



**Methods and tools to place foresight at the forefront of democratic renewal : representing the future**

Futures conference, Turku, June 2017

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## 1. The challenge (The mistake)

“History is not the past : it's our way of organising our ignorance of the past” (Hillary Mantel)



“We think out in the world with tools. Taking knowledge as a type of mental content—a justified, true opinion—obscures that simple phenomenological truth” (David Weinberger, referencing Heidegger, Andy Clark & David Chambers)

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## 1. The challenge

Great excitement about approaches that are fundamentally future-denying or futures-ignorant

- Big data, AI
- Social media (silos and echo chambers)
- “Design thinking”, mindfulness, etc.



Our Puny Human brains are terrible at thinking about the future.

“Our future selves are strangers to us.

When you imagine your future self, your brain does something weird: It stops acting as if you’re thinking about yourself. Instead, it starts acting as if you’re thinking about a *completely different person*.

[...] as if your future self is someone you don’t know very well and, frankly, someone you don’t care about” (Jane McGonigal)

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2. The temptation

“There is a dark side to our obsession with frictionlessness. It comes in the shape of a potential breakdown in human relationships and commitments. It is not just that good things come to those who wait. Those unprepared to delay gratification impede capital formation and possibly even our capacity to preserve the value we have already created“ (IK)



Democratic government, as we know, depends on the power to interrupt critical flows, whether of energy or of revenue.

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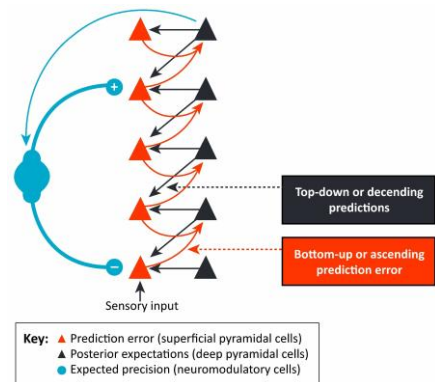
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2. The temptation

How our brain really works

von Heimholz : brain is *prediction machine*. Perception must therefore be a process of inference, in which indeterminate sensory signals are combined with prior expectations or ‘beliefs’ about the way the world is, to form the brain’s optimal hypotheses of the causes of these sensory signals – of coffee cups, computers and clouds.  
 What we see is the brain’s ‘best guess’ of what’s out there “A fantasy that coincides with reality” Chris Frith in *Making Up the Mind* (2007).

When automation is embedded with a feedback loop and able to simulate (some would call this ‘imagination’) many different scenarios and self test those scenarios for correctness, then we are at the cusp of some extremely potent technology that can rapidly cascade into capabilities that few in our civilization will be prepared for.



Trends in Cognitive Sciences

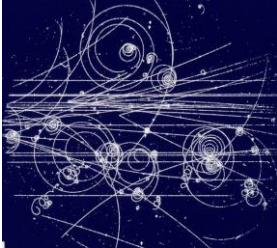
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### 3. New science, new/old scientific method

How we learn new things

Like subatomic particles and fickle lovers, we are forever in motion, unknown not only to each other but to ourselves, touching and moving apart in endlessly complex ways.



To perceive things differently, we must bombard our brains with things it has never encountered. This kind of novelty is vital because the brain has evolved for efficiency and takes perceptual shortcuts to save energy. Only by forcing our brains to recategorize information and move beyond our habitual thinking patterns can we begin to imagine truly novel alternatives (Gregory Berns)

We are in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals, **we complete or finish ourselves through culture.**

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### 3. New science, new/old scientific method

Bacon's scientific algorithm has three essential components: **first**, observations have to be collected and integrated into the total corpus of knowledge. **Second**, the new observations are used to generate new hypotheses. **Third**, the hypotheses are tested through carefully designed experiments.

[But] the three main steps of scientific discovery occupy different planes. Observation is sensual; hypothesis-generation is mental; and experimentation is mechanical.



Pure reductionism is reaching the edge of its usefulness.

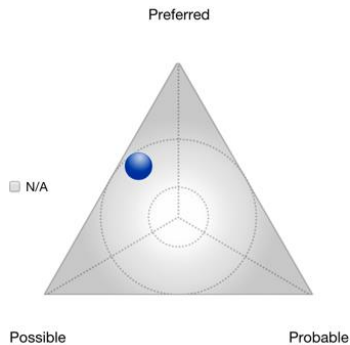
Human minds cannot reconstruct highly complex natural phenomena efficiently enough in the age of big data. A modern Baconian method that **incorporates reductionist ideas through data-mining**, but then **analyses this information through inductive computational models**, could transform our understanding of the natural world. Such an approach would enable us to **generate novel hypotheses** that have higher chances of turning out to be true, **to test those hypotheses**, and to fill gaps in our knowledge. It would also provide a much-needed reminder of what science is supposed to be: truth-seeking, anti-authoritarian, and limitlessly free.

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**Modalities of collection**

1. Narrative capture and auto-indexing (Cynefin)
2. Survey tools (Fountain Park)
3. Schools (essay writing)
4. Social media (tweets, vlogs & blogs, etc.)
5. Review of existing corpus of scenarios etc.



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**4. New framework for gathering futures****Prompts (indices for narrative)**

1. Future you expect (In 20 years I expect...)
  - a. What is going to make this future happen?
  - b. What would stop this happening?
  - c. What's the big unknown?
2. Future you fear
  - a. What is going to make this future happen?
  - b. What would stop this happening? (forces, factors)
  - c. What's the big unknown?
3. Future you want
  - a. What is going to make this future happen?
  - b. What would stop this happening?
  - c. What's the big unknown?

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**4. New framework for gathering futures****Agency**

1. What can be done to make the future you want happen?
2. Who can do this?
3. What can you do?

**Mini-scenario**

Describe one or more of these futures in a story, screenplay, music, video. You can be part of it or not. Involve other people in your class, social circle.



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**5. Tools & approaches**  
 Cynefin & Cognitive Edge

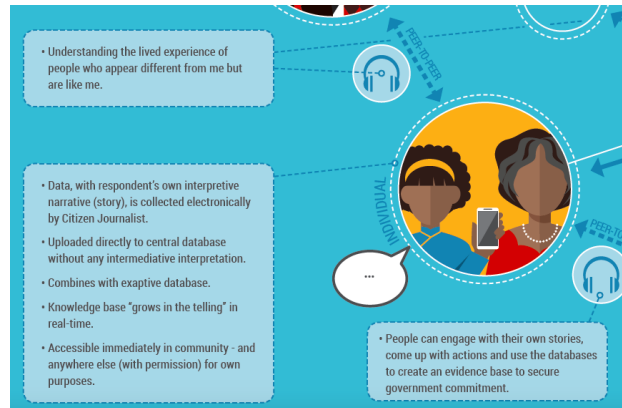
**ENGAGE.**

Self-ethnography allows members of a community to discover what is happening, what is amiss and what is working in their own communities in a peer-to-peer knowledge flow. "Sending experts in from the outside" often results in misinterpretations like the recent polls before the Brexit vote and the US Presidential election. Statistically relevant samples creates objectivity in a world filled with echo chambers.

**EMPOWER.**

Communities develop their own solutions or share solutions and ideas across communities. The statistical validity of being able to "present their own story" produces a spontaneous interaction between government and a community. This authentic voice (removed from the noise of social media or layers of interpretation) of a community supported by the quantitative power of numbers, also empowers government to develop evidence-based policy as opposed to policy-based evidence.

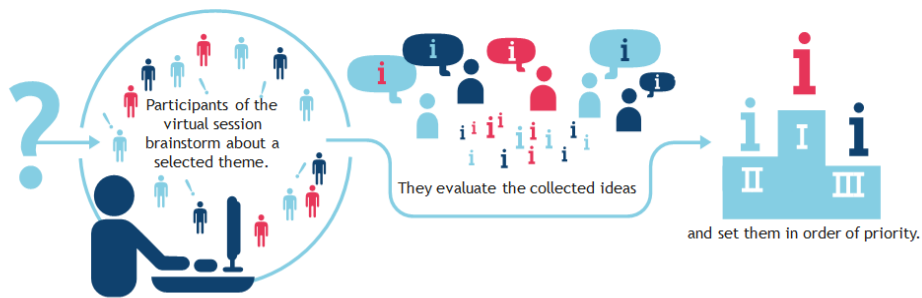
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**Virtual brainstorming**

**FOUNTAIN PARK**  
 Wisdom of Crowds into Practice



**Benefits of the method:**

- 1 Issues that the participants themselves consider important gain attention.
- 2 The participants can make their voice heard in their own words.
- 3 There is open discussion about the ideas.
- 4 Engagement, information acquisition and communication are done at the same time.

## 6. Dedicated actors & activists



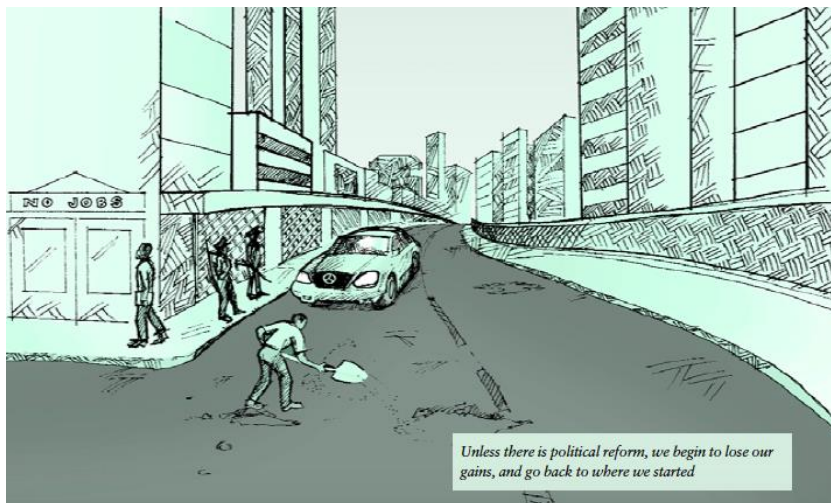
“We have to tell a different story from the one the shock doctors are peddling, a vision of the world compelling enough to compete head to head with theirs.

“We need, somehow, to fight defence and offence simultaneously – to resist the attacks of the present day and to still **find space to build the future we need**. In other words, the firmest of nos has to be accompanied by a bold and forward-looking yes – a **plan for the future that is credible and captivating enough that a great many people will fight to see it realised, no matter the shocks and scare tactics thrown their way.**”

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Kenya at the Crossroads, SID 2000



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## Imagine Aruba 2008 (Martin Hazell et al.)



Imagine Aruba (*Nos Aruba 2025*) was a process where 60,000 people (out of a population of just over 100,00) participated in developing a vision of a preferred future and making it happen. Within the framework of an Appreciative Inquiry into the future of the Island, we ran a series of open courses in foresight and scenario planning which engaged people in thinking not only about their aspirations, but also about them in the context of different unfolding future environments, and how these might provide opportunities for the sustainable development of their Island home.

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### Recap

- How to promote renewal when threatened with collapse?
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### Models for Foresight Use in International Development

Alun Rhydderch  
Volume 47 Issue 4  
Published: 21 September 2016  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19088/1968-2016.153>

**Abstract:** This article sets out the components of the foresight approach that has been adopted by many governments in the developed world, and identifies elements of this 'dominant' approach that may hinder its uptake in developing countries. Instead, it suggests that a less rigid, more exploratory and normative approach may be better suited to many developing country contexts. With reference to the writings and practice of the creator of 'la prospective', Gaston Berger, it argues for an attitude that combines bold and inclusive thinking about how to create better futures with the pragmatic engagement with political and administrative systems that can help bring these about.

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