PEP TOGETHER SESSION: THURSDAY 18TH JUNE, 2020

NCCPE Updates

- The NCCPE has recently launched a series of online training courses, with 6 modules available through Blackboard collaborate. These courses will be delivered by members of the NCCPE team and training associates; and are currently open for institutions seeking training in PE.

- The NCCPE is hosting Engage Conference this year, using a hybrid model of online and offline activity. Taking place between the 30th November and the 4th of December, the festival will be partially curated via suggestions and ideas from those in the PEP network, with a range of sessions, plenaries, workshops and performances that reflect the diverse array of knowledge, needs and experience available in the sector. A prominent theme to this year’s Engage will be around the role of public engagement in reimagining a post COVID-19 world. The NCCPE will be offering a small number of bursaries for those bringing ideas for online and offline engagement to the table, with a call for contributions scheduled in July. More information can be found here.

- Registration for the NCCPE’s PEP Network is now free of charge until March 2021, with the status of current members extended at no cost for the next membership year. To find out more, click here.

- The next extended PEP network event will take place on the third of July, running from 10.30am to 4pm. These sessions are designed with connectivity in mind, and allow more time and space for PEPs to network, hold conversations, or simply catch up on the day-to-day.

- Future PEPTOgether sessions will be held on a fortnightly basis, with each session extended to 75 minutes in length. This change is designed to allow space for longer conversations and the discussion of more complex issues; however, we welcome any feedback from delegates regarding this decision.

- In recent news, current plans are being made for a new ARPA-style UK research agency, modelled on practice from the United States. The government has committed around £800 million to the funding of this initiative, with the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee running an inquiry that will close before the end of June. The
The proposal is, in part, designed as an alternative to current research cultures of ‘red tape’ and bureaucracy, which the government believes may be hampering innovation: [link to article](#)

- For PEPs who wish to share any news, updates or stories during future sessions, please contact Maddy Foard ([Maddy.Foard@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Maddy.Foard@uwe.ac.uk))

**Exploring Future Scenarios – what does the future hold?**

*Paul Manners provided some framing comments to set up the topic for the webinar.*

For contemporary society, the current global pandemic is a truly unprecedented situation. The future that will follow COVID-19 is, therefore, an uncertain one – not simply due to the virus itself, but also due to the widespread re-evaluation of contemporary social issues triggered by the pandemic.

Social disparities and systemic inequalities in our society have been thrown into stark relief by the pandemic. Be it on a local, regional, national or global level, COVID-19 (and the ensuing response) have thrown a spotlight to these issues. This can be difficult and anxiety-inducing, but has also opened up possibilities for innovation and disruption, with a push for societal change.

The process of envisioning and planning for the future is really challenging. Much of the current focus is geared towards providing practical solutions to the more immediate, short-term ramifications of the virus and of lockdown. This session will explore the use of [scenario planning](#) - a strategic planning method that some organizations use to make flexible long-term plans. The approach (also known as scenario thinking) allows you to explore longer term possibilities, and to better organise what appears to be, at first glance, a complex and chaotic set of actions and events.

Below is one such example of a scenario planning template, from KANTAR’s ‘Anticipating the Balance of 2020 – Scenarios exploring COVID-19’. It identifies four possible futures, plotted against two dimensions (the nature of the reaction to the crisis – ‘panicked’ or ‘controlled’) and the frequency of the outbreak (‘one time’ or ‘recurring’).
It outlines four ‘possible futures’:

- **‘Close call’**: a one-time outbreak, with good absorptive control. There is a sense of optimism having narrowly skirted disaster. Business and the economy bounce back and phase back to normal by Q4 2020.

- **‘Panic attack’**: a one-time outbreak in which society struggled to absorb the impact. Global recession ensues as emotions and fear overpower attempts to shore up the economy.

- **‘Recurring nightmare’**: perhaps the worst case scenario, in which the pandemic is not a one-time outbreak, and in which society continually struggles or fails to absorb the impact. Health concerns dominate all others as people seek ways to stay well. Digital divide exacerbated. The economy and health care systems are under extreme pressure.

- **‘Brave new reality’**: in which the outbreak is recurring, but society is able to successfully adapt and alter to absorb the impact. The world adjusts to a new normal, including social distancing measures, lower levels of consumption, new forms of leisure. Businesses learn how to adapt.
As Kantar stresses, it’s important to remember the following things about scenarios:

- Scenarios are:
  - Descriptions of alternative coherent and plausible futures (often the most extreme depiction).
  - Narratives of the evolving dynamics of the future
  - Specific strategy-focused views of the future that create a view of future possibilities

- Scenarios are not:
  - Predictions
  - Variations around a midpoint/base case
  - Generalized views of feared or desired futures

Participants were invited to complete the following poll:

**POLL: Which of these scenarios most accurately anticipates the future you are currently planning for?**

- Close call
- Panic attack
- Recurring nightmare
- Brave new reality
- None of them

The vast majority of delegates chose the ‘Brave New Reality’ option. One delegate mentioned that, for them, planning for the Brave New Reality option was the necessary option, if only because planning for the more negative scenarios was extremely demotivating and difficult.

Another delegate pointed out that the plans made by their institution may have some overlap with different scenarios; expecting the ‘Nightmare’ pressure on healthcare and the economy, while adapting work to fulfil the need of the ‘Brave New World’ (or example, delivering content and resources virtually to rural locations).

The NCCPE has prepared a resource pack containing examples of 9 different approaches to scenario planning in the context of COVID19: [link](#)
Presentation: the Local Trust scenarios

This session’s guest speaker was James Goodman, Director of Partnerships at Local Trust. His organisation has been involved with many projects that use scenario planning, with much of the work focused in community and civil society. Local Trust was created in 2012 to deliver the National Lottery’s Big Local Programme, which gives £1 million to 150 different communities across England for residents to spend on improvements in the area – a radical approach whereby the money is allocated according to the decisions of the residents, thus altering the structure of power in local areas.

- To deliver Big Local until 2026, Local Trust has developed new structures and practices, including scenario planning, to promote sustainability and long-term thinking, while enabling people to engage with the changes required at different levels for a more sustainable planet.
- While developing strategy, Local Trust was anticipating a challenging time ahead for local communities. However, with the onset of the pandemic, it became apparent that rapid re-evaluation and radical new thinking would be needed to make sense of the potential future impact of COVID-19.

This motivated Local Trust to commission the development of scenarios to explore plausible impacts on communities. James referenced a well know example of scenario planning, developed in the wake of South Africa’s abolition of apartheid: the Mont Fleur Scenarios, (which can be seen below). Other (earlier) examples of scenario planning include the ‘Wargames’ used by the military, or Shell’s approach to navigating oil shocks during the 70s and 80s.

![Mont Fleur Scenarios Diagram](attachment:image.png)
Local Trust view scenarios as a transformative social technology, which can help us to navigate uncertainties and create the changes that we want to see.

One way of developing scenarios is to zone in on the critical uncertainties that research suggests are shaping events. This requires thinking on a larger scale, examining critical uncertainties that are not only shaping the immediate response to the crisis, but the long-term economic or socio-political ramifications of it.

In this project, one key uncertainty the team identified was: will the pandemic lead to greater polarisation, or will society see itself more as a collective?

The other key uncertainty concerned the centralising of power and decision-making during the pandemic, or the extent to which decision-making is devolved and distributed.

This led to the two axes underpinning the Local Trust scenarios: **how we see ourselves** ('collective' vs 'polarized') on one axis, and **how we take decisions** ('centralised' vs 'distributed') along the other:

James pointed out that each axis must be plausible: a possibility emerging from the way things are currently, rooted in the evidence of today. While the future itself is a fiction (and scenarios are not concrete predictions), the exploration of possibilities must have a basis in contemporary events.

It is also possible for certain ideas to overlap to an extent between quadrants. They must be flexible, since views of a possible future change with new information.
James then presented the four scenarios Local Trust have constructed:

- ‘Rise of the Oligarchs’:
  o Centralised and polarised
  o A ‘kleptocracy’, with a retrenchment of power which has taken advantage of the COVID-19 crisis.
  o A more populist environment; centralised, populist control of the media, with fake news dominating through social media.
  o The relationship between big business and government grows stronger.
  o A surveillance state, which is disempowering civil society.

- ‘Big Mother’
  o Collectivised and centralised
  o Government ‘locked in’ a way of operating by the statist responses made in the early stages of the crisis.
  o Competent and functional, but unintuitive and unimaginative.
  o Not particularly empowering for those at the margins, which can cause challenges.
  o A patriotic ‘togetherness’ narrative that many subscribe to.
  o Local government has money to act, but little power to make decisions; acting more as an executor delivery agent of central government power.
  o Corporate inequality

- ‘Fragile Resilient’
  o Distributed but polarised.
  o Government is barely managing to cope, as multiple crisis follow one another (multiple pandemics, the climate crisis etc)
  o While the government appears to be acting, the public perceive it as a poorly implemented and ineffective power. Where once power was consolidated in government, it now moves outside those confines.
This opens up room for informal innovation and connections (between families, friends, immediate cohorts, extra-governmental ‘mafia-style’ operations), and creative approaches of the sort seen in informal settlements in developing counties- a ‘cash-in-hand’ economy, but also with a high degree of innovation.

- ‘Winning Ugly’
  - Collective and Distributed
  - An enormous collective effort, over which relationships and connections are formed on both horizontal and vertical levels across society.
  - The management of the COVID-19 crisis is an important lesson for future issues, such as the impending climate crisis.
  - An openness to radical ideas
  - The state is an enabling platform, facilitating action and distributing power to localities.
  - Less travel: greater fostering of local economic development, which is more people-centred.
  - Does not underestimate the amount of change required, and the difficulty in achieving said change

James noted that the aspects of each scenario can be seen in current developments: from populists attempting to shape the narrative (‘rise of the Oligarchs’), to the corporate inequalities and political tensions of ‘Big Mother’, the innovation of ‘Fragile Resilient’, to the work at a local level that is in line with the ‘Winning Ugly’. Each scenario has its roots in contemporary societal responses to COVID-19.

James then invited participants to vote in two polls

**POLL: Which of these scenarios would you most like to see?**

- Big Mother
- Rise of the Oligarchs
- Winning Ugly
- Fragile Resilient

The overwhelming majority of delegates voted for ‘Winning Ugly’, with 23 votes. Five votes were directed towards ‘Fragile Resilient’, and four votes towards ‘Big Mother’.

**POLL: Which of these scenarios do you think is most likely?**

- Big Mother
- Rise of the Oligarchs
- Winning Ugly
- Fragile Resilient
On a more pessimistic note, the ‘Rise of the Oligarchs’ received the most votes, with 16. ‘Big Mother’ followed with seven, ‘Fragile Resilient’ with six, and ‘Winning Ugly’ four: in effect, a complete reversal of the results of the previous poll.

- James noted that when he had run similar polls in other settings, such as polling among community groups, the votes for likely scenarios were more evenly split.
- Imagining scenarios in this way is not simply an academic exercise in speculation, but a tool that can be used to strengthen strategy. For example, what would one’s practice look like in a Fragile Resistant scenario, as opposed to a ‘Rise of the Oligarchs’ scenario? And how might strategy be developed to make the best of each situation, and to innovate alongside or in spite of them?

Responses from delegates

- There was a degree of criticism for the titles of certain scenarios in the chat. While the scenarios were seen as helpful, some delegates felt that the language was unnecessarily gendered and used outmoded tropes, particularly in the case of ‘Big Mother.’
- James was asked to explain why the term ‘Winning Ugly’ was chosen? He explained that it was an oxymoron – to make the point that overcoming the challenges would require some very tough choices and tactics.
- He was asked whether it would be possible to create a set of scenarios in which all four were positive. He replied that the goal isn’t to be deliberately pessimistic – but to identify extreme instances which stem from objective analysis of the current situation.

Applying Scenarios

Paul Manners then led a session exploring how this kind of scenario thinking might be applied in the context of university public engagement.

The Local Trust’s scenarios report, in which the above scenarios are outlined, also details ways of using the scenarios as a means of working towards a more positive future.

To do this, the report explores how the scenarios might be addressed at different geographical scales: the local, the national, and the global. At each scale, there are different choices or interventions to make, based on the context. For example:

- At the local level, efforts to work towards a more ‘collective’ and ‘distributed’ future may range from protecting communities from economic and political failure, to empowering communities to play a role in building a better future.
- At a national level, the focus may be directed towards greater scrutiny of decision makers. As leaders dig in for the long haul, there is a priority to create pressure on leaders to act in the public interest. Current examples may include the BLM movement (with its remarkable momentum in recent months creating changes in legislation), or in the way that COVID-19
has created greater awareness of social inequalities, which are then brought to the fore in political debate.

- **Globally**, the pandemic does not respect borders, and so efforts to combat the virus must be trans-national, with countries working together to rebuild economies, protect the systems on which people depend, and create hope for a better future. It may be useful to think about how universities, which are global in their reach and approach, might contribute to this.

Delegates were asked to choose one of the four scenarios, and to reflect on how they might use it to help them to focus public engagement activity at one of more of the geographical scales.

**Delegate responses**

- ‘Nationally - there isn't much political (or parliamentary) debate about BLM. There's a lot of avoidance, e.g. the PM saying they've been taken over by "violent agitators", the increased potential sentences, yet another review. But there is no action and some cabinet ministers are shutting down debate about racism.’

- ‘Locally - my University was approached by a councillor about finding a solution to families with no IT and no internet access. Working with schools with high pupil premium, local charitable trusts and broadband providers (plus Eden North) they've gained the funding to provide tablets, free broadband and provide student mentors for Y11/13 students. It has mostly been through the student union and widening participation roles rather than public engagement. The next stage is the provision of activities which link to research, so they put out a call out for ideas and they're now working with the Design department to create bags. I guess that falls into the Big Mother/Fragile Resilient sectors.’

- ‘I find it really helpful to consider PE within this framework every so often. It’s so easy to get pulled into one direction, or way of working, which might mean we’re missing ideas, and more importantly people who should be involved in everything we do.’

- ‘The chartered institute of public relations had a nice future gazing graphic: [https://newsroom.cipr.co.uk/the-future-of-public-affairs-ciprs-pa-group-publish-horizon-scan-and-announce-ciprpachat/](https://newsroom.cipr.co.uk/the-future-of-public-affairs-ciprs-pa-group-publish-horizon-scan-and-announce-ciprpachat/) (Difficult to see in the preview though, and need a membership for the full pdf.)’

- ‘This makes me think of the work I do on an Action Research project at UAL. [publiccollaborationlab.com](http://publiccollaborationlab.com) . We've gone on to create a local community/college workshop [https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins/csm-public/make-story-garden](https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins/csm-public/make-story-garden)

- This is fascinating to think about but I'm still making sense of it, and need more time to mull it over. I can see elements of each local scenario here that I could use to build into a PE strategy in my HEI but I'm not too sure how each broader type of scenario has led to these examples being produced. The university is using scenarios to help planning at such an uncertain time and I think I do use scenarios to help shape thinking - but in a less structured way.’
- ‘These are very good for prompting people to examine process and not concentrate on outcomes, as we are guided to do’

- ‘This will help with some of the community partners and individuals we’re working with who have quite a specific agenda. Having this in mind might help me to frame some of the conversations to try and consider things differently’

- ‘I can definitely see how this exercise would be fascinating when discussing the role of the university in the future’

- ‘I think scenarios will help to consider how we’re having some of the difficult conversations at the moment. They’re also useful for considering the very different types of engagement we are involved in (or want to be involved in).

- ‘It’s helpful to consider how different issues are related, or how they’re presented in each scenario, and to consider how our initiatives could impact public involvement with policy and research.’

- ‘It is also worth considering that different people may feel they are in a different scenario within the same project due to the hidden (and obvious, to some) power structures.

- ‘Those struggling with their mental health may also struggle with thinking about the future at all: possibly they can’t see one, or this thinking could lead to anxiety attacks.’

- ‘One scenario - what if, collectively, we decided we did have the power?’

- ‘How do we encourage HEIs to consider this more broadly? And to plan more for communities and their place in them, when so much energy now is (understandably) being used for crisis management?’

- ‘At my institution, we are still dealing with the short-term issues; while these scenarios are useful, it may not be possible to have these conversations until a later date’.

**The session closed with a final poll**

**POLL: Can you see a use for Scenarios in your institution?**

- Yes
- No
- Maybe...

Of the three options, ‘Maybe’ received the most votes at fifteen, with nine votes for ‘Yes’. No votes were given to the ‘No’ option.

James noted that the scenarios are developed for a particular context, and can be altered or re-contextualised for other settings, e.g. Public Engagement. He stressed how useful they can be to
encourage ‘blue-sky thinking’ and open up different options. They can enable participants to examine the bigger picture; for instance, reminding people that a local community is embedded in a wider system and is influenced by a global context. PE teams could have conversations around scenarios with other teams at their institution, or groups external to the university, in order to get a wider perspective and to better understand the variety of ways these futures might be perceived.

Charlotte Thorley pointed out that using scenarios within PE requires applying them to work with partners and stakeholders. Scenario planning may be useful when considering the university’s existing plans, and the thinking that underpins this planning. She asked: how can PEPs find out what senior leaders and preparing for, and the assumptions underpinning their plans? And how can PEPs ensure that the role of PE can be articulated with these plans? Could this be something the NCCPE could help with?

- Paul noted that fostering this kind of long term, ‘big picture’ thinking could be an important role for PEPs when offering perspectives during meetings and planning with senior leaders.
- James noted that community ownership of assets and strong relationships between community organisations, residents, and the local state (including universities) are important to build a better world, and must be advocated for regardless of which scenario becomes the prevailing one.

Next steps

The NCCPE has prepared a compilation of Scenarios which have been created to model recovery from COVID-19, with examples from a range of sectors.

The NCCPE is developing a toolkit for PEPs to use to focus attention on the contribution of Public Engagement to university responses to COVID-19

Resources shared by delegates:

Linked to scenario planning

Link to NCCPE Scenario planning resource pack: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/nccpe_covid19_scenario_planning_resource_pack_june_2020_2.pdf

Link to UAL action research project: publiccollaborationlab.com

Link to UAL local community/college workshop: https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins/csm-public/make-story-garden


Linked to news and update
Links to Dominic Cummings’ blog on DARPA, and the newly proposed UK research agency

https://dominiccummings.com/tag/darpa/


Link to NCCPE PEP network process: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/professional-development/public-engagement-professionals-network

NCCPE Online Training courses: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/news/new-online-public-engagement-training-courses


Booking form for July PEP Network event: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/july-2020-pep-network-meeting-booking-form