

Reflection	Reflections on the IMAGINE process and its seminars
Title	Daring to opt for challenges that are both sustainable and desirable
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Links	Energie-Cités: http://www.energie-cites.eu/ IMAGINE resources: http://www.energie-cites.eu/IMAGINE IMAGINE blog: http://www.imagineyouenergyfuture.eu/blog IMAGINE exhibition: http://www.imagineyouenergyfuture.eu/exhibition
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About this document...

Energie-Cités is an association of European local authorities promoting sustainable local energy policies. The association was founded in 1990 and now represents over 1,000 towns and cities in 30 countries.

Energie-Cités has been promoting the “**IMAGINE the energy future of our cities**” initiative since 2006. Defined as a foresight platform of collaboration and exchange leading to action, the initiative is based on the acknowledgement that our current mode of development will not stand up to the new energy and climate paradigms.

The IMAGINE initiative aims at encouraging European territories to:

- Take responsibility for their energy supply and the associated impacts in natural resources, the climate and wastes.
- Prepare their future by adapting to energy and climate risks and redesigning their territorial policies on the basis of the new paradigm.

A foresight Seminar is organised on a yearly basis as part of the IMAGINE initiative. The aim of the seminar is to improve the concepts by confronting them with practical issues and to propose new avenues and methods for action.

The IMAGINE initiative also includes the “*IMAGINE Beacon regions, cities, neighbourhoods*” exhibition, as well as a *blog* and a *discussion list* as permanent supports for seminar participants to continue their discussions.

Summary

This presentation reminds us that Man's will, when placed at the service of society and enhanced by the strength of dreams, is capable of producing fundamental changes. The fall of the Berlin wall, Nelson Mandela's presidency in South Africa, the first moon landing and the transformation of the Swedish town of Växjö¹ into a carbon-free city are all chapters of History with one thing in common: they are all the result of the vision and desire of a handful of determined men and women.

¹ <http://www.vaxjo.se/>

Content

We are trying to imagine the energy future of our cities and territories. The time horizon is one generation, which is sufficiently ahead of us to anticipate a different paradigm but close enough to us that the future to be imagined remains “within reach” of and attainable by most of those who are doing this exercise today!

The challenge set by IMAGINE is to contribute to **making what seems impossible possible**. Being able to rely on a vision that gives us the strength to move forward is essential to the taking up of such a challenge. The more audacious and free of any paradigm or today’s certainties this vision is, the more likely we are to make possible what now seems impossible to us.

To give us courage, we can think of the examples of men of women who, in the past, helped their fellow citizens take important, not to say decisive, steps forward by standing up to their dream, desire and willingness.



Anthology:

1867: “In the 20th century, there will be an extraordinary nation. This nation will be a great nation, which will not prevent it from being free. It will be illustrious, rich, brilliant, peaceful and friendly towards the rest of humanity. This nation will be astonished by the glory of conical projectiles. It will consider the waste of human blood as useless... This nation will be called Europe.” Victor Hugo

1893: New-Zealand is the first country to give women the right to vote. **2008:** There is no country where men and not women² have the vote.

1940: General de Gaulle calls for resistance from London. **1945:** General de Gaulle parades down the Champs Elysées in Paris.

1945: Dresden is wiped out by thousands of tons of bombs. **1958:** the handshake between the German Chancellor Conrad Adenauer and the French President Charles de Gaulle goes around the world.

1950: On 9th May, which is now the day of Europe,

² Four countries, however, (Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Myanmar and the Vatican) have no national elections, and women are, therefore, deprived of their right to vote in the same way as men.

Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman found the European coal and steel community. Coal and steel... Two raw materials vital to war and peace.

2007: twenty seven countries previously separated by the Iron Curtain are now united.

1961: The US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy challenges his country to go to the moon. **1969:** Apollo 11 lands on the moon with three men aboard.

1962: Nelson Mandela is imprisoned for life. **1994:** Nelson Mandela is elected President of South Africa.

1963: Martin Luther King makes a dream. **2008:** Barak Obama is elected President of the United-States. Has the reality of 2008 exceeded the 1963 dream?

1963: In Berlin, US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy uttered his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner”. Did he ever think that the wall would fall 26 years later?

1995: Växjö, Sweden, 70,000 inhabitants. During a council meeting, the mayor and the leader of the opposition jointly decided to make their city a fossil-fuel free city by 2010. At the end of the meeting, some questions still remained unanswered: is it possible, realistic? They wondered if they had not gone mad! But they gradually realised and acknowledged the fact that it did not matter, that the main point was that this decision was to and would free their imagination. Once you have chosen your destination, all you have to do is invent the path to get there. **2008:** Växjö is on the right track and has nearly reached its target...

And now what?

“I think you should first set an objective that is impossible to achieve.

Incredible things happen when people decide to create the impossible.”

Shaunna Sowel³

The great depression of 1929 lasted ten years and led to President Roosevelt’s New Deal. Many industrialised countries followed this far-ranging American initiative and joined this “new deal”. Such a radical reform gave rise to the notion of a Welfare State, a pivotal notion in Western societies, especially in Europe. We are at the beginning of the 21st century and we are facing a number of crises: financial, economic, energetic and ecological. Are they separate crises or converging manifestations of the exhaustion of a declining world? Is it not time to launch a Green New Deal? From Al Gore’s exertions to the recent UN⁴ positions, it seems that the first signs of such a green new deal are already

³ Deputy Director to global infrastructures, Texas Instruments.

⁴ <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=548&ArticleID=5957&I=fr>

there. But economic players need to be encouraged to make investments and give momentum to a truly green economy. The head of the UNEP⁵ pointed out that the world will spend hundreds of millions of dollars on stabilising the global economy in 2009. Imagine for a moment what would happen if this stimulation package could be targeted towards laying the foundations of the sustainable economy of the 21st century!

Our relation to the future: “realism”, fears and desire. At territorial level, complexity is everywhere and local authorities have to cope with it. A thousand questions have to be dealt with, as many decisions have to be made. But what decisions? Where should we start? For everything is urgent. Everything is a matter of priority... and, therefore, nothing is given priority. Most of the time, thinking of the future consists of trying to adapt “business as usual” scenarios established by forecasters. That is what



we call “being realistic”, and a decision is generally reputed realistic if it has been approved by the Financial Director! Another approach would consist of asking ourselves what we would like to happen and what we can do to make it happen, and not what is going to happen. This drastically different approach is based on a different rationale. Looking to the desired future allows us to liberate our imagination: it makes it easier to invent the path to this future and makes sense of the endeavours of men and women to master their destiny.

Institutional communication strategies are adopted to make society move and invite it to consider what could or should be its future. Some are based on fear of future catastrophes, action becoming a way to avoid the worst. This type of anxiety-provoking discourse may lead some people to refuse to come to terms with the problem, and even to deny reality. Another approach consists of creating desire and presenting the future energy constraints as opportunities to radically reform our societal projects.

The IMAGINE process is about building a sustainable and desirable future. IMAGINE, and in particular its seminar, is looking into a variety of subjects: the modelling of a “2,000 watt society”⁶, cities initiating radical actions to open new avenues, the stakes behind the Brundtland principle and the issues of intergenerational justice, climate change as an opportunity for territories, innovative and efficient change management methods, the conditions for the emergence of new experiments such as eco-neighbourhoods, the relation (desire, obstacles, reservations) that individuals and organisations have with change, the interactions between change players and so on⁷.

At the same time, the IMAGINE exhibition⁸ is being shown throughout Europe. It has been translated into 9 languages and illustrates new paths and methods as ideas and desires that are already being experimented in various places.

We all wonder how to change, introduce change or find new ideas in our own systems or organisational charts. One of the IMAGINE challenges is to find methods to release energies, encourage creativity, develop discussion and reflection all in an inspiring conviviality, as well as to improve working habits and promote organisational modes that increase collective intelligence. Change is essentially a cultural issue. We do not change just for rational reasons. Civilisation, culture and emotions are essential factors in determining change and resistance to change.

⁵ United Nations environment programme:
<http://www.unep.org/>

⁶ Swiss version of the Factor 4 objective.

⁷ See the links mentioned at the beginning of this document.

⁸ <http://www.imagineyouenergyfuture.eu/exhibition/spip.php?rubrique2>