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Imagine Ahead, Plan Backwards: Prospective Methodology in Urban and Regional Planning

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Imagine ahead – plan backwards: Prospective methodology in urban and regional planning.

Elzbieta Krawczyk and Professor John Ratcliffe

Introduction

Today, half of the world's population lives in cities and the number of urban dwellers constantly increases. Cities are being recognised as a leading theme of the 21st century and a key aspect of the world's future. In the modern world, shaped by rapid technological advancements, expanding globalisation, profound cultural shifts and new economic trends, cities play a central role. They are the nucleus of human activity, frontiers of progress and engines of economic growth. Hence, there is an ongoing effort to ensure their prosperous and sustainable development alongside the provision of good living conditions for all their inhabitants.

Contemporary cities struggle with a whole range of problems mainly arising from an inability to cope effectively with consequences of global and local change and the extreme complexity of urban systems. It is being increasingly recognised that urban planners and policy-makers lack an effective future-oriented approach that would enable them to anticipate future transformations, effectively prepare for their consequences and tackle the complexity. Such an approach should also assist them in shaping the future according to the shared values and wishes of society.

This paper arose from the postgraduate research into the application of futures methodologies and techniques in urban planning. The discussed research addresses a strong need for a major shift in the way of thinking and acting about the future of cities, a shift from the traditional mind-set to a more imaginative, innovative and inclusive approach. The study involved the examination of the urban planning processes in Dublin (the main case study city) and urban planning initiatives employing futures methods in Dublin and other cities, such as Lyon, Bilbao, Barcelona and Vancouver. The paper draws on knowledge built upon both a broad documentary research and the extensive primary data generated during the study. The first part of the paper discusses the general situation of cities at the beginning of the 21st century, contemporary urban planning and its challenges. It also identifies the main weaknesses in urban planning's approach towards the future, which could be addressed by a suitable futures methodology. The second part presents the main outcome of the study - the futures methodology *Prospective*, adapted and developed in order to be used in urban and regional planning processes.

PART 1

Cities today

In the year 1900 only 14% of people lived in urban areas. As a result of intensive urbanisation processes in the 20th century the population of cities rose to 47% in 2000 and it is expected that in 2030 it will reach 61%. It is also predicted that almost all of the future population growth will take place in the urban areas, mostly in developing countries (UN 2002). It is

virtually certain that the future of civilisation lies predominantly in cities. But the question remains as to what the cities of the future will be like.

Cities today are extremely dynamic and complex multidimensional systems that are globally connected due to the process of globalisation and the progress of communication technologies. Change, of course, has been the characteristic of cities since their inception. Traditionally, it is observed through the related processes of accretion, addition and demolition (Hall 1998). However, nowadays changes occur more rapidly and simultaneously. They are brought about by internal and external forces (OECD 1994), of which external drivers, such as globalisation, technological progress, economic and social trends, are often more powerful and more difficult to deal with as cities have little control over them. Urban environments are formed by a number of interacting dimensions: physical, social, cultural, political and economic, each of which consists of countless interconnected elements. Interactions and relations between dimensions and their parts make cities extremely complex. Additionally, complexity is growing as the pace of change accelerates.

Over recent decades, more than ever, cities became globally connected. The information revolution, preceded by the advancement of communications and transport technologies, enabled global networking based on the exchange of goods, services, information and labour. Consequently “cities worldwide are increasingly networked in complex systems of global interaction and global interdependence” (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000:7). As a result of globalisation events, decisions and actions occurring in one part of the world have important consequences for societies and individuals in other parts. This increases complexity even further and makes it even more difficult for urban planners and policy makers to understand the internal and external interdependencies of urban systems.

Contemporary cities struggle with a whole range of problems that are predominantly the result of an inability to deal effectively with the consequences of recent trends and events. The main problematic areas are identified as follows:

- **Economic growth.** Continuous structural changes in manufacturing and services sectors combined with global competition put major strains on the economies of countries and cities. Many urban regions struggle with high sectoral unemployment and lack of financial resources for the development of necessary infrastructure and for tackling social and environmental difficulties.
- **Social development.** Social exclusion, one of the most severe urban problems, is related to income distribution. It manifests itself through, amongst others, poverty, crime and drug abuse. Another problematic aspect of social development in many cities is the integration of immigrants representing different races, cultures, and religions. In the long-term the aggravation of social problems can lead to public unrest and the break down of law and order.
- **Environmental quality.** Deterioration of the natural environment at the local and global scale is visible in various forms of pollution, the depletion of natural resources, the degradation of landscape and climate change. It has long-lasting consequences for the quality of life of people in cities and rural areas. Cities are the key factor in improving the quality of the natural environment.
- **Urban finance.** Many urban problems are related to the lack of sufficient financial resources, which is usually a result of a combination of a weak economy and inappropriate management of existing resources. Lack of sufficient funds is an important limitation for the development of necessary infrastructure, such as transport and communication facilities, environmental protection services and social amenities.

- **Governance.** Cities are a difficult challenge for their leaders and administrators, be they at local, regional or national level. On one side, the demands placed on cities and their governments are increasing; on the other, many urban regions are faced by the failure of local democracy, citizens' apathy and conflicting political interests. Present urban management approaches and mechanisms often fail to deal effectively with these challenges. (OECD op cit, Hall and Pfeiffer op cit, Ratcliffe 2001).

Contemporary urban planning and its challenges

A key function of urban planning is to make decisions in the present that will direct future activities in a way that will result in the creation of cities that are economically thriving, culturally vibrant, socially cohesive, tidy, green and safe, and in which all citizens are able to live happy and productive lives (Hall and Pfeiffer op cit, Myers 2001). Following this definition and numerous others, many would argue that the future is a key concern of the planning profession (Myers op cit). Yet, for many years urban planning has been mainly focused on shaping the physical form of cities and the provision of necessary services often overlooking its future dimension (Isserman 1985).

This situation began to change in the early 1980s, when American and Canadian cities, such as Tennessee, Quebec, Washington, Oregon, and others, started to use visioning method to develop images of the future (Shiple 1998). These images "served as goals or guides for planning decisions" (Shiple 2002:7). An increased worldwide interest in the future dimension of planning has been observed during the 1990s and the early 2000s. There has been an 'explosion' of various projects and exercises applying strategic planning and various futures methodologies in order to develop future strategies, visions and plans that would help urban territories to tackle their present problems and ensure a prosperous future.

A number of reasons can be listed to explain this growing interest in the future oriented planning. Among them are:

- **Challenges posed by contemporary change.** Healey et al. (1995) points out that contemporary processes of change are characterised by instability, disruption, rupture, conflict, break ups and complex and adverse effects of transformations. The forces of change pervade transversely through all dimensions of society, reconstituting previous relationships between the economic, political and socio-cultural systems. Changes taking place in one dimension have repercussions for all other areas. Consequently, the challenge to urban planning is to cope with, adapt to and make sense of these changes (ibid).
- **Competition between cities and urban regions.** One of the factors, which has had profound effects on the urban development, is the process of economic globalisation (Thornley & Rydin 2002). Due to the trade liberalisation measures and rapid technological changes, which have been transforming the relations between production, distribution and consumption, the national governments have a decreasing number of tools for intervention into their economies. As the competition between cities and urban regions seem to have become the main determinant for the development of urban systems, (Brotchie et al. 1995, Kresl 1995, Cheshire and Gordon 1995, EC 1999, Albrechts et al. 2003, Van der Berg et al. 2004 and others) the role of regional and urban governments in shaping the future of their territories is growing. (Kresl 1997).
- **Sustainability agenda.** An important driver behind many future-oriented actions and projects are environmental concerns both globally, i.e. ozone depletion and global

warming, and regionally and locally, i.e. flooding, desertification, air quality, water resources, waste management and other.(Thornley & Rydin 2002).

- **Urban governance.** Changes in the financing of the local government, following reduction of national and local budgets, led to a search for new forms of financing, such as joint financing among public institutions and between public and private bodies (PPPs). Also new forms of multilevel governance appeared as a result of changes in the government structures.(Albrechts et al. 2003).
- **Other urban challenges.** Cities also need to anticipate and respond to the opportunities and threats arising from social and cultural transformations, demographic change and accumulation of social and environmental problems. In the face of globalisation and European integration they often try to re-establish their local and regional identity and to create their new image.(Albrechts et al. 2003, Van der Berg et al. 2004).

Recognition of the challenges discussed above prompted numerous cities and urban regions to employ various forms of strategic planning and other future-oriented approaches, such as foresight and Prospective, in order to respond to these challenges, tackle their existing problems and create better futures. Parrad (2004), who reviewed various projects representing futures thinking in European cities, has identified four different types of exercises: 'strategic planning' activities, 'strategic competitiveness' projects carried out in order to increase the economic competitiveness of cities and their regions, 'metropolitan projects' and exercises driven by the agenda of 'sustainable development'. The reviewed projects vary as they refer to different traditions, are set in different local contexts, have different motivations and objectives, use diverse methodological approaches and look at different time horizons from short to long-term. Yet, the reasons behind these ventures are quite similar: the pressure for cities to position themselves within the local and global context, a need to improve their competitiveness, attractiveness, quality of life and reorganise and improve their governance systems. The examples of these European cities and many others worldwide demonstrate a strong need for futures thinking to be incorporated in urban planning processes as well as a need for a suitable futures approach that would facilitate it. As Parrad (op cit.) has pointed out: "...they would gain from using more formal methods for futures thinking" as "most of them are based upon informal approaches and they often have a hard time overcoming the difficulties arising from their innovative dimension."(ibid:12).

The main weaknesses of current planning's approaches towards the future

As interest in the future dimension of planning has been growing in the last 15 years or so, the deficiencies of the urban planning approach towards the future have been increasingly recognised and debated. The main criticism of planning's approach towards the future is related to:

- **Deficiency in dealing with complexity and uncertainty of change.** Contemporary cities continuously undergo rapid, profound and unpredictable changes (OECD 1994). Planners, operating in the complex environment comprised of many interconnected elements, are constrained by lack of certainty as to the future consequences of planning actions (Myers 2001) as well as to the effects of change in general. Often traditional planning techniques developed "in a lineal and incremental world do not have the flexibility needed to address multi-faceted and rapidly paced change" (Ratcliffe 2002:9).
- **Limitations of projections as the main methods supporting urban decision-making and planning.** Projections and forecasts, especially population projections, are used for planning in many areas, such as education, health, transport, land use and

many others. Projections are being criticised for: (a) under-representation of uncertainty, which effects the robustness of plans based on them; (b) being “univariate” and not giving much attention to the complex interactions within and between urban dimensions; (c) focusing on measurable variables, such as economic, demographic and environmental, and underplaying the less tangible ones, like social, cultural and political; and (d) rejecting the imagination by attempting to concentrate on what *will* be rather than what *could* be (Cole 2001). Forecasters have been often criticised for failing to present the assumptions on which forecasts have been developed, and for stating the results of forecasts without presenting alternatives arising from the changes of the input variables (Wachs 2001). Planners have also been blamed for using projections as if they described the most probable future and as if this future was desired (Isserman 1985). Myers and Kitsuse (2000) warn about planners who might introduce judgement into analysis that causes the projection to support a preferred future. This can lead to unethical manipulation of projections in order to support objectives desired by interest groups as well as by planners.

- **Main focus on spatial form.** For many years urban planning has been mainly focused on shaping the physical form of cities and the provision of necessary services. Planning activities included budgeting, land development, funding of social services, project management and other short-term activities.(Isserman op cit). Myers and Kitsuse (op cit.) argue that a strong focus on spatial analysis has often led to the neglect of the future aspect. Although space and time are two essential dimensions for describing the world, it is difficult to concentrate on both simultaneously. Furthermore, for a long time planners have had a tendency to use land-use maps and other spatial methods to envision the future of cities.(ibid). Consequently, techniques for spatial analysis and territorial planning have advanced greatly, in contrast to the methods used for tackling the time dimension of planning (Myers 2001, Ratcliffe 2002).
- **Short-term orientation of planning.** The short-term focus of planning activities has been reinforced by planners’ efforts to strengthen political relevance of planning and the need to respond to the crisis on the ground. Being more “politically relevant” meant greater influence of short-term budgets and short-term horizons of the electoral process over the planning activities.(Myers & Kitsuse 2000, Myers 2001). The short-term orientation of planning has been also strengthened by the limitations imposed by social science “that directs the attention only where data exist – in the past, not the future (Myers 2001:366)”.
- **Lack of an integrated and holistic approach to the urban system.** A common planning practice is separation of the physical form from the social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions, instead of treating all these aspects in an integrated fashion (Gaffikin & Morrisey 1999). Consideration of different urban elements separately often leads to neglecting important connections and interdependencies between them which results in ineffective policies and decisions. Plans developed in one sector rarely relate to the wider spatial impacts of activities and policies and usually apply only a single sectoral perspective (Koresawa & Konvitz 2001).
- **Lack of effective participation and collaboration between stakeholders.** Decisions about the future involve gaining agreement among a great number of stakeholders, many of whom vary in their valuations of key factors and hold different, often emotionally based views (Myers 2001). Although the topic of “collaboration” is becoming more and more important in planning thought (Puglisi 2000), i.e. Patsy Healey’s concept of ‘collaborative planning’ (Healey 1997), the typical planning

approach is not very well suited to “manage” participation and collaboration, as it comprises techniques designed for experts and trained professionals (Serra 2001). There is a need to build “convergence of values and meanings that go beyond the specialised knowledge of a few experts in order to investigate the diversity of experience, attitudes and values” of different groups and communities (Puglisi 2000:2).

- **Neglect of the visionary approach towards the future.** Many authors have pointed out the lack of visionary approach towards the future (Isserman 1985, Brooks 1988, Myers & Kitsuse 2000, Ratcliffe 2002). Isserman (op cit.) argued that too often planning “has lost sight of the future” and it lacks a vision that would lead the present to the future. One of the main factors responsible for such situation is a shift from ‘planning cities with a vision’ to ‘planning with use of scientific methods and financial mechanisms’ blocking idealism and visionary thinking. It could be also claimed that planners are “institutionally caged in a cautious and conservative role and they don’t wish to appear too off-the-wall to policymakers who want concrete answers (Cole 2001:373)”.

PART 2

The Prospective methodology

Considering the importance and condition of cities today and the limitations of the existing urban planning processes, it is clear that in order to ensure the future prosperity and sustainable growth of urban environments there is a need for a major shift in the way of thinking and acting about the future of cities, a shift from the traditional mind-set characterised in the previous section, to a more imaginative, innovative and inclusive future-oriented approach. A fresh future-oriented methodology is required to promote and facilitate this shift. Such an approach should reinforce an understanding that the future can be shaped and thus enable:

- (1) **Communities** to envision their desired future, building upon common values and wishes;
- (2) **Professionals:**
 - To understand the complexity of urban systems and the global context within which they function;
 - To anticipate local and global change and its short, medium and long-term consequences;
 - To consider cities as entities and tackle their problems in an integrated manner;
 - To create images of possible and probable alternative futures;
 - To understand the needs and values of communities;
 - To develop mechanisms that would facilitate collaboration of all stake-holders in shaping the future;
 - To promote networking of actors and to build collective intelligence;
- (3) **Community and professionals** to work together in order to achieve this envisioned preferred future state.

The methodology presented in this paper has been built upon the Prospective methodology, formulated in France by Gaston Berger and Bertrand de Jouvenel and further developed by their successors, i.e. Michel Godet, Hugh de Jouvenel, Fabienne Goux-Baudiment and others. The approach is intended to be used in urban planning processes. It attempts to address the need for a new improved way of exploring and shaping the future of cities. The following aspects of the approach are discussed: the process, mechanisms for collaboration and participation and interplay of different generations.

The process

The Prospective process (Fig. 1) consists of five main phases: formulation of the problem/strategic question, understanding of the past and present, exploration of the future, development of the most desirable vision of the future and recommendations and suggestions for implementation of the vision. Each phase is discussed in regard to its aims, steps involved, methods and techniques that can be employed and a scope for interplay of generations.

Formulation of the problem/strategic question. The methodology can be used for different purposes in the planning process, for example setting a vision for the whole city or region, determining a desired future of a district or area, examination of the future of various urban aspects such as transportation, land use, community development and so on. It is very important to identify and formulate a specific problem/strategic question that is going to be examined at the start of the process. It is useful to form an exact statement of the problem/question and determine the expected outcomes of the process. Often the initial concept of the problem or issue to be considered is vague and needs further clarification. Among the methods that can assist in formulating and clarifying the problem/strategic question are strategic conversations carried out with the key actors/stakeholders and brainstorming sessions.

Understanding of the past and present. An overall aim of this phase is drawing a complex picture of the present situation. Having a fully comprehensive picture of the present situation enables exploration of possible alternative futures and helps to determine a path from the present state to the desired future state. This phase involves completion of the following steps:

- Identification of key issues and problems characteristic of the present situation. This involves collecting a whole range of factual and statistical information as well as knowledge on community perceptions, memories, values, wishes, fears and so on.
- Exploration of the past and present decisions, policies and factors that have led to the development of the present situation. These should be considered at the local, regional, national and global level. It is valuable to discern decisions and policies, which still have a strong, often hidden influence, even if the reasons for their introduction are not relevant anymore.
- Recognition of the main actors and stakeholders. It helps to recognise, who should be involved in the process of the exploration of the future and development of the vision and who would be responsible for undertaking action to implement it.
- Gaining an understanding of interactions between actors and factors. Mapping relationships and interactions between actors and factors can help to reveal interdependencies, which there was no awareness of and therefore their impact and consequences are not fully realised.

There are different methods that can be employed in order to complete the steps of this phase: strategic conversations, brainstorming sessions, desktop research, Prospective workshops, environmental scanning, mind-mapping and relevance trees.

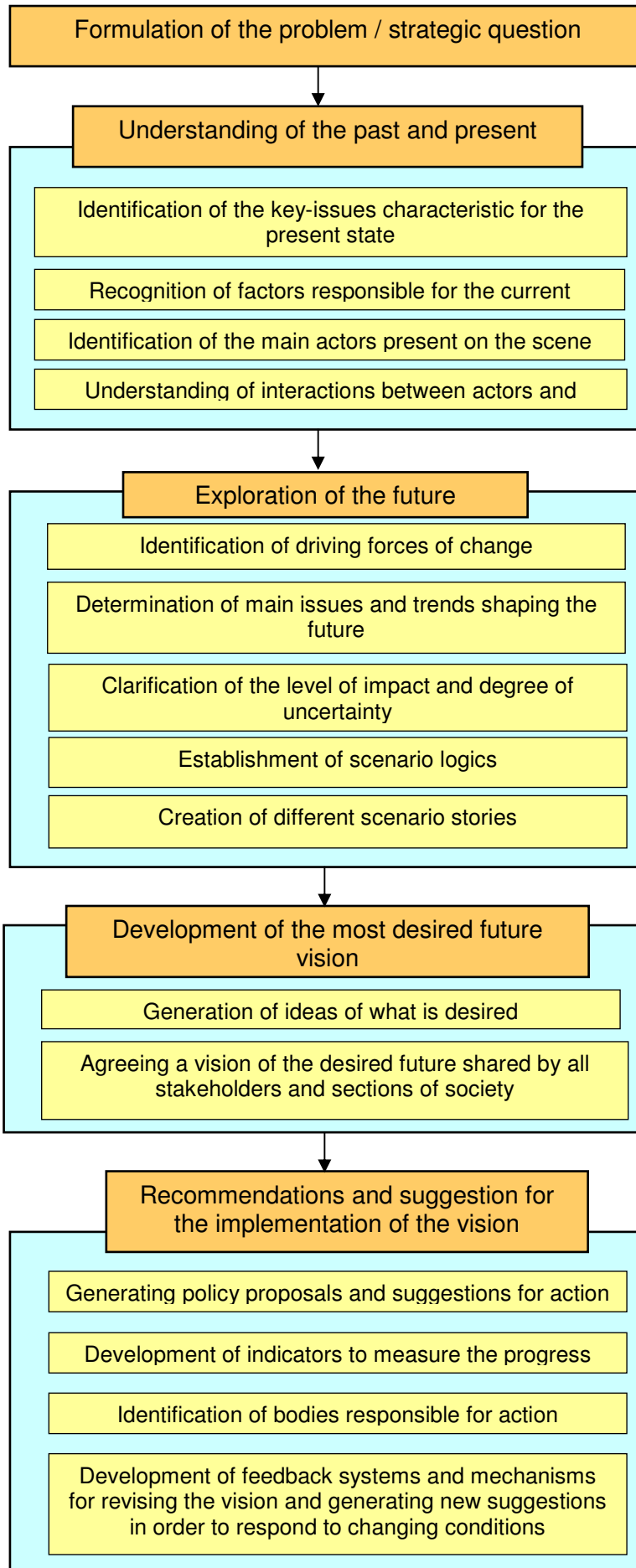


Fig. 1. The Prospective process

The possibility for interplay of generations exists particularly in projects where the future of the city or its parts is to be envisioned. In such exercises older generations can share their perception of the place and their memories attached to it with younger people. A very interesting example of such interplay of generations was described by Marika Puglisi (2000). Puglisi took part in the development of future scenarios for the redevelopment of Barletta town centre (Italy). In the first phase of the project older people shared their memories and feelings about the town centre with younger generations. This enabled a bond to be created between the generations as well as give a new emotional meaning to the area.

Exploration of the future. The third phase in the process is exploration of the future. Its main aim is to recognise what are the main driving forces of change, trends, issues and factors, to understand how they can influence the future and to create images of possible future states. The proposed technique for the exploration of the future is the scenario method developed by John Ratcliffe (2002).

The scenario method consists of the following steps:

1. *Identification of the driving forces of change.* The driving forces of change are identified within the six sectors approach: Culture/Society, Demography, Economy, Environment, Governance and Technology. They can be determined using methods such as environmental scanning, strategic conversations with experts, specific questionnaires, Prospective workshops and brainstorming sessions.
2. *Detection of the main issues and trends shaping the future.* It involves examination of driving forces of change recognised earlier and deriving from them the more specific issues and trends that would have an impact upon the problem/strategic question. They can be identified using the same techniques as for the identification of the driving forces of change.
3. *Clarification of the level of impact and degree of uncertainty.* As the issues and trends derived previously would have a different role to play in creating and shaping the future, it is very helpful to classify them according to their level of impact upon the problem/strategic question and degree of uncertainty (likelihood) of occurring within a given timeframe. There are four different types of issues and trends: potential jokers, pivotal uncertainties, significant trends and context shapers (Fig. 2). 'Pivotal uncertainties' have the central role in building the future scenarios, as they are characterised by their high impact upon the problem/strategic question but also high uncertainty of their outcomes. This means that the future will be influenced by these trends to a large degree, and as their outcome is very uncertain, a range of very different futures can unfold. This step can be carried out during a Prospective workshop, brainstorming session or through a survey.
4. *Establishment of scenario logics.* This part is crucial for the whole scenario process. Here the structure and foundations of scenarios are established. The scenario stories can be built around the framework provided by the two main 'pivotal uncertainties'. The scenario logics, built around the trends with a high level of impact and high uncertainty of their outcome, provide the main themes for scenario stories. These themes would perform differently in each scenario. Imagination, intuition and creativity help to establish how these themes would evolve in different circumstances.
5. *Creation of different scenario stories.* Scenario stories are built around the scenario logics established previously. They can be developed during a workshop by the participants or can be written by a member of a project team. Each scenario should have: a beginning, a middle and an end, key events that made it happen, early indicators of change and a suggestive title (Ratcliffe 2003).

It is important to remember that the process of exploration of the future is as important as its outcome (a set of scenarios) as it allows participants to understand how the future unfolds and to learn to anticipate changes and their consequences. This part of the process should involve the main stakeholders and decision-makers in order to let them develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and interconnected context within which the future of their urban territories is being shaped. Also to enable them to anticipate in a more structured way local and global change and their short, medium and long-term consequences.

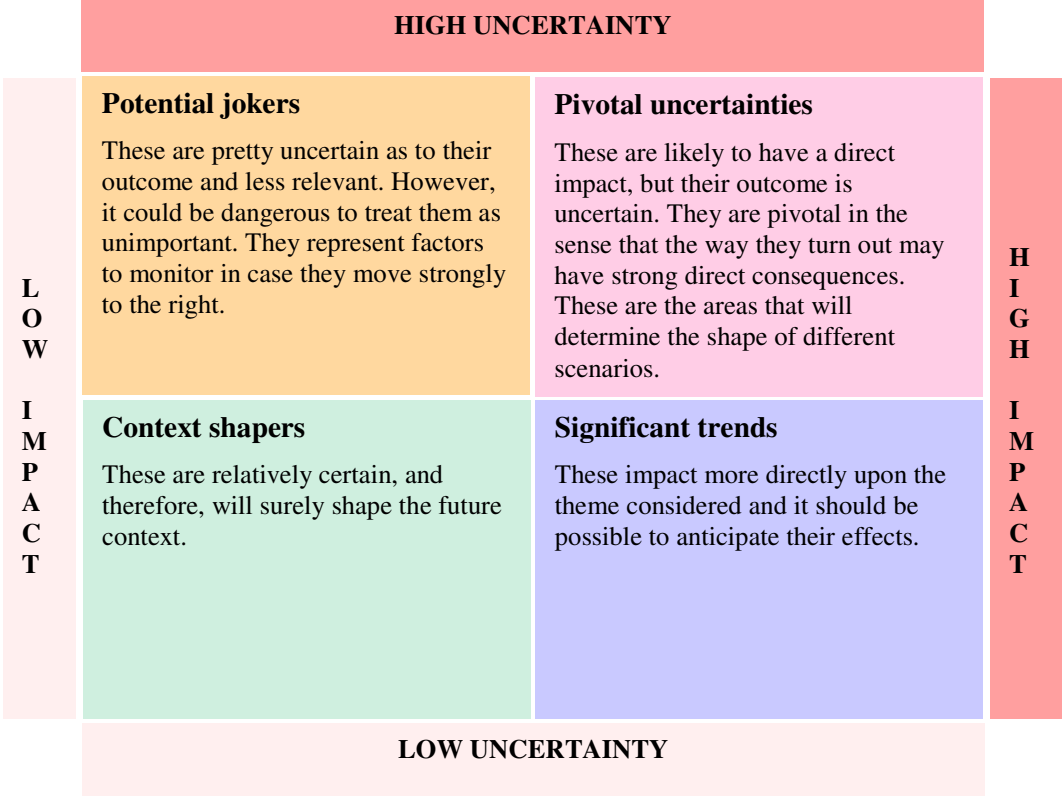


Fig. 2. Types of issues and trends

Development of the most desirable vision of the future. This is a crucial step in the Prospective process. Knowing what future is desired enables the direction, in which decisions and actions should be led, to be determined. It helps to develop measures that would monitor the current course of action and verify the direction taken. Knowing what type of future is desired enables the path and means how to get there to be identified; it supports strategic thinking and planning. The vision can be described as a ‘landmark’ that orientates present decisions and actions.

The desired vision can be created in a single visioning exercise, during the Prospective workshops, through targeted questionnaires and a series of brainstorming sessions, workshops and so on. When visions for urban territories are being developed it is necessary to ensure that everybody is invited to take part in the process: stakeholders, public and private organisations, community groups, minority groups, different generations, individual citizens and so on. Different parties and groups have different expectations, aspirations, needs, values and fears. It is very important to let them to express their views and to enable them to engage in a dialog that would result in agreeing a shared vision. While developing the vision it is important to remember that decisions and actions taken in order to achieve it will have impact upon future generations.

There are two main steps in this phase of the process. The first step involves collection of the views, aspirations and ideas held by different stakeholders and groups about what kind future is desired. The aim of the second step is to reach, through dialog and negotiation, agreement between all involved parties on what the desired vision is.

Recommendations and suggestions for the implementation of the vision. The last phase in the process involves four main steps. The first one is generating policy proposals and suggestions for action. These are usually generated during Prospective workshops, brainstorming sessions, strategic interviews and surveys. The proposals can have a general or specific character. The second step is the development of indicators for measuring progress. It aims at the establishment of measures that would enable the monitoring of progress towards the achievement of the vision and provide feedback information on the key issues specified in the vision. The third step involves identification of bodies responsible for the implementation of the vision. It is hoped that these bodies would have been involved in the development of the vision and therefore would accept their role in its implementation. The last step includes development of feedback mechanisms for communicating the progress towards achievement of the vision and for revising the vision and generating new suggestions in order to respond to changing conditions.

Mechanisms for collaboration and participation

Mechanisms for collaboration and participation in various future-oriented exercises for urban territories are usually designed on an individual basis. In some cities and countries these mechanisms are developed by the body/agency carrying out the project, in others as specified by appropriate legislation, i.e. the case of Social, Economic and Cultural Strategies developed by City and County Development Boards in Ireland. This paper proposes the ‘concertation’ process to be used as the mechanism for facilitating the collaboration between stakeholders and decision makers. It also presents a number of ways to facilitate public participation, such as community forums, focus groups and consultation brochures.

‘Concertation’, which originated in France, can be described as a process, which facilitates the coherence between actors and partners viewpoints through the establishment of a social, political and/or administrative consensus (ENDA 2004). It can be also defined as negotiation occurring in the public decision-making processes taking place in urban planning in France (de Carlo 2003). The structure of the concertation process presented in this paper is based on the “Prospective Masterclass” delivered by Fabienne Goux-Baudiment at the Dublin Institute of Technology in October 2003.

The concertation process involves participation of Locally Involved Actors (ALC). These are, for example, major employers, universities, hospitals, army, police, church, trade unions and so on. There are three main groups of actors: administration and public decision-makers (i.e. elected councillors, civil servants), economic sector (i.e. employers, trade unions, banks, business associations and so forth), and non-economic sector (civic society, education, health, police, army, church and so on). Actors can also be classified by their role and power. They can have:

1. power of authority (legal),
2. power of function,
3. power of influence (i.e. the media).

Importance of actors can be “measured” by the number of powers they have. In a given urban region for every 500,000 inhabitants there are approximately 300 people who have at least one type of role/power in the society (group C), 100-150 people who have two types of

role/power (group B) and around 30, who have all three types (group A). This classification is illustrated in Fig. 3 in a form of a pyramid.

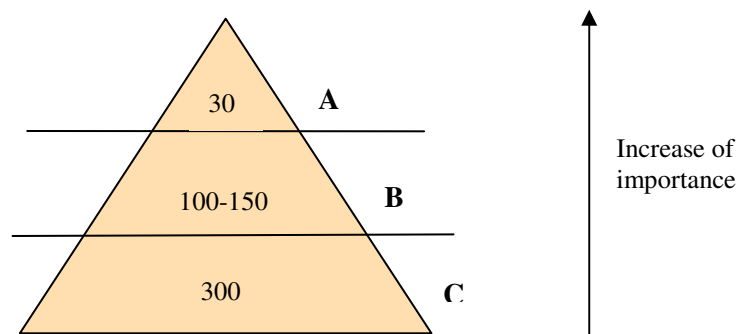


Fig. 3. Pyramid illustrating the importance of actors

In the concertation process actors representing all three groups (A, B, C) are targeted. As a first step a questionnaire is distributed between the members of all three groups. The members of group C are asked to complete and return the questionnaire. The members of group B are also asked to complete and return the questionnaire. If they fail to do so within a given time limit they are phoned twice in order to encourage them to complete the questionnaire. If an actor representing group B or C fails to return the questionnaire, it is treated as an answer in itself – a lack of concern.

The members of group A, the most important and influential actors in a given region, are invited to participate in the workshops as well as to complete the questionnaire. They are asked to leave behind their professional background and stand back from the organisation they represent. They work on specific issues within so called “functional groups”. The actors meet several times. Their task is to define the problem, develop a vision and come up with proposals for action. There are also three workshops attended by ten people representing three different sectors (public administration, economic and non-economic) (3+3+4).

The concertation process used to facilitate collaboration between the stakeholders and decision-makers leads to the creation of partnerships and networks between the most important and influential actors as they are forced to meet and work together. Also it results in the development of ‘collective intelligence’ shared by these actors.

Public participation can be facilitated in urban planning processes in a number of different ways. The following examples are forms of public participation developed during the creation of the Social, Economic and Cultural Strategy for Dublin City, but can be applied to any city or region:

- Establishment of a *community forum*, which brings together all kinds of community and voluntary organisations. Such a forum, as a structured and recognised platform, can facilitate dialogue between the community organisations and local government and other stakeholders.
- Creation of *focus groups*, which are comprised of citizens, community organisations, stakeholders and experts. Focus groups can explore specific issues building upon knowledge already existing and develop it further.
- Distribution of *consultation brochures* among citizens. This could be a way of developing awareness about a project, encouraging citizens to participate in it as well as gathering valuable knowledge on their concerns, aspirations, wishes, perceptions and so on.

While designing the public participation methods it is necessary to ensure that the public has a chance to exchange their views and present various issues to the decision-makers and stakeholders and vice-versa. It is also important to ensure that the civic voice will be listened to and incorporated in the vision, strategies and plans. Stable relationships based upon trust can be only developed through respectful discussion and the acknowledgment of contributions of all parties involved.

Interplay of different generations

Interplay of different generations was mentioned several times in the section discussing the Prospective process. Below it is discussed from two different points of view, the first is related to the general development of urban areas and the second is associated with the roles, which different generations can play in shaping urban territories.

While exploring different future possibilities and deciding upon the preferred options decision-makers and stakeholders need to remember that their choices will have impact not only on the lives of the present generation but often, and possibly to a lesser degree, on the lives of people living in 50, 100, 200, ... years time. In the same way as decisions made by our ancestors, such as the segregation of land uses, have impact on the present ways of living. This notion has been already recognised in relation to the natural environment and has been promoted through the sustainability concept. However, it could be argued that although every planner and decision-maker knows the word “sustainable”, many of them lack an in-depth understanding of its meaning in the context of their own sphere of activities. Therefore it is important to make people participating in future-oriented exercises aware of that notion.

As mentioned earlier, older generations through dialogue with younger people can put a different perspective towards certain aspects of a city and give a fresh meaning to different places. On the other hand the involvement of young people in the development of visions for the future can bring a large dose of enthusiasm and innovative and creative thinking, not limited by knowledge of financial, administrative or other type of restrictions. Hence it is worthwhile to listen to all young people’s ideas about the future they imagine and the future, in which they would like to live. Another role of different generations in the development of desired future visions is making stakeholders and decision-makers aware of their present needs, be it the needs of the elderly, young people, or those just starting families.

Final thoughts

In order to ensure the future prosperity and sustainable growth of cities and urban regions it is necessary to change the way of thinking and acting about the future of cities. Planners and decision-makers need to become more creative, innovative and proactive in their approach towards the future in order to deal with the challenges that 21st century cities face. It is being increasingly recognised that urban futures should be built upon the values and principles promulgated and proclaimed by their citizens, and in a concerted and joint effort of all actors responsible for the development of urban territories.

It is hoped that the Prospective methodology presented in this paper can assist communities in envisioning their desired future, and planners and decision-makers in exploring future possibilities, understanding the complexities of urban environments and anticipating change and its consequences. The methodology can be also used as a platform for dialogue between communities and the decision-makers and as a mechanism for collaboration amongst the stakeholders. It is also hoped that the Prospective methodology will contribute to the

transformation of the traditional planning mindset into a new approach that could be summed up as “Imagine ahead – plan backwards”.

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