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FROM SCENARIO BUILDING TO SUSTAINED COMMITMENT IN THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on my key-note lecture takes up an issue which is not often discussed in connection with futures studies, namely how following the completion of a futures studies attempts are made to uphold a commitment in the future in an organisation or a community. The paper is based on a key assumption that futures studies have been implemented in a participatory fashion (see, e.g. Khakee, 1999; Bell, 1997, May, 1996 for a further discussion of participatory praxis in futures studies). In fact the paper starts with a brief section on participatory scenario-building and vision-sharing. References are made to participatory scenario building exercises in a cross-cultural context that have been carried out by the Concerted Action. The following section discusses the role of institutional capital in enabling a community-wide participation as well as building up premises for sustained commitment in the future. In the final section tangible actions to obtain sustained commitment are briefly discussed. The paper asserts the need for effective sustained follow-up actions after the completion of a future study.

1. SCENARIO BUILDING AND VISION SHARING

In an earlier paper (Khakee, 1999) I outlined some major criteria that were considered of importance in developing participatory scenarios and ensuring the sharing of visions among stakeholders involved in participatory futures studies as well those not actively represented in these activities.

Management of the scenario process: It involves the creation of a leadership and administrative capacity to manage an extensive process including a community-wide discourse. Such an organization can be advantageously located inside the local government provided that it can offer proper conditions for a bottom-up approach in the inclusionary discourse. In order to maintain an innovative spirit during the entire process, it is necessary to recruit people able to co-ordinate various inputs in the scenario-making process. The internal recruitment of the scenario group can be compensated by one or more external reference groups and by making extensive use of brainstorming sessions and other activities in order to stimulate participation and to elucidate tacit knowledge.

The role of key persons: Participatory scenario acts as an instrument for people to appreciate seriously their values and discover the shortcomings of the present system. This is necessary in order to change the direction of societal development. Such scenarios may be both provocative and challenging. If they are not experienced as such then there may be something wrong with their contents. In this context the role of 'key' persons is essential. These persons, who are not experts but come from everyday life, are willing to accept criticism for their imaginative ideas and viewpoints that may at first sight appear unrealistic and untenable to many. Their knowledge about the neighbourhood they live in may also be valuable in this respect.

Involving the stakeholders: A major aspect of citizen participation is to identify and get stakeholders involved in the scenario-making process. In the case of developing a scenario for sustainable development for a local society, all members of the community are stakeholders. Such a definition is inclusive rather than exclusive. Involving all members of the community is an impossible task. If the results of international studies about the interest in futures issues in an organization are applied to a local community, then futurological issues intrigue a tiny proportion, about 2%, of the community. If this is the case, the issue of representativeness is crucial. Several approaches have been proposed for selecting stakeholders (Mitroff, et al, 1977).

The approaches that can be adopted for the scenario work in the following manner.

In the first phase stakeholders are identified, their affiliations to formal and informal associations and networks are mapped and representatives selected. In the second phase the stakeholders are solicited

for their concerns, expectations and interests in the problem areas related to future development (see further, Guba and Lincoln, 1989 for further discussion on stakeholder identification and involvement). Then each stakeholder group's contribution to the successful preparation of the scenario is analysed. In the final phase, negotiations among stakeholders are carried out in order to reach consensus on the final version of the scenario.

Balancing the GO's and the NGO's: The preparation and implementation of participatory scenarios assume a different relationship between the participants: researchers, professionals, business representatives, policy-makers on the one hand and the 'grassroots' on the other. There is always a fear among the grassroots that their experience and values will not be taken very seriously. On the other hand the representatives of the organized interests may feel that the arguments put forward by the grassroots are blurred and fuzzy. If the preparation of participatory scenarios is to be successful, then the stakeholders must confront and deal with each other's ideas. Only by maintaining an open dialogue and willingness to understand different viewpoints is it possible to draw common threads for developing the scenario.

Organizing the inclusionary dialogue: This issue concerns what gets discussed and how. An inclusionary effort in thinking about a future desirable society is more than only discussing what the policy issues are about and tracing development trends. It involves exploring the issues, finding out what they mean to different people and understanding the issues in new ways. It includes learning about each other's concerns regarding the problems and possible images of the future in ways that cut across social and cultural differences among the stakeholders. Three crucial aspects of inclusionary discourse are:

- The style of the discourse which does not only mean that everyone can present her/his suggestions; it also means promoting active discussions and facilitating for those not used to discussing issues publicly;
- The language of the discourse is not only a matter of metaphors and other language constructions but also respect and understanding for different ways of expressing things and recognizing the need to interpret all arguments and proposals;
- Respect for the participants implies appreciation and understanding of all viewpoints and the capacity to review argumentation by both those present in the discourse and those whom they represent. Striving to fulfil these requirements is an important step in organizing an inclusionary discourse for developing participatory scenarios (see further Healey, 1998 for a discussion on inclusionary discourse).

Interpreting knowledge: A wide array of stakeholders present facts, values, claims for attention and narratives of an unknown future in the course of preparing the scenario for future development. In order to translate these expressions into a more concise language, a balance between scientific knowledge, experiential knowledge and values is required. However, the resulting 'analysis' should not be so abstract that the participants cannot identify themselves with the text.

Since the objective of the scenario is to map out the process leading to a desirable society, the scenario must be an instrument for probing different issues raised by the participants. Interpreting the knowledge is not a technical process as has been the case of expert and hybrid scenarios, but it is an active effort in mutual sorting through the arguments and exploring the various images of the sustainable society. The role of the expert is to facilitate the process of learning and sorting through arguments, claims and images.

Developing participatory scenarios: The actual preparation of a participatory scenario poses a different challenge than the preparation of expert scenario presents. It implies that the stakeholders presume that they can influence progress towards a desirable future and what they say and do matter. Forecasts and knowledge derived with the help of formal techniques constitute a small part of the knowledge since the aim of the scenario is not to provide 'accurate' predictions. The knowledge, which is essential in the case of participatory scenarios, is derived with the help of intuitive methods that are designed to explore the consequences of specific decisions and actions in order to enable the local community to move towards a desirable future. Besides the problems posed in the derivation of knowledge there are the problems posed by integrating stakeholders' input in the scenario. A step-by-step approach with feedback loops can be built into the scenario-making process in order to evolve a scenario in the light of the stakeholders' assessment of their own efforts in sustainable development. Scenario making becomes a learning process during which the scenario is gradually developed.

Vision-sharing: A crucial aspect of participatory scenario building is that stakeholders agree on a 'shared vision' that is often a compromise arrived at via a discursive process between the stakeholders.

However, in order to proceed with the implementation of the vision, this shared vision needs to be clear in the minds of the stakeholders when preparing plans and policies.

A jump from theory to practice in preparing participatory scenarios is quite substantial as the following table clearly illustrates in the three case studies from Sweden, Turkey and Tunis (see further Khakee, 1999; Barbanente, Khakee and Puglisi, 2002 and Khakee, Barbanente, Camarda and Puglisi, 2002).

Tab. 1. Participatory scenarios in cross cultural context.

	Sweden	Turkey	Tunis
Management of the scenario process	Local government initiative. Planning and Environmental Boards. Bottom-up through engaging district councils, study-circles.	Concerted Action initiative. Ege University. Bottom-up through a few NGO representatives.	Concerted Action Initiative. Ministries of Agriculture and Equipment/Urban Development. Strong central control.
Key persons	Bias for local government officials and politicians. Some efforts to involve catalysts out in the community.	Bias for local government officials even through some NGO and business representatives.	High ranking civil servants. Few academics and representatives of professional organisations.
Stakeholder involvement	Through study circles, public campaigns, specific actions for households, business companies and NGOs.	Through professional contacts. Selective. Some snowball effect at least among NGOs.	Selective nature of participants excluded stakeholder involvement in real meaning.
Balancing the GO's and the NGO's	No specific measures. Bias for the GO's.	Preponderance of GO's	Only government sanctioned NGO's
Inclusionary dialogue	Study circles, meetings, outdoor activities. Questionnaire surveys. Brainstorming sessions limited to officials, business and NGO reps.	Questionnaire surveys and brainstorming sessions among the selected participants.	Questionnaire surveys and brainstorming sessions among the selected participants.
Interpreting knowledge	Arbitrary and selective sorting of arguments, ideas and images by local government officials in the final preparation of the scenarios.	Selective sorting through arguments within the participating group in the brainstorming sessions.	Selective sorting through arguments within the participating group in the brainstorming sessions.
Scenario development	No particular method applied. Ideas selected arbitrarily. Simple tabulation method.	Alternative scenarios identified during brainstorming.	Alternative scenarios identified during brainstorming.
Vision sharing	Political compromises with regard to final visions. Vision-ownership unclear. Results made available to the public but debate among officials and politicians.	Strong desire to spread knowledge to a wider audience especially among NGO reps. No steps taken for vision sharing.	Not discussed despite the strong interest among participants about participatory approach.

2. ENABLEMENT MEASURES

These measures include initiatives and inducements which seek to exploit existing opportunities and trends in an attempt to capture the energies and resources of various segments of the community. Such measures are designed to encourage participation of non-government actors in the implementation of initiatives and plans outlined in the visions. The measures outlined in this paper put a special emphasis on the use of institutional capital that is generated during the development of participatory scenarios.

Institutional capital has been variously defined as relational webs or networks, cultural capital or cultural assets and interactive governance assets constituting intellectual capital (knowledge resources), social capital (stock of trust and relationships) and political capital (capacity to act collectively). In the case of participatory scenario building and enabling efforts, institutional capital is assumed to be embodied in the social relations and interactions that are generated during the social learning process. Three major components of institutional capital are intellectual, social and political capital and they constitute major aspects in enabling sustained efforts in future commitment.

Intellectual capital: The watchwords for sustained commitment in the future are participatory vision-building and vision-sharing. In other words sustained commitment has to be seen as an integral ingredient in the process of vision-building and vision-sharing as well as in the subsequent process of working for a desirable society. Process and knowledge input must be acceptable for the broadest range of stakeholders with a wide-ranging agenda of acceptable development, inter-generational equity and geographical equality. This implies that the range of knowledge that is required for developing a broad vision include scientific, technical and practical understanding and reasoning. It requires a thorough understanding of local society, cultural values as well as an agenda that enables to alter human behaviour either by changing moral values or through a variety of incentives. Vision-building must make use of both instrumental and experiential knowledge.

In order to stimulate the generation of intellectual capital, four criteria are essential:

- 1) Range of knowledge emphasising how various ways of thinking about and shaping policies for sustainable development are emulated.
- 2) Frame of knowledge, including different ways for justifying ideas, making distinctions and observing limitations, made broad enough.
- 3) Knowledge that is constructed in different arenas - scientific knowledge prepared in arenas that belong to the system world and experiential knowledge from arenas in the life world - appropriately linked.
- 4) Openness and learning with respect to new ideas and new sources of information.

Social capital: Participatory scenario-building is based on the assumption that local actors - citizens, businesses and local public agencies - are involved in a wide variety of activities whose common goal is to form ideas about a desirable future. Local actors may be designers, practitioners, visionaries or activists (Roseland 1997). In whatever capacity the local actors are involved, the underlying assumption is that all the participants have rights and obligations and their activities generate a capacity of trust and reciprocation.

Participation of local actors takes place through a web of networks e.g. neighbourhood or workplace-related groups, civic associations and other interest organisations. Some of these networks are visible and receive public attention, others work in silence and avoid public attention. Networks are organised in various ways e.g. hierarchical organisations with set routines, non-hierarchical organisation with multiple nodes. Crucial for the engenderment of social capital is that the web of networks leads to confidence creating capacity and enhancement of personal and professional relations.

Three criteria are proposed in order to enhance social capital:

- 5) Range of social relations be kept broad enough in order to ensure stakeholder involvement, and functioning of various networks.
- 6) Linkages between networks, density of interconnections, relations between core and peripheral networks and integration between networks be properly maintained.
- 7) Relations holding networks together, access to networks, ideological and allocative structuring forces linking the networks be supported.

Political capital: Scenarios cover comprehensive range of domains and thereby have a moral and ideological status with the aim to revise priorities in a large number of policy areas. The capacity to act collectively on a wide range of ideas and images implies a challenge to change established ways of doing

things. It is a question of new working methods intended for accelerating learning, developing trust and generating a capacity to act collectively. Effective mobilisation can help collective action as well as ensure broad involvement.

Political capital can be bolstered with the help of following measures:

- 8) Selection of issues to mobilise around, the extent of collective identification of issue agendas, stakeholders' approaches for collective activities are carefully designed.
- 9) Range of techniques, adaptation of current techniques or development of new ones, consensus-building and partnership-creating practices are encouraged.
- 10) Sufficient support is provided to key persons in mobilisation efforts and to agents for maintaining networks and linking networks.

3. SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENT

The generation and maintenance of institutional capital are vital in obtaining sustained commitment in the future among the various interests in the community. However these also require certain tangible actions. Three of the most important of such actions are:

- 11) Effective follow-up of initiatives and ideas generated in the scenarios. This is necessary in order capture the energies and resources of the community. In the long-run a failure to have an effective follow-up may discredit any scenario-building activity.
- 12) Those responsible for future studies should ensure adequate assessment of implications of initiative, ideas and measures. This is not primarily a question of costs and benefits of measures and ideas but that all such efforts are consistent with the scenarios.
- 13) There is a need for steady support of future ideas with the help of various components of the institutional capital i.e. a continuing encouragement of new knowledge bases, community-wide networks and mobilisation capacity.

4. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

There is a wide gap between scenario-building exercise and efforts to obtain sustained commitment in the future. One way to bridge this gap is to reduce inadequacies with regards to all aspects of participatory scenario building and vision sharing. More research on identification of key actors, stakeholder involvement and organising inclusionary dialogue is required. The maintenance of institutional capital continuous openness to various knowledge input, encouragement of new networks and their inclusion in community-wide discourses about the future and retaining of mobilising capacity is equally important in efforts for sustained commitment in the future. Finally tangible actions in order to obtain sustained commitment need to be continuously revised in the face of new ideas and challenges.

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