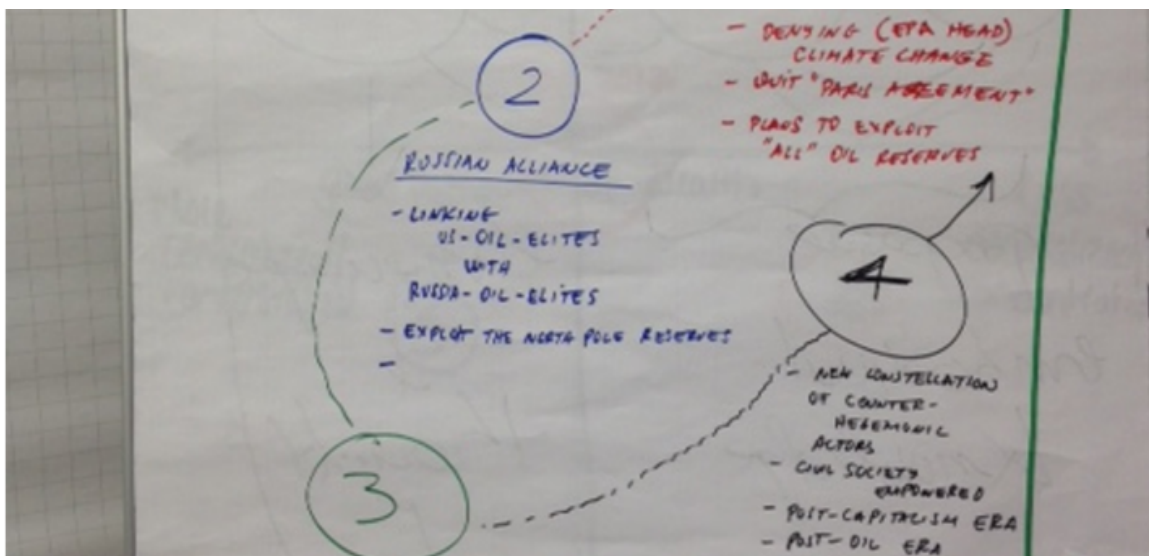


Scenarios about possible futures under Trump's Presidency

2017-02-01 Rebecca Freeth discusses scenarios about possible futures under Trump's presidency.



"Every January I try to craft a forecast for the following year [and ...] my record has been credible. [But ...] as the world's largest economy leads the way into uncharted political waters in 2017 and beyond, it would be foolhardy for a mere mortal to attempt a forecast ..."

◦ Joseph E. Stiglitz January 9 2017; prosyn.org/QITQJYc

Two days before Stiglitz published these remarks, a group led by Rebecca Freeth (from the Leverage Points for Sustainability Transformation project at Leuphana) drafted four storylines about what might happen during Donald Trump's Presidential term of office until 2020. Freeth and her team used participatory Transformative Scenario Planning (TSP), a methodology designed to help people remain alert, engaged and co-creative in times of great uncertainty. When uncertainty is combined with fear, as it is for many now, paralysis can set in, which means we fail to recognise, in time, the opportunities for change that uncertainty often presents.

Simply put, scenarios are stories about the future. Stories can reboot our imaginations, offering a creative outlet to make visible our underlying logic about how and why we think things unfold in particular ways. Most importantly in the TSP methodology, these

stories are designed to function as conversation starters, provoking discussion in ever-widening circles about what could happen (not what we think should happen or will happen).

This workshop comprised members of the Methods in Comparison module in the Studium Individuale study programme convened by Dr Ulli Vilsmaier, joined by some colleagues from the Sustainability Science faculty.

Freeth reports: “When it came to presenting the draft scenarios, one of the four scenario teams walked into the room in which we were politely waiting, shouting that we were late and in the wrong room. We hesitantly rose from our chairs and headed towards the door, only to have that door slammed in our faces. We exchanged looks and mutters with each other, wondering how to respond. Once we had assembled in the right place, we continued to be treated rudely throughout the presentation, which painted a future in which President Putin brokers a coalition between the USA, Russia and China, leaving Europe vulnerable and marginal. It was a powerful experience of bullying.”

An article this week by Alexander O’Riordan charts the rise of democratically elected Presidential bullies, citing the Philippines (Rodrigo Duterte), the United States (Donald Trump) and Freeth’s own South Africa (Jacob Zuma). The scenario presentation gave her a visceral foretaste of what this could be like as the dominant world leadership model, provoking her to wonder how she might respond. “Would we remain polite and tentative, giving away what remains of our power in the process? Would we mimic the aggression of the bullies, thereby entering an era of brinkmanship to violence at ever-greater scales? Are there alternatives for standing our ground with bullies? “, are her questions.

These questions have been very alive for her ever since. Thanks to these scenarios it’s not just her mind that has been opened to these possibilities. “I suspect that this is a critical aspect of sustainable development; turning not just the bright beams of our intellects on the challenges ahead, but also other ‘ways of knowing’ that tend to be less activated in university contexts, such as our imaginations, feelings and intuitions.”

For more on Transformative Scenario Planning, please see:

- reospartners.com/tools/transformative-scenarios/ Q Freeth, R and Drimie, S. 2016. Participatory Scenario Planning: From Scenario ‘Stakeholders’ to Scenario ‘Owners’”, *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*.
- Or accessible through:

www.researchgate.net/publication/304718386_Participatory_Scenario_Planning_From_Scenario_'Stakeholders'_to_Scenario_'Owners'

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