

Hindsight and foresight combined:

History as a component in scenario building

Edward Cornish, the founder of the World Future Society, once claimed that it is absolutely essential to revisit historical visions of the future in order to comprehend the concept and be able to carry out qualified forecasting. This is exactly what I will be doing in this paper, which explores the potential of historical knowledge as a platform for scenario building in urbanism. I do this in two parts. First, a dissection of previous scholarly work on the subject matter, such as *A History of the Future* (2008) by Donna Goodman and *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) by Fredric Jameson, aiming to pin-point a theoretical basis for the forecasting ambitions of the past. Secondly, a critical reflection on some of my own endeavours in the field, which involves me in the capacity of conducting preservation assessments and historical analysis within the context of Norwegian urban planning practice. More specifically, I target the value of historical perspectives as an integrated part of scenario building as well as the methodological execution – what you can do and what glimpses of the future you can see from an historical point of view, to put it in simpler terms. While I will refer to several projects, I focus my attention on a recently concluded collaboration between myself, Rodeo Architects and Dietz Foresight: “Perspective 2050 – Scenarios for Jæren”. This took form as a scenario building process in close alignment with the new regional plan for Jæren, an economically wealthy region in the southwest part of Norway. Although roles and responsibilities within the project were split between the parties involved, leading to three separate documents, the whole working period happened in close collaboration, yielding a scenario synthesis report where hindsight and foresight merge. This version of the project is particularly aimed at reaching audiences beyond the world of politicians and planning professionals. It is shorter and more concise, yet also more diverse and cross-fertilizing when it comes to key perspectives. From the outset, the idea is that we can learn something from history in terms of projecting the future – a pedagogic reminder of past predictions, failures and successes – and that history carries with it the potential to anchor the future. Memories – accurate or imaginary - of the past often create a “nostalgia for the future”, according to cultural heritage scholars Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, which can enable people to get more involved and engaged in their own local community. There is a basic need in human beings to dream back in order to think forwards, or so it seems – at least that is one of the things I will be exploring more closely in this paper, shifting back and forth between theories and practices of anticipation.