to know about the future but instead call for learning with alternative futures to become more agile and adaptive, overcome inertia and create movement. We illustrate this process of large scale systems transition through reference to a specific case study on the futures of Europe. The initiative combines a variety of futures methods - scenarios, visioning and value creation modeling – to support an open-ended process of collaborative innovation and empower the co-creation of new potentialities.¹ Learning developed in this multi-stakeholder, multi-method transformational foresight initiative is relevant to a wide range of scholars and practitioners in different fields with interests in collaborative strategy, complex systems redesign, transition management. Key lessons include the value of convening both institutional insiders and outsiders, the benefits of opening up the past to look forward, and the resourcing challenges in sustaining an open-ended process and nourishing a new and still fragile network of actors.

Keywords: Transformational Foresight, Futures Methods, Design, Co-creation, Innovation, Learning with Futures, Collaborative Futures, Transition Management, Whole Systems Innovation, Europe, European Union, Civil Society

Introduction

All decisions we take today shape the future we will live in. The future is not a passive, uncharted territory, waiting to be discovered. Deeply held beliefs, assumptions, expectations and perceptions about the future play an active role in shaping understanding of the present. Modern foresight methods and tools, e.g. scenarios, technology road maps, search conferences, causal layered analysis, etc. have been used for decades to reveal and test deeply held future assumptions and enable new possibilities.

The stance adopted when facing the future can differ from reactive planning to preactive design. Reactive planning is based on the assumption that human action cannot change the future, but that the future can be better known and better prepared for. This stance is evident in the practice of stress-testing banks to ensure they have sufficient capital buffers to cope with a range of foreseeable, yet uncertain future events. The proactive approach esteems that human action can and indeed should shape the future, even though future outcomes cannot be controlled. When creating the future, questions of ethics are often left unaddressed. Who is shaping the future and in whose interests? The future is not neutral and creating a better future involves attention to the quality of governance and participation in the process of deciding and shaping “better” possibilities. Who decides what is better and on what basis? Who gets involved and how? etc. These are legitimate questions whether the challenge at hand is securing the future of a group, community, nation or global system.

Ramirez/Roodhart/Manders (2012) present empirical evidence to show the value of foresight in the form of alternative scenarios, in corporate strategic innovation. At the same time, the future of whole societies and regions cannot be left to commercial imperatives. Naim (2013) calls for political innovation. In this paper, we focus on an initiative involving practices of ‘collaborative’ and ‘transformational’ foresight to see and seed new possibilities for the future of Europe.

Making movement in the interests of better futures for democratic societies requires a more inclusive, multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach of foresight-to-co-creation than the conventional, linear method of speaking truth-to-power across the science-policy interface. Resolving the eurozone crisis, enabling a global energy transition and progressing global sustainable development are not simple problems but puzzling and messy situations. These challenges involve more than technological substitutions i.e. product and process innovation.

Aligning diverse interests and empowering actors to collaborate towards better futures benefits from a process of learning with futures to open a safe space for conflict rather than a rushing to consensus (Mermet, 2011). The imperative is not to fix a problem that has been inherited from the past but to clarify and transform future possibilities in order to overcome inertia and sustain more and more effective collaborative action.

Some previous efforts to link foresight and innovation appear to emphasize the promise of a “controllable” future, in which carefully managed interventions achieve predictable outcomes (i.e. engineering solutions). Other attempts connect foresight-design with innovation, in terms of more open, social processes of creative destruction and construction, involving collaboration between different interests (i.e. inter-organizational settings that result in unpredictable, emergent changes that can

be steered towards better outcomes).

We position this article as relevant to ongoing attempts to link the parallel fields of foresight, design, strategy and innovation. “Transformational foresight” practices require effective participation to redesign whole systems and enable messy (i.e. multi-dimensional) transition management. They involve a social learning process that is more similar to seeing, seeding and growing the future than engineering a new solution. Linking foresight, design and innovation to create a better future through collaborative innovation and co-creation, we suggest, also benefits from using mixed (i.e. multiple) foresight methods. The mastery of the modern futures toolkit, in turn, depends on an understanding of the strengths and limitations of a variety of futures methods, an ability to effectively tailor them to the purpose at hand and avoid conflating or confusing one with another (e.g. scenarios are not forecasts or visions).

We offer a specific case study and explain why, how and with what effect mastery of the modern futures toolkit was helpful in the design and conduct of a transformational foresight initiative – a process of collaborative innovation and co-creation aimed at catalyzing and sustaining movement towards new and better future possibilities for the whole of Europe.

First, in section 2, we explore the links between innovation and foresight in the futures literature. In section 3, we note the diversity of methods available in the modern futures toolkit. In section 4, we describe our specific case study. It was a pan-European initiative aimed at renewing deeper, socio-political foundations and identifying shared priorities for the future. It was initiated by the Network of European Foundations (NEF) on the occasion of their 10th anniversary. In section 5, we present the outcomes of the intervention and in section 6, offer conclusions and key learnings.

Innovation – It’s all about the future, right?

Awareness of the socially messy, puzzling or “wicked” problem nature of today’s significant challenges started in the 1970s and contributed to a shift in futures thinking, from a predictable world of controlled solutions to an unpredictable world of continuous learning and rapid adaptation through redesign and innovation – for example, Rittel/Webber (1973) on Causal Textures, Emery/Trist (1978) on Wicked Problems and Ackoff (1993) on Idealized Design.

Such developments have simulated further evolution of the futures field and contributed to the processes. For example, Vandenbroeck (2012) emphasizes the links between knowledge production, new ideas, systems thinking and design in a process of collaborative innovation and co-creation. Jain/Arden/Pickard (2012) have also developed a hybrid practice in which the tools of critical design are developed in the service of a rich and collaborative form of foresight practice.

Other authors have discussed the added value of open foresight approaches - for example, Raford (2012), Ramos/Mansfield/Priday (2012), and Hiltunen (2011). However, less focus has been put on using foresight processes as a launch pad for collaborative platforms of open or convened transformational networks. This article is a contribution from the perspective of the field of foresight that is relevant to other fields of practice e.g. whole systems innovation, large scale transition management.

Scholars in these fields highlight innovation as a messy, open-ended process

of social learning rather than time-bound, controllable intervention, in the context of complex, open and adaptive systems - for example, Geels/Schot (2007), Grin/Rotmans/Schot (2010), or Dehaene/De Vree (2013). This has led to call for the recognition, study and further development of new approaches that involve more participatory, reflexive and interventionist methods rather than more scientific studies of problems to enable organizational innovation and inter-organizational strategy - for example, Wilkinson/Eidinow (2008).

Whether the focus is on products, processes, services or entire systems, the promise of innovation is that of at least a different or at most a better future, albeit with the unintentional perils that can manifest during any uncontrollable and unpredictable process. New ideas emerge in the interaction of different ways of thinking about the future – which include probable, preferable and plausible (less comfortable, yet possible) futures. Opening up futures thinking, can help to avoid the “novelty trap” (Rayner, 2004), in which we overestimate the impact of a new technology in the short run, followed by an underestimation of social changes generated by the said technology in the long term. Furthermore, appreciating and managing the risks and opportunities that emerge through the innovation process, benefits from better understanding and use of the modern futures toolkit and the ability to combine, for example, qualitative inquiry using scenarios and visioning with model-based quantification of the projected alternative futures.

Over the last decades, the discipline of innovation has radically changed. Until recently, innovation was viewed as the work of specialists, ‘creative minds’, scientists and highly qualified engineers working on the next ‘big thing’ (i.e. a technological ‘game changer’ or a scientific break-through). People in high security laboratories would work on major R&D programmes, often in glorious isolation from day-to-day realities of their sponsoring organizations and assuming the push of new technology would be met with the pull of societal needs.

Today, the directions of technology push and pull in the world of business is being transformed by the emergence of social media and the need for faster and continuous consumer-driven innovation to beat competitors. In the world of public policy, evolving societal needs cannot be met without the redesign of public services and a rethink of the role of technologies, old and new. In either case the trend is towards harnessing a combination of analytical, critical and creative thinking in an open source process of social learning, rather than organized and managed study by a specialist, stand-alone unit. Innovation concepts and models continue to encompass inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches: collective intelligence, open innovation, collaborative innovation, design thinking, business model innovation, and many others. In times characterized by low predictability and inevitable surprise, the capacity for anticipatory adaptation, resilience and self-transformation is now seen as the key to long term success. As Gary Hamel notes in the introduction of the book ‘Innovation at the Core’ (Skarzynski, Gibson, 2008, p. xviii), “*in an environment of steadily decreasing friction and crumbling entry barriers, those new forms of collaborative and rapid innovation is the only brake on margin-crushing competition*”.

In opening up the participation to achieve ‘whole’ systems innovation or large scale transition management (as implied in the challenges of sustainable development or global energy systems transition), new challenges are encountered. These include questions about who participates and how to frame the system of

concern and interaction with its wider context. Engendering trust and forging new common ground between participants and organizations with different cultures and/or interests requires attention for constructive conflict and shared learning, rather than a simple push for rapid but shallow consensus building.

Flowers (2004) notes that *“empowerment starts with an instrument or organ of perception. You can’t just analyse such systems from the outside to get to the root causes – you have to feel them from within”*. Sudhanshu (2012) defines the term co-creation as *“a generative process where ideas, opportunities and aspirations are studied by very different stakeholders in an interactive re-invention mode; co-creation does not assume primacy of knowledge, but is aimed at cross-sector innovation in order to allow the creation of new markets, new forms of organizations, new policy environments etc.”*

The NEF 10th Anniversary Initiative, which is described in detail in section 3, was explicitly designed to use the combined strengths offered by different futures methods and move beyond initial ideation to the design and enactment of new future possibilities. It involved a variety of European stakeholders in a sequence of broad and deep situational analysis using scenarios followed by a visioning-to-value creation ideation process. The aim was to generate more shared and systemic understanding whilst keeping the future open to informing more and better options for making movement. In the context of the different perspectives on Europe’s systemic crisis, which has been unfolding since the financial and banking crises of 2008, we suggest that this thoughtful combination of futures methods is pivotal in the anticipatory sense-making involved in whole systems innovation and large scale transition management.

We authors note that scenario building and vision development is not designed as an end in itself: plausible, alternative stories about the future do not automatically create impetus for change. Instead, we suggest that to trigger societal-scale transformations, scenarios need to be combined with other methods e.g. the visualization of a viable, new value creation system. By opening up the future as a safe space for constructive conflict, it is possible to manage disagreement as an asset and forge new common ground in a way that sustains social learning and collaborative interactions between diverse stakeholders. We also note that insights from well executed transformational foresight initiatives can fail to bring about social innovation, because too little focus is put on the afterlife of prospective sensemaking processes. Kahane (2012) recently proposed a collaborative futures method (called ‘transformational scenarios’) that not only helps to construct scenarios to understand the future better, but also to influence it.

To bridge the difficult gap between futures thinking and action, this article presents an integrated approach that uses principles of foresight, design and innovation and combines different futures methods - elements of scanning, scenarios, trends analysis, visioning - to support a process aimed at renewing the deeper foundations needed to create new possibilities for the future of Europe. First, we explain what we mean by the modern futures toolkit.

The Modern Futures Toolkit

The modern futures toolkit has evolved in the context of a fuzzy field of foresight practices. Kuosa (2011) notes the emergence and co-evolution of parallel paradigms,

including prediction, management thinking, systems thinking, futurology, dialectic thinking, etc. that have shaped foresight practices since the 1940s. Wilkinson (2008) notes that diversity of foresight traditions, but also diversity within methods (most notably in scenarios practices, where the combination of continuous innovation and an absence of grounded theory can lead to confusions, misunderstanding and methodological fetishism) is difficult to navigate.

Attempts to document the range of methods and tools available² have been made and the purpose here is not to repeat such attempts but to highlight the differences between methods.

Navigating the diversity within practices can be challenging for the less experienced. Selsky/Wilkinson/Mangalaglui (2013) have recently offered a distinction of futures methods:

Table 1. *Comparison of Futures Methods*

| Method | Future(s) | Temporal stance | Futures thinking | Attitude (normative stance) | Intervention approach | Epistemology of uncertainty | Output |
|-------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| Forecasting | Single | Linear: Past-to-future | Closed | Descriptive: knowing /seeing the future | Outside-in and adaptive | Mathematical treatment of uncertainty | Probable future |
| Visioning | Single | Backcasting: future-back-to-present | Closed | Normative: responsibility for the future | Inside-out and activist | Choices and values as basis for coping with uncertainty | Preferable future |
| Scenarios | Multiple | Entangled: multiple temporalities | Open | Descriptive/critical: creating options for the future | Outside-in and can be either activist or adaptive | Cognitive biases, culture and social processes introduce additional uncertainties, ambiguity and ignorance | (Set of) Plausible futures |

Case Study – Creating a Better Future in Europe

In 2011, the Network of European Foundations (NEF), a Brussels-based platform of European public interest foundations, decided to celebrate its tenth anniversary in an unusual way, by investing in a futures initiative to decipher pathways out of the ongoing situation of crisis. A team of futures specialists was hired to design and facilitate a three-day “*Unconventional Summit on the Future of Europe*”. It aimed to contribute to ways forward of and within the EU.

The desired outcome of the project was a set of priorities for the future of Europe. The journey to those priorities was and is an interdisciplinary expedition to create a desired future for Europe.

The NEF starting position was that European integration, overall, was too good to fail. Convening seemingly unlikely allies in an era of crisis seemed necessary. Those allies were considered people who already play or are soon likely to play an important role towards bold decision-making, robust social peace, and thriving communal, civic, and economic life in Europe. The challenge was to create a space for a generative high-power dialogue that would go far beyond the usual conference-based exchanges – something that would continue after the event in the form of multiple, ongoing collaborative actions, including spin-offs.

The event took place in September 2012 at Stift Altenburg, a spacious baroque

monastery inhabited by Benedictine monks in rural Austria. The monastery exhibits a spirit of openness and is famous for its activities in the fields of intercultural dialogue. The design of the summit was such that there were no official speeches, no panel discussions and no power point presentations. Instead, a combination of interactive exhibition spaces, plenary and small group discussions and various “*markets for ideas*” encouraged imagination, creativity and inspiration. The emphasis on human interaction, multidisciplinary and exchanges that respected alternative perspectives opened the space for shared learning and established the foundations of mutual trust required for collaborative action. The following elements were key success factors of the project:

A metaphoric approach: Seeding the future of Europe

In any collaborative setting, metaphors matter. Beck (1999) notes that a commonly used term, such as community, is a rich, complex and multifacteted concept, imbued with multiple meanings that need to be explored and understood through metaphorical mapping. Clearly the concept of Europe cannot be understood from any single perspective and the past, present and futures of Europe hold multiple meanings. At the same time, providing a metaphor for this new initiative that aims to enable new and shared understanding of present and future situations, was helpful in enabling effective participation in the process, especially by those unfamiliar with foresight processes. Selecting the right process metaphor helped avoid misunderstanding (e.g. the aim is to create not predict the future).

In the NEF initiative, gardening metaphors were deliberately used to resonate with the aim of the project of shifting the situational framing from fixing a crisis to creating the future: growing the future from a variety of seeds which in turn require additional resources to flourish. This organic metaphor differs from the more engineering-based language deployed in other futures initiatives – where terms like crossroads, road maps, etc. are common phrases that convey a sense of clear choices, blueprints and orderly progress.

“*Seeding*” the future is a metaphor more suited to the nonlinear evolution of a complex, open and adaptive ecosystem and the large scale innovation processes involved in ensuring a better future for people in Europe. In this metaphor, seeds represent new ideas or initiatives. Seeds often have all the information needed to succeed and thrive. But we also need to provide enough water, warmth and sunlight and we must take care to plant it into fertile soil. Great ideas are like seeds, in that they too need the right environment in which to grow. Some ideas may wither and die out in a particular place, not because they are bad ideas but because the ‘*soil*’ in which they attempt to take root does not suit them. There may be any number of cultural, historical or material circumstances that make it difficult for a particular idea to flourish in any given context, regardless of its quality.

There is rarely a shortage of seeds within any given organization. However,



the innovation environment is not always providing those seeds with the perfect conditions to grow. Ideas need to be carefully cultivated, then harvested when they are mature. This is *not* a random process, but rather one that requires patience, expertise, strategy, and a willingness to take on impact-driven transformations.

Community management and delegates' selection

The diversity and quality of the creative community participating in a foresight-to-action process is crucial to unleash collaboration and foster large scale changes, particularly in a multi-stakeholder setting. In the case of the NEF project, the selection process aimed to ensure a suitable representativeness of the diversity of administrators, decision-makers, and innovators in Europe.

Scouted and personally invited delegates came from two groups: one was a group of rather high-level decision-makers and players from Europe's political-administrative and institutional structures, whether regional, national, or supranational. The other was a group of remarkable voices for change from a large set of fields and disciplines, including science, the arts, urbanism, and information technologies. Other criteria in the research, scouting, and networking process were age, gender, the geographic areas of work.

The selection of the candidates was based on both recommendations by the project stakeholders – a dozen of European foundations—as well as a targeted scouting process undertaken by the project leader. More than 200 potential candidates were initially considered. A short list of 80 candidates was formed, 50 of whom participated eventually at the summit.

Participants' roles ran the gamut from a senior European Union analyst and Brussels-based writer, the co-director of a key foreign ministry's EU department, a ministry of finance official, a prime minister's spokesperson, a derivatives expert at a large private bank, the CEO's speechwriter of a large industrial company, a deputy mayor of a large European city, an open-data expert and lawyer, a leader of an EU country's large and new social movement, a national TV journalist, all the way to the founder of a new online debate platform, an open-data expert, a video artist and curator, a theatre director and actor, an epidemiologist, two human rights activists, and a gender activist.

Preparatory interviews – Deep Listening

In preparation of the summit, the facilitation team conducted open-ended in-depth interviews with a representative panel of participants (almost 50 %). These interviews lasted for at least 40 minutes each. Some took nearly two hours, thus providing an opportunity to deep-dive into the diversity of views, underlying assumptions, habits, and norms as well as the vocabulary that would be exhibited in this convention.

The interviews also operated as cultural probes, in which participants directed attention to critical sources of information and additional reference materials. A synthesis of all the interviews was provided to all participants prior to the summit, including a set of direct (non-attributed) quotations extracted during the interviews. These quotations also formed part of the initial exhibition spaces of Europe's past, present and futures.

This type of deep listening, semi-structured and open ended interview is now common practice in preparing the ground for high-powered strategic dialogues. It

helped the facilitation team to “tune in” to the many different perspectives on the issues at stake.

The synthesis of the interviews added new dimensions to the current puzzling situation. For example, the multiple views about the history of Europe became evident, as did the discounting of the longer term histories in the situational analysis describing the impact of the financial crisis in Europe. Revealing and respecting these deeper histories provided a helpful starting point for rethinking the political, social, cultural, economic and historical dimensions of a new European value-creation model.

The venue

Humans are creatures of habit and habitat. Location is an active rather than passive ingredient in enabling a memorable experience. Selecting the right venue in order to enable generative dialogue, catalyze creative and collaborative thinking and secure a lasting and positive memory of an amazing event requires looking further than bricks and mortar.

The venue needs to match the logistical requirements as well as service the purpose of the event and attract the attendance of busy people. Creativity is fostered by unusual and inspiring environments.

In the case of this project, the venue chosen for the “*unconventional summit*” was itself unconventional for such events – the Altenburg Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Austria. The history of Altenburg Abbey, however, offered an appropriate analogy for the NEF Anniversary Initiative. Firstly, there is the Benedictine tradition of hospitality. From the Middle Ages, Benedictine monasteries including this one have served as locations of pausing, reflecting, and conceiving new beginnings for inhabitants and visitors alike. In the Altenburg Abbey, the question of “what constitutes a full and true life” has always been pertinent, and it called the participants of this summit to face the challenges and demands of our times in sharp focus. Secondly, there is a curious story behind the Altenburg Abbey: one part of the building complex was designed to accommodate a putative, unannounced visit of the Habsburg Emperor. The overall architectural design, however, hides a subtle secret. It is only discernible from the rear side of the abbey complex: from here, the most prominent aspect of the Abbey is clearly the church (rather than the imperial buildings), alluding to the monks’ subtle message that the church – and not the state – were to ultimately lead people to a better future.

Whilst not all multi-stakeholder dialogues can or should be hosted in monasteries, it is important to consider the resonances between habits and habitats, routines of thought and familiar environments. A place that corresponds to the soul and the spirit of an event are often overlooked. The location itself can offer an exceptional learning journey that lifts the event to levels that are usually untapped by consideration of physical doing over the spiritual being. Therefore, the choice of a venue is one of the building blocks of success in any transformation initiative.

Project design and visual recording

The process design of a multi-stakeholder futures initiative is another critical contribution to the collective memory of a group. As an inspiring place, a well-thought and executed project design anchors memories in the minds of the participants. In the case of this project, a clear design language has been used to

guide the participants through the entire summit. Design elements covered a global project branding, visual session posters, exhibition posters, a visual agenda, a neatly designed welcome bag, and a set of visual communication cards.

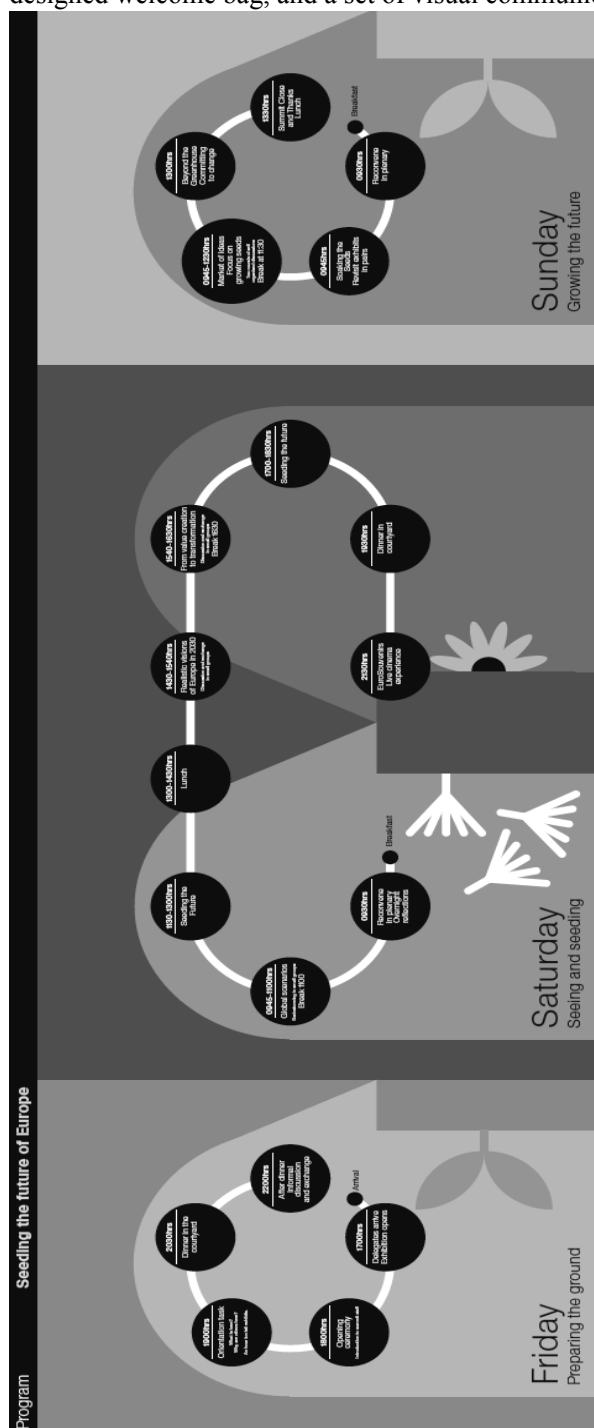
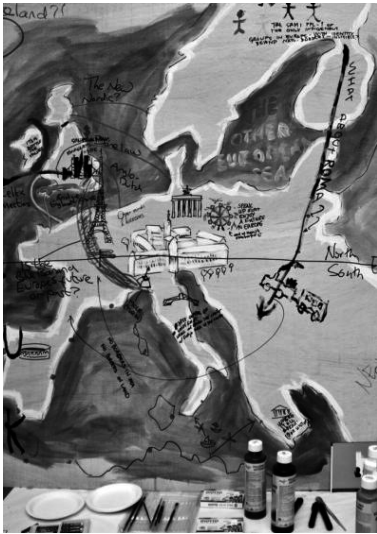


Figure 1. Visual project design: summit agenda



Another success factor was the use of a visual recorder. As David Sibbet (2010), a world leader in graphic facilitation puts it: *“Visual practitioners are inspired by how designers work and they bring a new dimension into a collaborative setting. Visual recording immediately acknowledges that someone was heard and how, in ways that verbal communication alone does not. Working visually is deeply integrative – it combines both visual and verbal ways of interacting. This allows people to talk directly about how they are making sense of things and often facilitates the representation of complex issues, enhancing the quality of the conversations”*.

In this initiative, an artist worked in parallel with the strategic dialogues over the entire process, acting in the role of an observer and listener of ongoing conversations. He then presented the sense he had made of what he heard in the form of a visual graphic record. Participants were encouraged to review and further develop these visual renditions. Furthermore, participants could post their ideas for new seeds in a visual landscape resembling a greenhouse. The evolving greenhouse mural provided a visible record of all the new seeds for change. These outputs served the group as a way to express their journey of shared learning and also provided timely feedback to the facilitation team about the diversity of perspectives in the room.

Making space for conflict and disagreement

To stimulate conversations and interaction all along the process, the facilitation team developed a set of cards that encouraged participants to engage with each other as well as interact with the inputs and ideas that emerged. These cards operated as a set of agree ground-rules – providing an in-offensive and visible cue for participants to challenge, support, agree and disagree. There were eight card designs – seven animal cards and one “Aha!” card. The participants could use these cards during their visit to the exhibits and in reviewing the ideas emerging from the group sessions, by sticking the cards onto exhibits and other materials displayed during the summit. Furthermore, participants could hold up cards during any session to make a visible point. Those cards were a powerful way of interacting and helped participants to express themselves all along the summit.

The seven animal cards were:

- Hobby Horse: an argument habitually advocated;
- Elephant: an obvious truth being ignored;
- Sacred Cow: an idea immune for criticism;
- Sacrificial Lamb: something given up for the common good;
- Wise Owl: an existing and valuable idea;
- Bird of Paradise: an idea that belongs to heaven, not earth;
- Zebra: a politically incorrect idea;

The eighth card was designed to draw attention to new ideas and critical

insights. The so-called “Aha!” card carried a design showing a “light bulb” in which a new seed was starting to grow.

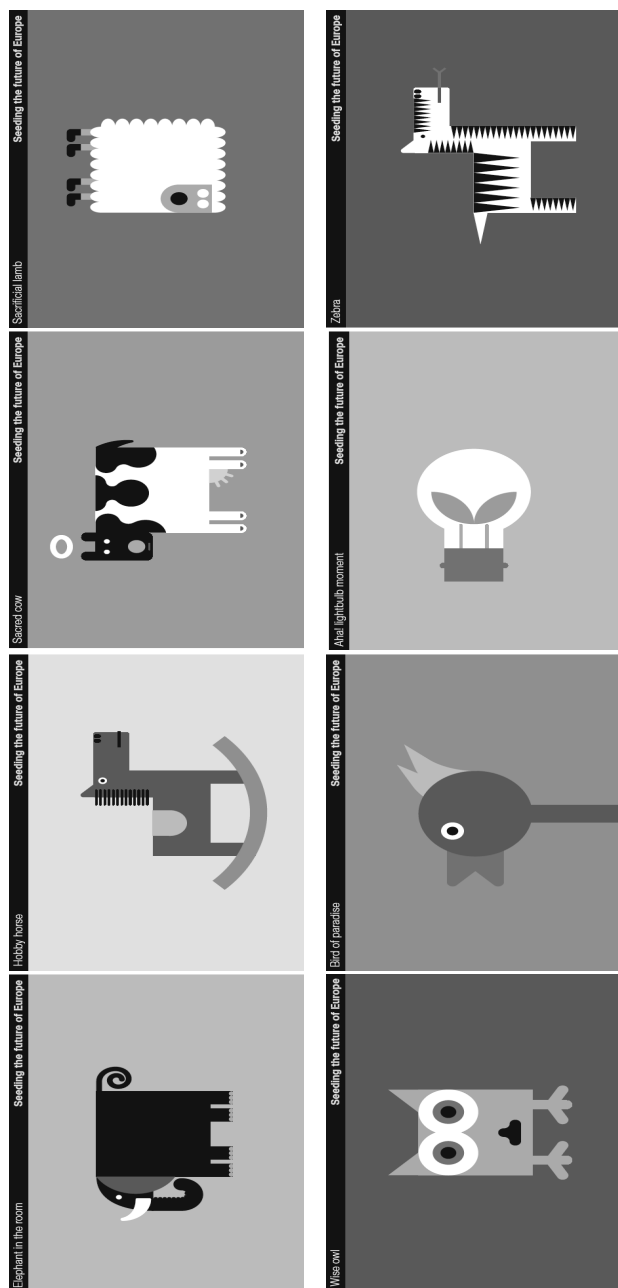


Figure 2. Visual communication cards

An integrated approach – From futures thinking to action

Four different phases of futures thinking were conducted within the short time frame of the three-day summit.

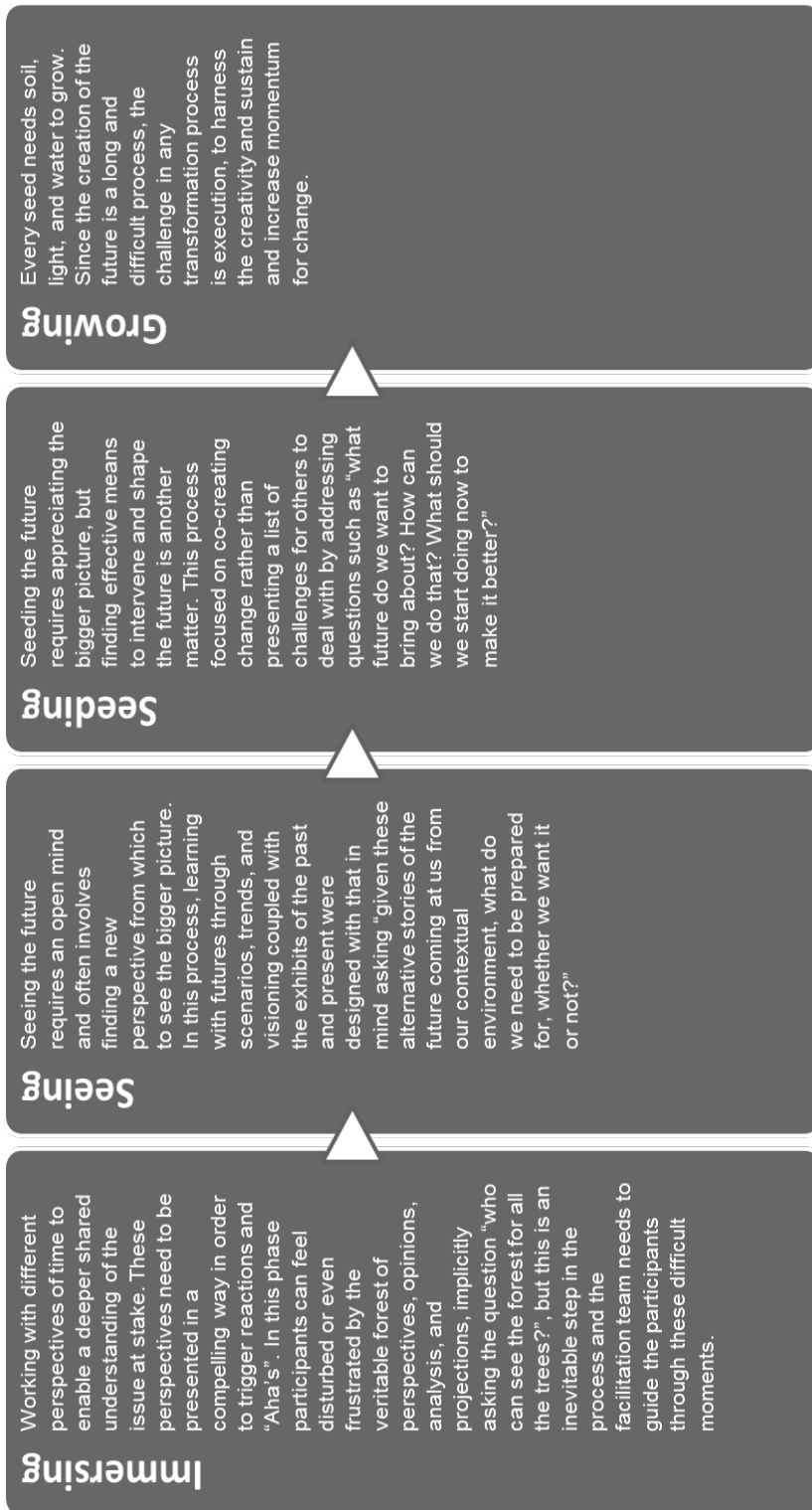


Figure 3. From foresight to action process

The selection and sequencing of different phases can and should be customized to any specific project. In some cases, project teams may want to stay in the immersion and seeing phase for a longer period to deepen their understanding of the significance of different changes in the wider context. In other cases, the focus will be on collective action and the use of megatrends and visioning elements prepared by or obtained from third party sources will provide a sufficient basis for triggering creative thinking and collaborative innovation.

However, caution about fast futures processes is needed. Learning is painful, especially for established experts who are rewarded for knowing the answer rather than asking better questions. Furthermore, shared, societal learning requires immersion in often uncomfortable ideas – e.g. the future is never perfect! As such, we recommend that some elements of each of the building block should be retained in some way or another. We suggest that combining scenarios, visioning and value creation modeling helps to overcome the natural – and often disastrous – biases of projecting current conditions into the future and seeing only what we would like to see (Sommers, 2012).

Immersing: preparing the ground

In an on-boarding phase, delegates were invited to immerse themselves in the material provided in three distinct exhibition spaces, each of which reflected a different perspectives of time. By working iteratively with considerations of the pasts, present and futures of Europe, participants could break away from the dominant litany implied in the conventional framing of a history of Europe that starts only after the Second World War and is today largely characterized by the recent global financial crisis. By doing so, participants were able to develop a deeper shared understanding of challenges and to clarify actions they could take that would contribute to a better Europe.

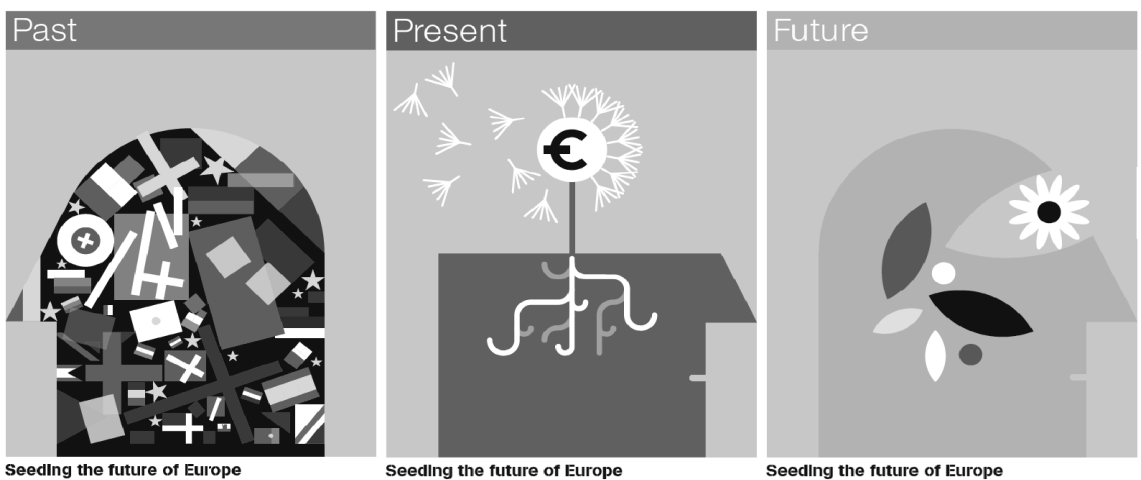


Figure 4. Posters of immersion spaces

The exhibit of the past was designed as a display of various maps and word clouds of key publications aimed at provoking new and insightful ideas about the long, diverse and rich history of Europe and to encourage reflections about how our

vision of history shapes our understanding of the present.

The exhibit of the present was designed as a forest of information, publications and broadcasts reflecting a space crammed with alternative perspectives, different opinions, contradictory certitudes, analysis and projections. The project team did not only want to expose the gamut of suggestions for the future, but also the sheer quantity of seemingly isolated efforts going into this by governments, businesses, foundations, think tanks, political parties, trade unions, and social movements. The question here was *“how can we see the wood for the trees and start creating a better future?”*

The exhibit of the future was a virtual greenhouse, empty on the first day, but populated with seeds – ideas for the future of Europe – by the end of the summit.

The pictures, artifacts, movies, and reports in these spaces were chosen by the facilitation team on the basis of a desk research in order to stimulate conversations. Furthermore, cultural probes provided by the participants in relation to the preparatory interviews were also displayed. Cultural probes are a very powerful way of obtaining information about people and their universe, perspectives and opinions, in the form of reports, headlines, clippings, collages, photos, etc.

The spaces were also designed to trigger “Aha!” (“Wow!”) moments and to raise certain “sacred cows”, “elephants in the room” or other “animals” in the participants’ minds. Whenever a picture or an idea on the walls of these exhibition rooms triggered a reaction, participants were invited to share their emotions and ideas with the group by using one of the specifically prepared cards.

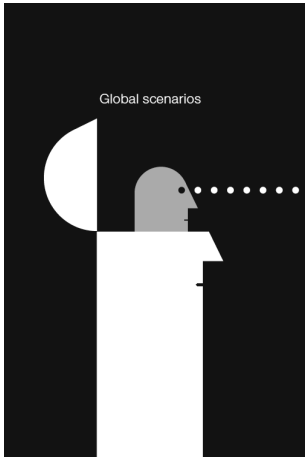
While discovering the spaces and exhibits, participants could also meet their fellow delegates and engage in conversations. They were invited to ask *“What is here?”* and *“Why are others here?”* At the end of the exhibits, delegates had the opportunity to visualize the answers to these questions on dedicated graffiti walls, independently or with the help of a graphic facilitator.

The immersion phase also aimed at presenting the metaphors of seeding and growing that formed the DNA of the process and, in turn, helped forge a new and shared strategic vocabulary that enabled more effective communication during and after the summit. Three different ways of developing “seeds for change” were introduced. Each mode was brought to life and described in a compelling story told by members of the core team during the opening dinner. The 3 modes of seeding were:

- **Hacking:** breaking into existing, encrusted systems, accessing spaces by circumventing closed systems, or using an anti-authoritarian approach to drive change without formal legitimization.
- **Mashing:** turning a combination of different existing or new ideas under specific conditions into powerful initiatives or projects that contribute to aspired changes.
- **Coding:** reinventing, refining, or enhancing the existing codes of conduct of an established system or organization, or questioning existing principles or rules by proposing new, more transparent, more inclusive, more effective, or fairer codes.

On the basis of the insights generated during the immersion phase, the next step of the project consisted of a set of interactive and generative dialogues aiming at identifying specific “seeds” – hands-on activities, initiatives and strategic agendas that could be sponsored by individual delegates or groups.

Seeing the present from the perspectives offered by alternative futures



Global Scenarios: What Future might come at Europe independently of its will?

Before turning to the co-creative sessions in order to answer questions such as “*where do we want to take the future?*”, the facilitating team considered that it was important to have a closer look at the external drivers that will shape our world in the years to come and address the future in a more passive way as “*where might the future take us?*”

However, this session was not so much a matter of describing or guessing the future itself, but rather of exploring different possibilities and see if our strengths and assets are adequate for dealing with these alternative futures. Thinking through different futures helps us to see opportunities that lie ahead and increase preparedness even for uncomfortable scenarios. And while there are no facts about the future, the influence of future assumptions in shaping our understanding of the present is real and cannot be dismissed. Therefore, this session emphasized on the value of learning with alternative futures, first by drawing on analyses of megatrends and existing sets of global scenarios asking questions such as:

- What contexts are coming at Europe from changes and expectations in other world regions?
- Given these alternative stories of the futures coming at Europe from the rest of the world, what do we need to be prepared for, whether we want it to happen or not?
- What would Europe need to be/do to be successful in any of those alternative futures?
- What seeds of change would help Europe prepare for each alternative future? What does this imply we need to be doing today?

Three groups – about half the delegates – looked at existing long-term scenarios, adapted from “The Oxford Scenarios: Beyond the Financial Crisis”³ and discussed what seeds of change would help prepare for the future in each of the two described scenarios (Health and Growth).

Going through a slightly different process, the remaining groups created scenarios based on six megatrends (global drivers of change) proposed by the facilitation team as a result of the preparatory research and interview phase. Those drivers were presented on visual driver cards providing concise written and graphic information about the different issues aiming to stimulate conversations among the participants and – through combination and creativity – come up with alternative scenarios in an inductive and creative process. After imagining a number of scenarios, the groups were invited to identify seeds of change that would be needed to cope with each of the developed alternative futures. It is important to stress that in the design of the global approach scenarios were used only as a means to an end,

namely the identification of initiatives for actionable change (seeds). In this respect, the development of scenarios was a valuable step in the process since it helped the participants to enter into a meaningful conversation about possible future contexts and discuss if Europe were prepared for them. However, the short timeframe for developing the *scenarios led to contrasted and normative scenarios (i.e. the future as “heaven” or “hell”)*.

Visioning and seeding a desired future



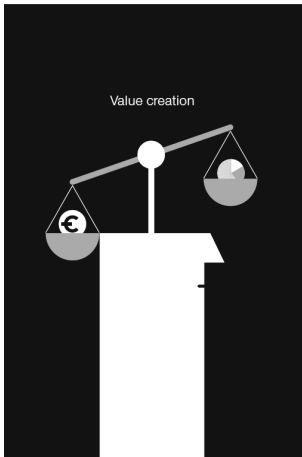
Vision to value creation: What future would we like to create?

Exploring possible future contexts then led to work on creating a realistic vision for the future. The key questions addressed in this phase of the summit were:

- What vision for the future do we collectively have?
- Does this fit with our values?
- What value(s) should we create? And for whom?
- How can we make progress to our desired future?
- What seeds should we plant now?

Using five different sources of value creation categories - natural, social, intellectual, human, and financial – delegates listed elements that would characterize a positive vision for Europe. The value creation categories were provided as input to the group discussions via specifically designed capital cards containing synthetic information about each form of value creation (definition, some key metrics, and quotes).

In a diverging-converging brainstorming and selection process, delegates filtered out a realistic vision for the future of Europe focusing on specific value creations that would drive the next step of the process.



Value creation to transformation: What transformation is needed?

To move from visioning towards a more concrete and systemic model of value creation, participants explored the transformations involved in catalyzing and sustaining progress.

To address those transformations, working groups of 7 were asked to use the CATWOE model developed by Checkland (1993). CATWOE stands for *customer* (the beneficiaries or victims of the system), *actors* (the person or persons who carry out the activities in the system), *transformation process* (the purposeful activity undertaken within the system), *Weltanschauung* (the worldview which makes this purposeful activity meaningful), *owner* (the person or persons who could prevent the activities from occurring), and *environmental constraints* (things which the system must take as given). Checkland suggests using this model to map out the necessary activities to

achieve transformations. Lang and Allen (2010) have also argued that designing a scenario project as a purposeful human activity using the methodology of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) helps to accommodate the various perspectives that exist within groups regarding the nature and intensity of turbulence and what is to be done about it. The synergies between Scenario Practice and SSM have proven very useful in this project.

The transformation discussions provided the catalyst for seeding the future of Europe and resulted in a number of concrete initiatives that were deepened in the next phase of the process.



given the opportunity to revisit exhibitions and review seeds that had been elaborated in the former sessions. Each participant was invited to identify the 2-3 seeds they really wanted to commit to and to champion those ideas in a “market of ideas”. To facilitate this self-organized process, A3 size paper copies of seed cards were available in order to help participants advocate their favorite seeds.

Small groups of 2-7 people were self-generated and met to discuss how to nurture the seeds and identify how they would like to plant and grow them. To that end, detailed seed cards were used in this working session to capture and share ideas.

The seed cards encouraged not only to describe the ideas but also to attend to what must be done to

Growing Europe into its preferred future : Market for ideas

Throughout the summit, the participants created a number of seed cards as well as collective initiatives for change. In this last step of the process, participants were

| The seed | Seeding the future of Europe |
|---|------------------------------|
| | |
| Your seed A description | |
| Soil What structure/organisation/carrier will best nourish its roots? | |
| Water/Rain What resources are needed for it to flourish? | |
| Sun What communication strategy will help it to grow? | |

help change happen. The sections of the seed card in addition to the seed itself were called “soil”, “water/rain” and “sun”. Soil represents the structure/organization or carrier that will best nourish the roots of the seed. Water/rain represents the resources that are needed for it to flourish. Sunlight refers to the communication strategy that will help this seed to grow.

At the end of the summit, participants were planting their seeds into a virtual greenhouse and communicating specific commitments to further nurture those seeds either on an individual level or through a collaborative project with fellow delegates.



Figure 5. The greenhouse populated with seedcards

Results: event outcomes and wider impacts

In a short burst of intensive activity on the last morning of the summit— similar to a “code-a-thon” (or Hack’athon or Hack’day) in the software development world - delegates created 78 specific “seeds of change” and made personal practice-oriented commitments for change.

Some seeds are more abstract, others are ready-made project proposals. Those seeds now need to be nourished in order to help Europe transform and grow into the vision highlighted at the summit. The seeds for the future of Europe can be grouped into four categories:

- **Reframing:** these seeds focus on the development of new narratives and policies regarding diversity, migration, identity, and solidarity, but also regarding wellbeing, consumption, corporate citizenship, and wealth. Examples of seeds developed in this category are the installation of a pan-European wide observatory on the (positive) impacts of migration in Europe, the proposition to install a Ministry of Creativity and Innovation in national European Governments, the installation of a European “Upper House” or the launch of a website that champions sustainable consumerism.
- **Reconnecting:** these seeds call for bold action to rebuild trust in democracy, (re-)discover European values and (re-)vitalize the so-called European peace dividend. Examples of initiatives developed in this category were the conduct of a democratic audit of the EU, the implementation of an Erasmus-like programme for activists, the integration of European civil education in national educational curricula or the realization of a study of the EU history via the

analysis of national representations of European history.

- **Unifying and harmonising:** these seeds include calls to further harmonize governance capacity and economic performance, to harmonise policies, tools, and rules to eradicate criminal practices, and to reinforce human rights practices and solidarity mechanisms. Examples of seeds developed in this category reach from the launch of a pan-European media programme targeted at the young generation of European citizens in light of the next EP election 2014, or the promotion of the debate on a new European model of development moving from a paradigm of “ever more growth” towards one of “higher standard of living and well-being”.
- **Creating degrees of freedom:** these project ideas seek ways to educate and empower citizens and consumers, provide open access to information (especially data), create transparency, secure citizen ownership of key public infrastructure, enable responsible immigration, leverage cultural diversity, and spur corporate innovation. Examples of ideas for new initiatives in this space range from the creation of an open web-based platform for the European public sphere using open data and crowdsourcing techniques to provide content about a large variety of aspects related to the EU, the development of a multidimensional campaign to reconceptualize European identity and highlight and stimulate diversity in Europe, or the implementation of a School for Creative Democracy focusing on empowerment, divergent thinking and working towards a more democratic and creative learning process.

Resulting from the summit, the European value proposition of this initiative’s group of delegates is about diversity, inclusivity, social creativity, and caring. There is a strong distrust towards large and established institutions and in the capacity of these institutions to be a force for the common good. The process highlighted that the focus by governments and businesses on the national politics and economics of Europe are seen as laudable but insufficient. Who is Europe for? What is Europe for? There is obviously an urgent need to grow a common vision that unites Europe and establishes the social bedrock for continued peace and prosperity. This vision must be coherent and act as a magnet in relation to the diversity of cultures that characterizes the richness and dynamism of Europe.

Discussion and Learnings

We live in a highly networked and participatory world. While the political-administrative side of united Europe seems paralyzed in crisis mode, players at all levels, institutions, corporations, non-profit organizations, interest groups etc. have been stepping up to suggest new pathways to the future. *“Two megatrends were reiterated during the conversations in the abbey: the quest for sustainability, and the quest for participation”*, summarizes one delegate who holds a high-level position in a governmental structure. Among the details of concepts championed were proposals for self-organization, for more participatory democracy, for sustainable foundations of wealth creation, as well as for societal inclusion and public sector transparency.

In this sense, participatory multi-stakeholder processes will become more important and there appears to be a need to develop approaches that open up the past and future and combine foresight with innovation to enable varied constellations of

actor-networks to collaborate more effectively in building a better future.

Based on the experience discussed in this paper, the authors propose a set of key learnings aimed at helping futures and collaborative innovation practitioners to avoid common pitfalls when designing and executing such a process. In our view, the conditions for success similar action oriented multi-stakeholder foresight initiatives include the following main elements:

An innovative and powerful foresight to action process design

The usual emphasis in looking forward is on learning about the future and guessing what's next based on a confident understanding of today's strongest trends. This approach presents the challenge of the future as a knowledge gap. To fill that gap, we usually extrapolate from the past and limit policy and planning to consideration of futures that are a continuation of historical tendencies.

However, we all know the dangers of driving forward whilst looking in the rear view mirror, especially in times when the need to look beyond the cone of possibilities offered by the past has never been more pressing.

Therefore, the design of the proposed approach of "learning with futures to create the future" integrates the different notions of the futures toolkit in terms of alternative scenarios (plausibility) and normative preferences (visioning and value creation models) aimed at providing a common ground for participants to start creating the desired future. To do so, we begin by asking:

- Where might the future take us? What are the futures coming at us independent of our will?
- Where do we want to take the future?
- How can we start creating the future today?

In this process, we forge our understanding by looking from multiple pasts and through the forest of the present in order to create the necessary insights that have the power to trigger actions.

The authors believe that the "learning with futures" approach presented in this article can help forge the holistic and shared understanding needed to address today's biggest challenges.

The challenge is in the process, not in the collaboration at the event itself

Multistakeholder settings tend to generate a high level of energy and mobilization just before and during the actual physical (or virtual) collaboration spaces (exploration, ideation, design). For a process design and facilitation team, the main challenge is rarely related to the co-production of the various stakeholders during the strategic dialogues, but rather to the creation of conditions for continued collaboration once the energizing event is over and participants move on with their lives.

But change does not happen overnight and for this reason the collaborative event has to be embedded into a continuous and carefully managed (meta)change process.

One way of dealing with the risk of a slow-down in the dynamics is to design the approach around two or more, shorter collaborative workshops, instead of a single event. In that way, the process design itself focuses on a process rather than

on an event-based project management. Only if such events are clearly defined as steps in an overarching process, the intended transformations can take form and develop over time.

Another important condition is the deep reflection and commitment of the project sponsor related to the use and support of the outcomes of the co-creation process. By sponsoring a foresight to action initiative such as the described case study, expectations are inevitably raised among participants in terms of further support for the developed initiatives. A project sponsor therefore has to be very clear about the commitments it communicates before, during and after the project in order to avoid disappointment and frustration.

Support and sponsoring measures can range from soft factors such as the proposition of the sponsor organization's image to brand the developed initiatives, the liaising of delegates to important networks and European stakeholders, easy access to convening power, contacts and infrastructures, etc. to more tangible contributions such as the development of a powerful communication and wider stakeholder engagement strategy, the creation of an interactive network or hub for ongoing collaboration and exchange of ideas, the provision of seed funding for specific initiatives, the integration of project ideas into the project sponsors' working programmes, etc.

Generally, there appears to be a kind of dynamics inherent to public multi-stakeholder agencies (administrations, think tanks, NGOs ...) that make funding of closed loop, project based initiatives with a clear end much easier than to support open loop, on-going and iterative processes with no clear end in itself. Also, public agencies and foundations tend to fund research rather than application, yet learning with futures cannot sequence them that way. Project sponsors should therefore start to think in slightly longer cycles in a "think-test-learn-adapt" approach committing to a clearly defined level of support over the entire process chain in order to move from a single loop towards a double or triple loop learning process.

A new era of fast, interdisciplinary and agile co-creation has begun

Finally, moving forward from the co-created seeds of change, the question is how to design and facilitate collaborative action over time in order to practically implement the identified initiatives.

Building on the co-creational elements of this process as a "code-a-thon" in collaboration, we suggest that the actual transformations and practical follow-up initiatives should also build on a similar DNA containing elements of co-creation, design thinking, rapid prototyping etc.

In this context, futures methodologies can be largely inspired by recent innovation processes and methodologies such as Agile/Scrum, SmartMobs, Hack'days, etc. In principle, those approaches involve a community of thinkers, doers, makers and tinkerers applying their skills and energy to accelerate the work of cause-led innovators and change makers. They are all about diverse groups of people collaborating together, working in new, faster, fun and better ways by supporting ideas and people that are leading the way to what a flourishing 21st century society might look like. The techniques applied try to solve challenges collaboratively – on and offline – through gigs or sprints (24 to 48hr think, hack, do creative

collaboration events).

Inspired from the software development and digital world, those methodologies will spread more and more into more traditional fields, they represent how stuff gets done by Generation Y, so we should get used to it, learn, and adapt.

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Notes

- 1 The article presents a specific case study that combines a variety of futures methods - scenarios, visioning and value creation modeling – to unleash an open-ended process of collaborative innovation and co-creation of new potentialities for Europe. This particular initiative was hosted by the Network of European Foundations (NEF), a Brussels-based platform of European public interest foundations.
- 2 UNIDO, Millennium Commission, etc.
- 3 The Oxford Scenarios, (2010). Beyond The Financial Crisis (2010, Institute for Science. *Innovation and Society and The James Martin 21st Century School, University of Oxford*. Retrieved February 25, 2014. <http://www.insis.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/InSIS/Publications/financial-scenarios.pdf>

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