

Presentation 30

When Scenario Planning Turns Eristic: the Reification of the Future in the 'Local Government of the Future' program

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Room: PC3.50

Scenario planning is an increasingly popular method. Scientists and policy makers are increasingly fascinated with the future, in a context of discontinuation of trends, coming up challenges, deep complexities, and radical uncertainty of how the future will look like. Scenario planning offers an exploration of what alternative futures are imaginable and which possible, plausible and desirable (preferable) futures provide a point of reference for rethinking current policies and perceptions of the world. Scenario planning provides new knowledge for anticipatory governance, which enables policy makers to shape futures, through robust, resilient, flexible and innovative policies, in preferred directions, beyond today's concerns. The point of scenario planning is the exploration of *alternative* futures, the key assumption that futures are open and undetermined, yet not empty from social forces that are at work today. Scenario planning, exploring alternative futures, is a dialectical process that includes a variety of stakeholders and their employment of multiple, and typically contradictory, perspectives of the world.

A real scenario planning is a dialectical process that is organized the 'art of conversation' or the 'clash of minds' – an intellectual dialogical process in which opposite perspectives are reconciled in a (typically democratic) spirit of compromise. Yet, not all scenario planning is so real. False scenario planning may be organized for purposes of prediction and control, for instance, via the use of simulation models and incorporation of big data. False scenario planning is not dialectical but an eristic process in which a particular image of the future is reified through the application of a particular model or method. False scenario planning enforces a compulsive identification with a particular image or story of the future, ruling out alternative futures beforehand. The purpose of such false scenario planning is to reify the future in accord with current policy objectives. The reified future is the image or story of a future in which current policy objectives are fully realized, in a spectacle of policy effectiveness. Rather than unleashing new imaginations, much-needed for anticipatory governance, the false scenario planning closes off imaginations,

In this paper, the contemporary Local Government of the Future program, an initiative from the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, is discussed as an illustration of a false scenario planning. In this particular case, scenario planning is employed as a policy instrument that enables the policy makes of the Ministry in question to reify the future of local government, as a compulsive identification with a future of government that is currently desired by the policy makers of that Ministry. The purpose of this paper is to uncover, and criticize, the eristic process of such a false, mind-closing, scenario planning.