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Editorial

Introduction to the special issue in futures on design and scenarios



This special issue in *Futures* includes seven papers that emerged from interactions and dialogue at the Oxford Futures Forum (OFF henceforth) event held in 2014. As with prior Fora, the event was designed to foster generative dialogue, trigger and support productive collaborations, and deepen reflections on the connections between two futures-oriented domains of practice and research: scenario planning and design.

We are grateful to the *Futures* journal and to its Editor, Ted Fuller, for hosting this special issue as a way to further and broaden the conversations, collaborations, and reflections of the 2014 OFF. We hope that the papers in this issue will provide another step towards helping scenario planners and designers fruitfully relate to each other, build new connections, and immerse those they work with in potential futures with the practices and thinking of the 'other' field.

We found in designing and hosting the 2014 OFF that scholars and practitioners from the two fields each offer unique and often compatible theories and methods to assess and engage uncertain, unforecastable, ambiguous, novel, or problematic situations. The papers in this issue share some of the outcomes of the spirited dialogue and creative studio sessions that occurred during the OFF.

Since the OFF seeks to reach beyond those invited to attend the event, we have been directing attention on spurring scholarly outputs as well as new projects and collaborations. Thus this special issue stands as an offering to others to engage in the intrigues and value of the cross-fertilization we've found useful from intermingling design and scenarios.

Our passion for interdisciplinary study that manifested in the OFF is well represented in these articles. Each paper offers insights into how the two fields can benefit from each other, and how they can engage uncertainty and open new lines of experimentation and inquiry that link research and practice, rigour and relevance.

A fundamental strength of this special issue is that it leverages the theoretical and practical experience of a diverse network of practitioners, academics and consultants that inhabit the field of futures (Mermet, Fuller & van der Helm, 2009) and of the field of design. The hybridisation between practitioners and academics at the OFF was reflected through a broad range of interests and epistemologies coalesced in a number of different academic disciplines, consultancy practices, design fields, governmental and non-profit bodies, and business communities. The focus on design and artefacts prompted the addition- for the first time in the history of the OFF- a curated exhibition as well as hands-on design sessions. The exhibition showcased a range of analogue and digital materials that sought to capture different ways that the future is articulated, represented and materialized in scenarios and design practices. We sought to organize interactions in and through the exhibition in such a way as to enable the works to elicit new forms of creativity and collaboration.

In the first of the seven articles, 'Scenarios and design: Scoping the dialogue space', OFF co-convenors Cynthia Selin, Lucy Kimbell, Rafael Ramirez, and Yasser Bhatti describe the conceptualization and design of the Oxford Futures Forum. Selin, Kimbell, Ramirez, & Bhatti, 2015 outline the impetus for the curiosity around scenarios and design, how they set the stage for iterative discovery, and some of the findings from the interdisciplinary explorations that took place during the OFF.

The second article, by Alexander V. Steckelberg, on 'Orchestrating a creative learning environment: Design and scenario work as a coaching experience' describes the value of team-coaching experiences in designing and implementing a creative learning environment for both fields using educational and psychological methods. Steckelberg (2015) argues that with both fields, spanning the arts and the sciences, the creativity needed to foster interdisciplinary research and practice might be best facilitated through a combination of crafting as well as coaching.

The third article, by Fabrice Roubelat, Jamie Brassett, Michael McAllum, Jonas Hoffmann, and Denisa Kera, on 'Probing ephemeral futures: Scenarios as fashion design', explores the design of scenarios and the design of fashion as means to achieve desired but yet ephemeral transformations, involving different time-based realities in their products. Roubelat, Brassett, McAllum, Hoffmann, & Kera, 2015 propose a conceptual framework and introduce how the process through which fashion is designed can be used to transform decision-making processes.

The fourth article, by Jamie Brassett and John O'Reilly, is 'Styling the future. A philosophical approach to design and scenarios' and seeks to rehabilitate the notion of style in design thinking. Brassett and O'Reilly (2015) argue that styling helps to raise the affective aspects in scenario planning and has the potential to helpfully reconfigure the role of agency, innovation and narrative in efforts to craft possible futures.

The fifth article, by Paul Graham Raven and Shirin Elahi, is entitled 'The new narrative: applying narratology to the shaping of futures output'. It draws upon film and literary theory to develop a novel analytical model for designing futures outputs as stories or narratives. Raven and Elahi (2015) explore 'narratives of futurity' and juxtapose art and science through comparing a literary author's freedom to write a story versus the constraints faced by scenario planning writers to fit outputs within the limitations of users, purpose, scope, and methods. Each reflect the rules of process and the specificities of context and have implications for an ethical engagement with the future.

The sixth article is by Joost M. Vervoort, Roy Bendor, Aisling Kelliher, Oscar Strike, and Ariella E.R. Helfgott. Entitled 'Scenarios and the art of worldmaking' the authors propose the idea of "worldmaking" as a useful framework and heuristic for scenario planning practice to help more creatively and critically embrace uncertainty, discomfort and knowledge gaps. Vervoort, Bendor, Kelliher, Strik, & Helfgott, 2015 explore the pluralism native to Goodman's "worldmaking" and the ways in which the comparison and contrast of different worlds, as surfaced through scenario planning, can foster productive and creative tensions.

This special issue concludes with Thomas J. Chermack and Laura M. Coons integrating thinking on scenarios and design as discussed at the Forum with an eye towards the implications for practice. Chermack and Coons (2015) summarize and synthesize the collection of articles in this special issue and take a view for interpreting and describing the core messages and practical take aways of each article for both scenario planners and design thinkers.

Although the contributing authors of this special issue possess vast collective expertise, no one has a monopoly on the distinctions between scenarios and design or of their relative merit. This special issue makes no attempt to chart definitive pathways or future trajectories for how to best embrace the intersections between design and scenarios. In some sense this issue (as well as OFF 2014) have only collated a set of plausible scenarios about what's interesting at the nexus between design and scenarios. Though new possibilities have been articulated, rendered explicit, or even opened, the proposals pursued in these articles stand as initial stabs at the prospects, but largely remain conceptually driven. Considerable further work is needed to try out new ventures and empirically test promising lines of inquiry or novel engagement methods. While the articles here have concentrated on the intersections and linkages, logically one can expect there to be ample scope to delineate instances where integration between fields is neither desirable nor productive.

For those who wish to take the ideas presented in the special issue forward with greater energy, it may be worthwhile to explore the 69 abstracts which were shortlisted for acceptance to the Forum, which provide a broader variety of perspectives than those already rich ones presented in the seven papers outlined here, as well as the 100 page report of Forum proceedings. Both are available online at <http://www.oxfordfuturesforum.org.uk/>. Other outcomes one can foresee may be in the form of entrepreneurial projects and empirical investigations spurred from the sketches for research proposals, workshops, exhibitions and networks incubated during the OFF.

We, along with the other convenor, Lucy Kimbell, the 69 participants, the 10 people documenting the OFF, 2 artists helping to curate the exhibition, and the sponsors of the 2014 OFF, hope readers using this special issue will appreciate the diversity of thought brought together. We hope it does justice to the enthusiasm of people of very different backgrounds who convened at the 2014 OFF.

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