

Mapping Planning and Engagement Systems Applied by Four Queensland City Futures Initiatives: How City Futures Tools and Methods Engage Across Multiple Contexts

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Abstract

This article maps critical factors of four influential South East Queensland City visioning and foresight initiatives conducted by the Cities of Maroochy, Logan, Gold Coast and Brisbane. A previous article in the March 2015 issue of Journal of Futures Studies gave a prima facie litany of the phases of the initiatives (including the Visions and Governance phases) – the current article deepens the analyses of the planning and community engagement phases. Conclusions drawn from the mapping and comparative analysis that are unique to this article include the value of applying futures methods and theory to explore phases of futures initiatives, the systems they operate within and their contexts.

Keywords: Futures studies, scenarios, CLA, community engagement, governance, city futures

Introduction

This article maps the processes of four Southeast Queensland city futures visioning initiatives. It identifies learnings and contributes to knowledge by focusing on the four cities' projects and initiatives, and discussion about contemporary theory as it relates to futures tools and methods.

Four South East Queensland councils in this study were responding to perceived challenges posed by rapid growth. The initiatives aimed to deliver, explore and shape the multiple opportunities anticipated from this growth and to protect against potential threats that unrestrained growth implied. These city futures initiatives explore imaginative city visions and themes, which, when implemented, would guide the popular development of city policy and strategies for issues such as cultural, transportation and sustainable economic development. The city futures initiatives were more about constructive longer-term topics and were less about particular city plans of issues in the business-as-usual scenario.

Three phases in this study represent firstly, the reason, problem or opportunity that the initiatives found, secondly, how the cities planned to respond and thirdly, how they engaged their communities. Each phase has its own characteristics and rationale. A forthcoming paper will apply Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to the planning and engagement phases of the four Southeast Queensland city futures initiatives as the councils attempted to prepare for and manage the opportunities and risks inherent to rapid growth.

Mapping of the Planning and Engagement Phases of Maroochy 2025 – A Visioning Journey

Pre-Planning Phase

What happened? The dominant neoliberal economic view was supporting the rapid sale of Maroochy Shire’s land lots. These sales were matters of controversy as the sale and subdivision of land worked at the level of economics for some individuals and families, but threatened the values that others believed characterised Maroochy. These challenges impacted on the established social and cultural identity of Maroochy.

Maroochy planned to create understanding of the local to global contradictions that took place by creating a long-term city vision between 2002 and 2005, called Maroochy 2025. It did this by firstly researching local and international planning frameworks and issues. Maroochy selected a 4-step model used by Steven Ames (1998) in Hillsboro 2020, Oregon, USA: The Oregon Model of Community Visioning. Maroochy enhanced the model using futures studies—planning and visioning concepts that included, for example, ‘The Futures Triangle’, ‘CLA’ and ‘Scenarios’. Additionally, ‘Anticipatory Action Learning’ was applied as a pivotal methodology to engage the inherent capacity of the community (Gould & Daffara, 2007, p.3). Maroochy 2025 became a clear opportunity for the community to answer the key question, “The future is changing! Do the citizens of Maroochy want to be passive receivers of the future or active co-creators?” (Gould, 2005). In putting their initial thinking into action, project leaders engaged in a pre-community consultation workshop in 2003 where they applied futures studies methods with “facilitators who were undertaking futures studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast” (Gould & Daffara, 2007, p.3).

In 2009, key learnings of *Maroochy 2025* (Gould, 2009), included:

- The community is highly responsive to Anticipatory Action Learning, particularly AAL workshops;
- There are gaps between foresight policy and local sustainability practices;
- Local government information was perceived to be focused on the near-term and not on the future aspirations of the community; and
- Futures Studies methods work well in visioning projects, particularly as they accommodate the shifts in planner assumptions.

What didn’t work well?

- The project team did not involve key opinion holders or decision makers consistently throughout the process;
- The project team did not communicate Action Learning or project design updates to consistently to the project sponsors;
- The project team engaged at the level of community empowerment while the project sponsors were only prepared for consequences of engaging at the level of consultation;
- The lack of cohesion about the outcomes of engagement, which were seen to be formulated ‘by others’;

- The lack of a Maroochy vision implementation committee; and
- The lack of formal implementation.

From my perspective as an experienced practitioner and independent observer, the most critical failure in this pre-planning phase from the above findings was the first one listed above. The consistent updating of leaders at each phase of the initiative is likely to have a positive effect on the other five listed actions. A recommendation is to clarify the value of visioning to council managers at each phase of the initiative by creating Action Learning questions mapped against the broad categories of a public sector planning framework (Luthy, 2011):

1. Emerging issues and preparing for future challenges;
2. Accountability of program values and contribution to the community;
3. Clarity of agency missions and long term goals.
4. Detailed reports of agency efforts towards continuous internal improvements.

Additionally, by inviting responses from leaders to a survey, the project team can discover pathways for creating and determining levels of collective ownership of the visioning process. For example, I map Luthy's (2011) administrative categories across CLA's layers to deepen and broaden Luthy's 'public sector planning framework'. I then reframe the deepened framework as a 'CLA visioning phases survey' for leaders to respond to at each phase of the initiative:

- Litany: What is the litany of emerging trends, challenges and opportunities for your branch's area of interest to 2050?
- Systems: What actions have the project areas and branches of the organisation delivered to map and understand the underlying values of the systems that support personal, branch and community systems for these emerging areas?
- Worldview: Who are the stakeholder sponsors and community and what would be the consequences for each group of stakeholders if their preferred futures unfolded? and if the stakeholders were involved at the level of 'consultation' and at the 'empowered' participation level?
- Myth Metaphor: What are the stories or myths, actions and measures that could help the Branches (or visioning project team) narrate their preferred futures?

At this stage, the objective is to understand consequences of business as usual futures. Further, if there is interest, signs of internal ownership and understanding of the expectations that stakeholder groups will have for the visioning project. It is recommended that the above survey be facilitated by a futurist who has the futures vocabulary and supporting methods e.g. firstly, workshopped examples of CLA, secondly, knowledge of alternative futures and thirdly, ability to craft survey results into a draft 'visioning report' of possible themes, their consequences and assumptions.

Among its many objectives, the initiative would involve community in the creation of a future scenario and vision for 2025, and develop an action plan and process to facilitate the delivery of alternative and preferred futures scenarios. For Maroochy, it was about determining agreed futures scenarios with the community (Gould & Daffara, 2007, p.2). An initial survey and report from staff about staff achievements and business as usual perceptions can be a useful starting point before workshopping alternative and preferred futures. A knowledge of that gap that may exist between desired and business as usual futures can help to motivate the development of alternatives for which systems should be supported and which should be transferred into preferred futures.

Maroochy's Planning Phase

Maroochy's official aims for the initiative were to reflect on learning from regional networking and research and to work with community members to increase their capacities to participate in

community visioning. Maroochy's worldview offered the mutual benefit of reciprocal effort where the Council would provide an inspired, creative and cooperative process. Prior to community consultation, city leaders would be involved in the co-creation of sustainable futures through local agenda setting and through the selection of community members to a community advisory committee. Maroochy's core solution was to include leaders and the community in the planning process. This solution was based on the principle that "community engagement approaches are inextricably linked to the issue of creating sustainable communities" (Gould, 2008, p.22). Training of stakeholders in futures tools and methods was found to have worked particularly well as did "the use of Community Taskforces and Community Action Planning Teams" (Gould, 2005, p.128).

On the other hand, the project had not continuously engaged the 'key opinion holders' and 'stakeholders' (Gould, 2005, p.129). A recommendation for future teams of visioning projects is to invite commitment from key stakeholders through a survey or Action Learning meeting at the Pre-Planning phase (as is shown above) and to extend that survey in the planning phase to identify who "has the social and political maturity or skills and expertise to mobilize others to join into the process" (Cumberbatch, 2015, p.66). The whole survey or workshop should be delivered again to a wider audience to determine emergent stakeholders, their concerns and their own proposed solutions, consequences, alternatives and desired futures. This approach can be supported by an Action Learning perspective, via a 'checklist' of questions including "are they aware of how Action Learning is different from taskforces?" and "are members interested in and committed to solving problems?" (Marquardt, 2011, p.200). Action learning should help to raise awareness about the components of "the six pillars of futures studies" in order to strengthen the enquiry process e.g. mapping, anticipation, timing, deepening, creation and transforming the future.

Maroochy's Engagement Phase

Application of futures studies, Action Learning and ongoing analysis of the initiative has ensured that Maroochy 2025 stands as an important and iconic example of visioning in the region. Futures studies methods had been applied. The most impressive from my perspective was gleaned from my attendance at the final summit with 300 community members. I attended the summit with staff and managers from Logan and the Gold Coast City Council. The core Anticipatory Action Learning tools and methods were delivered as part of a suite of project background papers, websites, surveys, workshops, school visits, youth visioning sessions, the task force, action planning groups, literature reviews, newsletters and media messages.

Engagement through Anticipatory Action Learning enabled the community to "contribute to the solutions and provide mutual support, advice, and criticism on the proposed solutions" (Gould, 2005, p.128). In fact, there was high support for the project generally, with a project evaluation concluding that there was strong community support and "almost a consensus (92%) that the Maroochy 2025 Community Initiative had been worthwhile" (Gould & Daffara, 2005, pp.67-81).

While Maroochy 2025 was not endorsed for implementation, many of the outcomes from Maroochy 2025 were taken up into the Sunshine Coast Community Plan: Our Vision for 2030 in May, 2011. The reasons for a lack of endorsement have been made clear by Gould, 2009. In my view, a range of issues remain submerged at the theoretical level, in terms of representative democracy futures and the gaps between foresighted visioning and sustainability futures.

Methods and tools that support 'environmental' engagements to sustain the visioning initiative's outcomes

How can local environmental visioning outcomes be sustained, or expanded after the initiative to address new or omitted views? What are the engagement methods and theories that support sustainability that can be mapped against the vision and outcomes of the city in times of eco-crisis? I discuss two approaches and underlying issues, next.

Firstly, a foresighted approach, uses co-created research to continue the work of the city vision after the futures initiative with partner institutions. This local area vision extension work would sustain a general local area vision by building trust and exchanging views between citizens, politicians, and academic researchers as part of a foresighted process. Community consultation of an Action Learning variety is better than traditional methods of government surveys because “surveys leave little or no room for the community to raise the questions or comments they might have on the subject under review” (Peterson, 2015, p.85). Working with reduced land lot sizes in Maroochy, for example, could require a combination of legal and council planner and political discussions.

Secondly, areas omitted from city visions and planning processes pose a risk that drives locals to seek “the expansion of democracy through the radicalisation of the idea of political representation of risk” (Eckersley, 2011, p.251). If a council leaves an area unaddressed then it should have general and alternative policies and plans in place to activate a restoration plan e.g. revegetation of forests or riparian zones and assistance with the management of revetment wall structures alongside natural waterways and revitalization of reefs such as the Great Barrier Reef. Such an expansion empowers the capacity of those in the local area to help council not only restore and enhance the environment proactively, but also retrospectively. Cultural values and knowledge of locals is critical, because “authority to represent nature might also derive from traditional, vernacular, or local knowledge (such as from Indigenous persons or local fishers) or from other forms of local knowledge or ‘moral capital’” (Eckersley, 2011, p.252).

Why are formal and representative visioning processes like Maroochy 2025 critical? Firstly, in Australia, “national diversity is singled out as the remaining form of pluralism with potentially disruptive effects for representative democracy” (Eckersley, 2011, p.171). The disruption is occurring because of a conjunction between the digital age, which supports diverse views, and the subject of visioning about environmental thresholds and neo-conservation versus neo-liberalism. Here, a submerged issue is that local views may not sit well with others’ perceptions of state or national views. This context of pluralist diversity makes necessary a rational and scientific context when conducting visioning. In the current digital age, with rapid change and population growth, devolution of power from central government to subnational authorities is being granted to create freedom to resolve local issues in a timelier manner. In this context, traditional community engagements may not lead to problem solving and foresight without there being a deep and abiding, or lasting, commitment to both the theory of futures studies methods and tools and the changing of practices to sustain the environment.

Mapping of the Planning and Engagement Phases of Logan 2026—City Directions

Logan’s Pre-Planning Phase

The initial task was to ask “a local government body, traditionally conservative and risk averse, to begin to think beyond conventional corporate norms” (McGowan & Russo, 2007, p.134). Logan Council’s ‘Pre-Planning Phase’ recognised community and environmental aims and now needed to “explore a completely new learning dimension” (McGowan & Russo, 2007, p.134). While Logan’s early direction was informed by networking with the South East Queensland cities of Maroochy, Ipswich, Beaudesert and Brisbane, the challenge in this phase of the project’s delivery also required local knowledge. Logan would explore challenges, identify preferred futures within council and ensure a continued sharing of opportunities and ownership between council branches.

From this early phase, futures studies training and methods “influenced the project methodology and the production of a set of alternative futures which would be used for community consultation” (McGowan & Russo, 2007, p.136). Six scenarios were created, beginning with a set of four focused

on 'Healthy and Active', 'Green and Sustainable', 'Create and Innovative' and 'Business as Usual'. Then, the worst-case scenario was argued for and against, and the best-case scenario titled 'The New Frontier' outlined four areas (McGowan & Russo, 2007, pp.138-139):

- Community: social equity, participation, inclusion, health and safety.
- Economic: investment, education and accessibility in matching education to business in programs.
- Environmental: planning and development controls and the preservation of natural environments.
- Governance: accountability, transparency, sound management, key factors in community engagement programs and informed e-government systems.

From an Action Learning perspective, it is essential to "take action and to learn from that action" (Marquardt, 2011, p.91). Logan staff had successfully achieved the initial phase of thinking beyond norms and had shaped inner and external views at the personal and organisational levels, by developing scenarios and strategies.

Logan would use the strategic perspectives as frames to map current issues and possible futures of the city, as part of the next essential Action Learning step of "testing, gaining support and resources, getting additional information and pilot testing" (Marquardt, 2011, p.91).

Logan's Planning Phase

Logan considered social, infrastructure and connectivity changes, as its population increased, and its housing sector and local job industries saw higher demands. Access to available services and the need to enhance family lifestyles were part of the city's agenda for change.

Issues about population change affecting cities such as Logan can be argued in terms of both size and quality of life for populations. At the global scale, a report to the Club of Rome, "Global Population Blow-Up and After" bookends population explosion issues, by saying that the current global population of 7.4 billion is slowing in its pace of growth. Populations are increasing by more than 80 million people per year. While increasing in the short-term, it is in decline when viewed over the long-term, as "the population growth rate reached its maximum in 2000". Further to this trajectory, "in 2025, the population is expected to be about 8 billion and by the middle of this century it is expected to reach 9.5 billion and then eventually level off at 10 to 12 billion" (Kapitza, 2006, p.32). This population stabilisation is known as the 'demographic transition'. According to the president of the Club of Rome, an outcome will be "a new period of global development that will be less violent and inequitable than the past, posing a new global agenda". In this view, "mankind will cease measuring its progress in terms of numbers (people, kilowatts, butter, guns, etc.) and start assessing it in terms of quality of life" (Kapitza, 2006, p.8). Will a slowing of population growth help a city like Logan to achieve a better quality of life?

A critical argument is that quality of life can be better off sooner if population growth slows, because a lesser use of fossil fuels and mineral resources will result in less pollution to Logan's air shed. If growth doesn't slow, Logan's residents and moreover Australian's risk worsening the following hazards which the respected Australian environmental scientist Ian Lowe names as 'existing and emerging threats' (Lowe, 2010, pp.97-98):

- Degradation of major river systems and water restrictions now semipermanent
- Global climate change is increasing water supply costs, causing heat stress and major weather events
- Introduced species, chemical use and habitat loss is accelerating with climate change
- The Great Barrier Reef, The Murray river system, and Kakadu wetlands are at risk with 90% of the wetlands to be lost with a 2-3 degree rise in average temperatures.

A further argument for the decline of population growth, is that the longer it takes for the population of earth to slow, the larger will be the population and the larger any resulting problem of over resource-use. Environmental degradation offsets are required. A reduction in climate change is possible from a re-use and a reduction of use of materials. Also, the increased efficiency in design of material products is necessary because “due to income growth and population growth, the amount of material consumed continues to rise” (Hajkowicz, 2060 Global Megatrends. p.129). Hajkowicz states that a redesign of materials can result in reduced use of materials e.g. aluminium cans have been redesigned to use less aluminum per can, saving tons of aluminium being wasted annually (Hajkowicz, 2060 Global Megatrends. p.129).

A slowing of population growth can cause problems as the population ages and the tail end of the population pays for a statistically higher number of people who are ‘officially’ unemployed. The number of people who are recorded as being unemployed however, does not include the total number of people over the age of 65 who are doing ‘invisible’ work in the economy. Another example of an offset to perceived GDP growth, is the amount of production that each individual is capable of. While Australians will be living longer, they will also be living stronger with more health and great opportunities for older Australians “to keep participating in the workforce” (Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations, 2013, p.viii). Rather than simply being part of the population explosion, a way forward is for Australia to facilitate work for those aged over 65. One way to facilitate the involvement of ‘invisible’ activities is via a City as Commons ethos where, “activities create exchanges or shared uses where desired, but they are not controlled directly by governments, although they can be facilitated by them, based on a pervasive agreement, guidelines, policies and practices” (Russo, 2016, p.109). The City as Commons approach legitimizes, informs and facilitates the networking of ‘invisible’ practices and extends to all age groups.

By sharing its knowledge and technologies and by role modelling a sustainable society, Australians could assist in the role modelling of other sustainable societies. A see-sawing of the strengths and weaknesses of arguments about a slowing of population growth and whether it results in a slowing economy is compounded by ‘futuristic’ workforce issues. These issues include machines and AI taking over labourer’s roles including food production (3d printing of food and machines now make entire dishes in the home from fresh ingredients) and Uber and quad copter taxi and courier services affecting local jobs. These services may make a slowing rate of population growth more viable, where less average unemployment results.

As growth fundamentally results in resource over-use with potentially chaotic effects, alternatives to growth can be considered via the following three governance scenarios for the future of Australia to 2050 (Australian Academy of Science, 2015, p.138):

1. greater emphasis on protection of, and respect for, the environment and on giving people the chance to develop their own potentialities at a smaller group level than in contemporary society (postmaterialism)
2. economic rationalism and marketisation (going for growth)
3. public investment to build neglected sectors of society (tax and spend).

Together, awareness of population impacts can help steer the creation of sustainable choices at the personal level and sustainable developments at the urban industrial level. Alternative scenarios can help to re-track actions toward a vision of sustainable urban futures.

What is Logan planning towards?

On the one hand the culture of Logan City is formatively a ‘social city’; seen as affordable and family friendly, enabling children to matriculate in schools of similar standards to those seen regionally. Students access the education and jobs they need as they grow and move around the

region. Local, State and Federal resources have combined to improve essential services in Logan including health and transport services.

On the other hand, Logan is a ‘social city’ by default. Environmentally, with 1,100 treasured parklands and Logan River’s waterfront parklands, green spaces and corridors are in abundance. Economically, there is no real single set of leading non-service area industries, leaving a clear choice of social and cultural development—enhanced by learning, technology, arts and sports—as potential drivers of Logan as a distinguished proactive and self-perpetuating city. People driving through Logan via its M1 Motorway would envisage a ‘residential’ city, aside from its Moss Street ‘motor culture’ driven by small vehicle and hardware businesses and franchised service centres. On the other side of the M1 is the Springwood commercial area, shopping centres, eateries and small vehicle businesses.

In the low socio-economic areas of central Logan, community development, and an active and healthy, learning city perspective could really change lives. The main issues are sociability and the tyranny of distance; disconnects for the ‘driverless’ and active transport commuters; a limited base and direction in ideas and wealth creation; and no creative industries hub i.e. local artistic scene driven by community enterprise. The solution may be building cultural responses via a vision from emergent needs, as “cultures aren’t fixed or fixable”, rather “they emerge from the edge rather than the centre”, and from the needs of community users (Westbury, 2015, Appendix. para. 3).

A concern is how to create a sustainable vision while encouraging systems to connect across political systems, education systems, cultural values, local networks, personal and business growth and outcomes. Another of Logan’s precincts could become the Meadowbrook health and knowledge precinct. Council is already proposing to bring to Meadowbrook the best in health/hospital care and services with a local university provider. What are the knowledge industries that could fit well in Logan? At the deeper systems level, teaching about hard and soft systems could be integrated into the following disciplines:

- Schools for digital technology, apps and software creation; and electrical, mechanical engineering. These disciplines and systems approaches are appropriate to Logan, as it is well positioned among powerful neighbouring cities whose growth will intersect by 2030. Sustainability knowledge through architecture, planning, design and land care are suited. The softer people skills and stakeholder collaboration skills that help to guide physical infrastructure outcomes from these disciplines are critical.
- Schools that focus on ‘soft systems’ approaches to health care (nursing and services for local hospitals); and arts and social planning could also explore deep futures knowledge, history and ethics giving context for existing industries and future commons and economic-cultural transactions. The ‘Creative-Cultural City’ scenario and vision is, in today’s Logan, restrained to its major Arts Centre, garages, a small university campus, health gymnasium centres and other sports venues and clubs. Expansion of health and knowledge precincts across more disciplines, creation of artistic scenes, particularly for the unemployed and unmatched, could be supported by networked online and offline/mobile specialist community managers. These would de-stigmatise unemployment service localities and lead to an ‘active and learning city’ ethos across the whole city, while learning from those fortunate to be living near health and knowledge precincts. Mobile learning mentors could help to bridge gaps between existing training providers, technical colleges and universities.

Creative opportunities can be introduced through opportunities for ‘start-ups’. Both schools of thought above would benefit from transport, additional cultural community, mixed-use venues, and ultimately, a local airport to assist commuting between capital cities by 2050, to international East-West localities. Airports would move Logan’s Futures from being desirous of transit oriented

designs based on local rail lines, to the Aerotropolis metaphor (Gleeson, 2013) – where the airport becomes an additional central city hub linking to global possibilities.

Logan’s Engagement Phase

Given the aforementioned need to consult deeply on social and cultural issues, how did Logan 2026 conduct its engagement? The delivery of the engagement phase was focused on ‘primary data sources’:

- special interest focus groups and values surveys;
- a digital arts competition;
- submissions and shopping centre open days on the draft vision; and
- community consultation of Logan community champions.

An outcome of this engagement was community interest in local culture and environmental protection. Regional growth had driven local preservation concerns and the city planned to “fulfil the desire to build on Logan City’s strong community spirit and protect natural assets such as parks and bushland”, (Logan City Council, 2006, p.3). Logan was unaware that in 2008 it would also welcome new suburbs from Gold Coast City Council and Beaudesert Shire, spreading thinner Logan’s ability to create a unified and strong community spirit.

Theoretical approaches for social engagements

What philosophies and tools could help Logan to achieve its ‘social city’ goal of building a strong community spirit? In many ways, social engagements use all of the traditional methods of engagement and more. “Social engagement requires the right supporting infrastructure and design. To be specific, it requires five characteristics: well visualized data, savvy intermediaries, a governmental platform that works, personalized responses from city hall, and resulting real-time information” (Goldsmith & Crawford, 2014, p.63). The difference is however, that social and futurist philosophies take a multi-cultural perspective and deep empowerment perspective that introduces Action Learning and person centered learning – working with the knowledge of locals through workshops and futures studies. In addition, social engagements deepen social rights to participation, participatory consultations from a developmental perspective, and broadening the scope of social city engagements to include policy and cultural strategy in a global context.

French philosopher Henry Lefebvre’s social science perspective identifies five rights leading to full participation. The rights are to information, to express ideas, to culture, to identify in difference (and equality) and to self-management. I link these to both infrastructure and policy engagements. They underpin citizen rights to change, make permanent and use the civic spaces that exist in cities (Gilbert, 2008). Further, it is the integration of emancipatory worldviews and lived city practices by working through the mystifications and hierarchies of city experiences that structure such practices (Kipfer, Goonewardena & Milgrom, 2008). The ‘working through’ of worldviews, city experiences and practices can be achieved by applying an Action Learning perspective of combining ‘programmed knowledge’ and ‘questioning’ to remove conceptual blockages and to create new knowledge (such as cultural exchange and sharing). Continuous reflection in this way converts new knowledge into outcomes (Marquardt, 2011, p.120).

Secondly, using Lefebvre’s suggested community rights requires community engagements that encourage cultural developments in cities. From Lefebvre’s perspective, engagement would emphasise negotiation and sharing of spaces as he “argues against the abstract space of capitalism, space that tends toward homogeneity” – he is in favour of the multiple possible uses of public spaces by diverse populations (Milgrom, 2008). This helps meet the changing needs of user groups. The challenge that cities like Logan face is in engaging stakeholders to unlock spaces even when

they are not in use. The problem is that “even the most prosperous Australian cities are full of empty blocks” that could be engaged into use as civic spaces for ‘cultural experimentation’ and “to play, to exhibit, to sell, to perform” (Westbury, 2015, Appendix). In this practice, foresighted Action Learning begins not with a two dimensional page but with methods of enquiry to identify, for example, preferred futures and then how futures can be achieved with current resources and to hand these strategies over to governance and community workers to help locals “to exhibit, hang out and discuss with relatively limited capital...to socialise and embrace or argue about ideas” (Westbury, 2015, Appendix).

Thirdly, as an outcome of Logan city’s engagement, it clearly states its interest in sharing in the global ideas market, requiring networking and reputation building: “There is a desire for Logan to move from being a city with regional significance in South East Queensland to a city that is recognised for its global connections” (Logan 2026, p.3)

From a futurist perspective, global collaboration is key to generating the knowledge capital required to conceptualise, re-model and continuously innovate for preferred futures in cities and for global understanding of preferred practices. This is because “today we are facing global, regional and local challenges unlike any ever encountered...now more than any time in history, it is a time to review the data, identify various futures and collaboratively chart a course towards those most preferred” (Luthy, 2011, Preface, Para. 1).

Who has the right to shape the city, particularly as devolution of power from State to local agencies is becoming more common? Henry Lefebvre argues “If you live out your life in the shared urban landscape, then you have a natural right to shape its future” (Montgomery, 2015). This is about citizens being empowered by the State and Local agencies to shape their local futures. What value is there in global visitors also contributing feedback to engagements about preferred city futures? One resolute perspective is that: “At the level of global exchange, what is missing is not globalisation, but is globalisation that is public rather than private, democratic not hegemonic, egalitarian rather than monopolistic” (Barber, 2013, p.11).

Mapping of the Planning and Engagement Phases of Gold Coast’s Our Bold Future 2037

Gold Coast’s Pre-Planning phase

Scoping for the initial phase of Our Bold Future began in December 2006. Community consultation was completed across nine themes and was regarded as a ‘resounding success’ after seven months of forums, web input and surveys by October 2008. This comprised 50,000 inputs and over 100 stakeholder meetings and workshops (Bold Future Advisory Committee, 2008, p.7).

Regional networking helped the city prior to official commencement of the initiative, to think regionally and not just locally; both in terms of the city futures initiative and in terms of where its opportunities for the future might be coming from. Drivers of the initiative included population growth, climate change and changes in the global economy (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, p.3). The seaside location of the Gold Coast had, as its environmental concerns, climate change and sea level rise. Gold Coast was concerned about social issues such as an ageing population and the need to sustain its role as a recreational city. The Gold Coast needed long-term planning to identify opportunities for sustainable growth of its employment sectors. With a projection that its population of 491,000 would double in 50 years, it aspired to being more like capital cities including Brisbane. A key driver of the initiative was “managing our city as we mature and grow to a city twice our current size” (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, p.11). The basic problem with this argument is that from the outset, the Initiative was attuned to continued growth. A long-term futures initiative should create alternative models, for other potential outcomes and their consequences. The planet has finite

resources and yet the city of Gold Coast is not prioritizing population growth offsets. This may be because the city sees itself as a tourist city promoting ‘attractiveness’ of the city as its aim, rather than sustainability.

Linear city issues such as transport and mobility were secondary to seeing a grand narrative for the future across all of the city’s bigger, more visible issues, making softer social issues important, but even less of a focus. Perhaps the real question for the Gold Coast, is how to promote tourism and its affordable relaxed lifestyle at the same time as benefitting more of its community and environment, for the long-term.

Gold Coast’s Planning Phase

Staff performed well with respect to traditions, interests and hopes of stakeholders. They aimed to ensure success; face the unknown and a common future; be visionary; align actions and plans; partnerships; and consider further actions. The official view was that The Bold Future visioning project was established to provide the overarching strategic vision and action statements for a sustainable and successful city and to inform the direction of the other components of the Bold Future program (Bold Future Advisory Committee, 2008, p.5).

Gold Coast’s planning processes focused on co-operation between Branches, including managers who had not traditionally worked so closely. New opportunity, trust and responsibility for the future of the city were shared. The city emphasised positivity in how much had already been achieved with the help of the community, and the desire to build the community ever stronger.

Plans for the initiative included the following requirement set by council: “Formulate robust plans that all the city’s stakeholders know and understand; develop partnerships to deliver those plans; and consider further actions to lead the planning and delivery of our city’s future” (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, p.11).

Closing the gap between the ranks made it possible for cross fertilisation of ideas to emerge into the planning of the initiative, creating teamwork and a willingness to succeed. The Bold Future Advisory Committee (BFAC) received the advice from internal and external consultants who provided research and reports. The Committee “considered a number of best practice research reports on each of the themes being consulted upon” (Bold Future Advisory Committee, 2008. p.7).

Gold Coast’s Engagement Phase

The executive view was of “engaging with our local community in a more genuine, meaningful and productive way...openly communicating with our community and enabling our community to contribute to the planning for the city’s future” (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, p.3). Engagement methods included 19 city and staff forums on a single theme; six general forums on all themes undertaken by schools, tertiary institutions, peak body organisations and interest groups; surveys distributed using meetings, mail outs and the ‘boldfuture’ website; and 28 community reference groups via facilitated meetings on all themes with approximately 300 participants. A total of 11,019 survey responses were received.

Anyone could attend the Bold Future forums and speak openly to help imagine preferred integrated futures. By representing specific themes, it was hoped that attendees would be knowledgeable about themes and there would be cross representation of groups who were mainly interested in other themes. The result would be an integrated discussion about the best interests of the futures of the Gold Coast. This would create an atmosphere where creative suggestions would emerge. It would allow council experts from particular disciplines to attend and provide the community with a presentation about trends and issues for each theme.

Community engagement across the initiative represented an advance in practices for the long-term in the city. The aim that would embed these experiences as learned practices was the

creation of “a framework for ongoing engagement between residents, community groups, industry and elected representatives working in partnerships to create that future” (Bold Future Advisory Committee, 2008, p.2). Such a framework would be representative of all demographics, expert input, empower communities and would clarify hopes for an enhanced future city. What were the key engagement outcomes from Our Bold Future?

Theoretical approaches for an ‘engagement city’

The outcomes that follow as primary objectives for the Bold Future Advisory Committee (BFAC) show that while there is strong interest in economic development in the city, there is underlying interest in the development of the city as a networked and ‘engagement city’.

It was hoped that the community engagement process would “engender a greater degree of trust and foster a shared sense of responsibility for the future of the city” (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, pp.3). A change in psyche built on future generations could bring the required solutions and critical mass of support from community and both sides of government. During the Advisory Committee and during the councillor city future planning workshop programs two drivers became “abundantly clear” as being key to the city’s engagement futures:

- the need for the broader community to understand, engage, own and be part of the change to deliver a more sustainable future for the city; and
- the special role that council staff have, as skilled, informed and committed council officers delivering on the vision, and as active community members, able to promote, share knowledge and demonstrate *Bold Future* principles (BFAC, 2008, p.10).

The BFAC called for new ways for delivering community engagement, more often and in a more open and transparent manner, adopting more of a partnering model/approach with the community with respect to the way the Gold Coast would collectively plan, resource and respond to challenges that the city faces into the future.

The key element of the BFAC’s recommendation was “the establishment of a ‘household panel’/ community reference group to provide ongoing and regular public engagement that is both broad and targeted with regard to key issues and challenges facing the city” (BFAC, 2008, p.11).

In the Office of the CEO, City of Gold Coast, a community consultation policy, consultancy panel, consultation reports and community consultation portal were developed to engage local communities. The portal is active today via the website gchaveyoursay.com.au. It includes a randomly selected and representative ‘household panel’ who respond to survey questions independently of city surveys that are run simultaneously. This is a new form of online reference group that might be described as being well beyond ‘a synchronous conversation’ that works with multiple social media network features such as working with shared documents, activity streams, social sharing, small group conversations and multi-media blogs (Hansen, Schneiderman & Smith, 2011). The online forum preserves the anonymity of participants, allows education and refreshes panel members over time.

An additional key action would be that community consultation is responsive to the needs of people from the Gold Coast’s culturally and linguistically diverse community and people with disabilities (Bold Future Advisory Committee, 2008, p.10). This action was particularly supported by the Mayor of the Gold Coast during the term of the initiative, Mayor Ronald ‘Ron’ Clarke.

Theoretical approaches for economic engagements

Mayor Clarke’s vision for the city emphasised family friendly culture, however the BFAC report about the initiative identified conflicts and tensions between participant perspectives. These were “tensions that needed to be addressed in the Bold Future vision e.g., economic development versus environment: Respondents saw a need for development to cater for population growth, but not at the expense of the environment” (Gold Coast City Council, 2009, p.23). While development

without environmental costs may not be possible, actions that compensate or offset environmental losses create sustainability. The issue is partly one of recognition of the value of environmental heritage and is also one of transparent action to prevent climate change. Further, presenting a model and status report that shows how environmental offsets sit alongside ongoing challenges to the environment would be helpful. This would make transparent a fuller picture of the city's environmental status in line with growth objectives and global problems such as the city's contribution to climate change actions. The reason for proposing a model together with a status report, is partially because more than 15,000 people are coming to the city each year, meaning that its population will double by 2050 and a virtual model could help qualify internal and external changes to the city. The City of Gold Coast does not present a 'status of the city's environmental quality report'— showing trends on animal habitat growth or decline, or projections for the long-term to 2050 to match its intended population growth. Further, what are presented by the city online, are environmental reports that fragment a whole of city environmental long-term view. For example, the city has a 2009-2019 Conservation Strategy which has not been updated since the Our Bold Future Initiative as it still refers to the Initiative for guidance. It has a natural areas and events catalogue. Thirdly, it presents restoration codes split from guidelines and three manuals (Chenoweth EPLA and Bushland Restoration Services (2012)). In September of 2016, these are the city's outwardly facing documents i.e. they are the main form of information the community is able to engage with online, at goldcoast.qld.gov.au/environment/environment-facts-figures-267.html.

The question still remains: what is the net effect of population growth today and how can the city's environment be sustained into the future? Clearly, if the city's main website featuring its environmental assets makes absent the trajectory of land use and patterns of land clearing, a future of growth without an environmental expense is not possible. The level of endangerment of the city's natural assets including its marine precinct is disconnected from its main thinking about conservation, restoration and land use. A single virtual model or an online document that provides an updated 2050 view of environmental context and hopes, is a gap in the program and could help raise awareness of a balance of actions, offsets and consequences.

I frame the following discussion in terms of generating a macro, meso and micro model of environmental futures in cities.

Broader than the city itself, Macro STEEPLEF criteria fit within different political (left/right) cycles, phases of the economy (boom/bust) and cultural norms set by particular ages (industrial/machine-age/digital) and cultural attitudes (economic hierarchy, social empowerment and economic sustainability). These dualities and contexts fit within the six pillars of futures studies' 'timing the future'. Wider contexts influence the viability of outcomes but are not sole deterrents or encouragement: more specific measures of appropriateness are required.

Meso alternative economic engagement approaches understand the subject of the engagement in terms of its value at the level of the city itself. An Urban Metabolism Model (Kennedy, 2007) is a study of the flow of growth and energy consumption in the city that can help the city to model its own actions; its costs, wastes and other consequences of delivering and maintaining such actions.

The micro cycle engagements in cities are concerned with avoiding the tensions of immediate debates about social or environmental problems. Micro cycles focus on the inner city and inner organisational tensions caused when project leaders only consider the 'technical and financial criteria' and are confronted by the community's criteria of 'social, economic and political' (Abbott, 1996, 1. 3658), and in fact, any of the other STEEPLEF criteria. Project leaders must come to engagements prepared to discuss, or to facilitate enquiry, about these other criteria. A specific economic engagement action is to engage the community using futures methods and tools and give the results to project teams to consider two essential comparisons: firstly, "the quantitative data of costs and specifications" and secondly, "the social and value-based criteria inherent in decision making" (Abbott, 1996, 1. 3659). This would create in a fuller context, a STEEPLEF engagement process.

The above macro, meso and micro approaches imply a need for a wider, more rational context in visioning and in engagements; one that reflects values and preserves the environment along with our own planetary life systems, e.g. clean air, food, water, inspiration, ways of life and futures. This context would also consider the vast array of engagement methods and their role in shaping cities according to inner context, inclusive of future challenges.

Mapping of the Planning and Engagement Phases of Our Shared Brisbane— Living in Brisbane 2026

Our Shared Brisbane – Living in Brisbane 2026: Pre-planning Phase

On the surface, Brisbane’s central business district and inner suburbs were affected by road congestion, recreational and centre infrastructure challenges. As a riverside city, it also has climate change concerns. Most importantly, its significant stakeholders wanted to see expansions in line with visible housing and population growth. Community values identified to help guide the planning of the initiative included: “Lifestyle and community, recreation, a connected Brisbane, living in a progressive and prosperous City, safety and security, eco-friendly environs, green and shady, and a City with character” (Brisbane City Council, 2006, pp.4-8). In terms of processes, early involvement of international futures thinkers helped, through training sessions, to exchange and balance preferred approaches with State legislation, local thinking and the values of city leadership. For example, while the Queensland Government’s legislation to build a sustainable future for the region empowered the initiative, pre-planning processes were taken to the next level after considering the local vision Living in Brisbane 2010, which was developed in 2000/01. Feedback from executives about pragmatic outcomes re-focused the initiative. Then, the initiative was guided by the need for the Plan to consider issues of “water shortages, fluctuating fuel prices and climate change” and accelerating economic growth of global regional neighbours (Brisbane City Council, 2006, p.2). While all stakeholders were hopeful of seeing better connectivity in the inner city, other social issues surrounding the city would require significant work. Here dreams of inner city infrastructure could potentially detract from hopes for social inclusion.

Brisbane’s Planning Phase

Brisbane’s first city futures initiative was delivered five years before. It was now planning to include more internal leaders as champions and to progress its planning process rationally, through committees of all levels, to improve upon its initial success.

Futures studies methods and tools helped Brisbane to show respect for the city’s past context, current needs and alternative futures policy developments. Methods included an Action Learning approach that would allow its stakeholders to recommend appropriate plans for the delivery of the initiative.

The city pre-planned an elaborate initiative appropriate to a capital city. City leaders required that it produce more tangible outcomes than its earlier attempt. The approach progressed to planning for wider participation and deeper investigation of feedback by city leaders.

Table 1. *Brisbane’s Planning Phase Unique Critical Factors*

Workable Factors	The second time planning a long-term futures initiative created clarity of purpose, outcomes and evaluation. Brisbane planned the combining of emerging issues identified during training, executive and councillor workshops, with community values from neighbourhood planning workshops.
Unworkable Factors	While futures had become ‘accepted’, there was still the need to provide for stakeholder involvement in the planning process.
Recommendation	Create multiple external perspectives representative of different sectors on factors of the process, emerging issues and grand challenges.

Brisbane reported that they were “alert to the urgency in tackling our challenges if we are to look after our assets for the benefit of future generations” (Brisbane City Council, 2006, p.9). More effort was applied throughout the planning phase by working with internal stakeholders via executives, politicians and the involvement of 16 vision champions. External stakeholders were not co-leaders at this stage of the initiative.

Brisbane’s Engagement Phase

Our Shared Brisbane engaged city leaders and community to consider how to embrace better alternative futures, e.g. eco-friendly travel, technological innovation and education about emerging futures. Engagement methods included surveys, postcards, children’s artworks, youth visioning, values workshops, neighbourhood planning collaboration, website, school visits, focus groups, cultural group visits, youth online forum, Mayors’ youth committee, video and staff workshops. Champions communicated and recruited knowledge leaders into the initiative during the project. The CEO was closely involved throughout the initiative including with the evaluations of the final vision arising from local area tours with community stakeholders. The CEO’s tours helped with transparency needed at this final stage of the initiative when many had already given feedback.

Table 2. *Brisbane’s Engagement Phase Unique Critical Factors*

Unique critical success factors	Firstly, technical futures tools were brought to youth through methods such as scenario development workshops. Secondly, other Cities were involved in background research and training. Thirdly, a goal of a ‘rigorous and detailed’ vision was aimed for.
Unmet engagement targets	Capital infrastructure was necessary; however, engagement with stakeholders about this area which led to infrastructure gains overshadowed substantial engagement in the social sustainability arena.
Recommendation	A results oriented approach was desired. Protect ‘softer issues’ through ongoing public ‘futures refreshers’ that build commitment to principles of diversity and sustainability. Show on the council portal a set of results from engaging the less empowered sectors e.g. disability, Indigenous, immigrants, youth, social security and seniors, eco friendly. The value of these groups can be recognised as being part of, clients of, co-creators of and co-located with city infrastructure and other empowered STEEP areas.

In 2006 Brisbane conducted community and employee consultation. In-depth feedback was gathered from 150 participating employees and 18,500 community members. “More than eighty percent of participants agreed on what they valued most about living in Brisbane” (Brisbane City Council, 2006, p.3).

A variety of futures methods and tools were implemented. The fact that the CEO took a direct interest in the initiatives’ outcomes by touring the city and visiting particular neighbourhoods mitigated the struggle between less influential groups and greater economic powers. When I interviewed Jude Munro¹, former CEO of Brisbane in July, 2016, about what she sees as important for the future of Brisbane today, she said:

“Better legislation is called for to help cities to plan with foresight, but also city councils should be trialing a range of other measures being employed successfully in Australia. For example, having a community coalition of local leaders like the one the City of Logan is building can have positive insights for local governance teams to consider. Also, a dedicated team like the urban renewal team² in Brisbane in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s could help re-establish principles of local area planning in cities of southeast Queensland”.

Clearly, a range of systems are needed to help cities to align their preferred futures with changing contexts.

Conclusions

In the above discussion, transcendence to sustainable cities is not created by leaders working alone. Leaders must engage stakeholders, staff and communities in a continual process of action learning applied to the components of “the six pillars of futures studies”. Transcendence across local to global communities is then made more meaningful as challenges and opportunities can be more easily understood e.g. in light of the knowledge of population growth and stabilization arguments and sustainable future markets. Digital engagement is one way of connecting across boundaries, as is planning for the long-term and acting today via face-to-face futures methods and tools. At the global level cities can borrow from other cultures to refresh their own thinking and reframe ‘the western great knowledge transcendence process’, through challenges of ‘the scientific method of experiment’, ‘evolving scientific frontiers’ and ‘new innovations’ (Jin, 2015, p.234). Transcendent futures for cities are more likely to occur through a series of evolving, transparent and alternative futures that recognise how social co-creation liberates STEEPLEF sustainability. They would beckon a balance in planning and engagement that creates sustainable and socially cohesive outcomes from temporal, sectoral, evolving, adaptable and innovative practices. They would provide engaging futures that are facilitated through foresight and that are mapped through simple models that help cities to appreciate the fullness of their social and economic trade-offs while in search of economic satisfaction.

In providing a third space for foresight and innovation in cities, planning and engagement processes must humanise the mass engagement processes of the future. Here a third space is not only about the preferred future, sustainable futures or cultures that are ‘other’ to the ones we are familiar with from our daily experiences. The third space is about inner spirituality and mapping with our moral compass, our growing knowledge of consequences of our combined behaviours and the changes we need to make to align ourselves and our cities with sustainable futures. This third space is about personal transformation and it is about how we shape our daily lives to help shape our cities’ futures.

For planners: a critical analysis of city visions, assumptions and consequences occurs in real time from the moment projects are created and adopted around land-use and infrastructure planning. While some cities emulate other cities with their visions, if they don't offer soft and open services, they may be regarded as empowering the elites without consideration of 'softer' consequences and thereby further entrenching power imbalances in cities. Urban observatories and labs of the future must be able to explore and make sense of macro city data sets by comparing them to local data sets and hopes for the future.

For executives and administrators of engagements: By using face-to-face methods, visioning processes are able to help community members to slow down, in order to speed up more successfully later. By conducting workshops with stakeholders from multiple sectors, for example, time can be afforded for reconnecting to a range of deeper values, in a space that allows time for joint pathways to be developed. These deeper forums are the important platforms that enable fast-speed data streams to be shaped and better used as human-centric systems.

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Notes

1. Jude Munro, former CEO Brisbane City Council, telephone correspondence, 22 May 2016
2. Information about the first twenty years of Brisbane's Urban Renewal Taskforce is available here <https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/3245>

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