Conference on Public Communication and Large-Scale Urban Regeneration Projects
September 5 – 6, 2006 in Warsaw, Poland

Future Search Conference in Theory and Practice

A Theory

1. What is a Future Search Conference?

Future Search Conference is a participation method, developed by the American trainers Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff. It derives from well-researched theories on the conditions under which diverse groups will cooperate.

Future search is a planning meeting for 16 hours spread across three days that helps people transform their capability for action very quickly. It brings people from all walks of life into the same conversation - those with resources, expertise, formal authority and need. The meeting is task-focused. It brings together 60 to 80 people in one room or hundreds in parallel rooms.

People tell stories about their past, present and desired future. Through dialogue they discover their common ground. Only then do they make concrete action plans.

Participants are encouraged to view their common interest from a broader perspective than the one they normally act upon. Problems and conflicts are regarded as information that can be used to identify common ground and desirable futures.

2. Conditions for Success, principles, ground rules and setting
a) Conditions for Success

- The top management (in politics and administration) must have the capacity to understand the need of change in the subject of the conference. They should declare their will to be open for new ideas that result from different affections and point of views.

- This method requires an attitude of partnership from all participants, an openminded expectation of yet unknown results and real chances for the implementation of results, so that the engagement of the participants will not only end in written papers.

- If the implementation of the results require finances or resources from other institutions they can only have the character of recommendations.

- If participants bring in own resources the results can be more binding

- In order not to depend only from the willingness of others to implement the results, always look for personal commitments, responsibility and engagement of the participants to specific next steps at the end of the conference.

- Existing ideas and plans to the topic can be brought in but should in no way limit the discussion and search of further ideas.

- The performance of the conference should be in the hands of neutral moderators / facilitators and they should use the wishes, ideas and competence of a preparationteam that reflects already the variety of groups and stakeholders.

- The conference requires a three-day time commitment from all participants.
- Urge full attendance - Keep part-time participants to a minimum.
- Meet under healthy conditions - This means airy rooms with windows, healthy snacks and meals, adequate breaks.
- Work across three days (sleep twice) - People need "soak time" to take in everything that happens.

b) Six Principles

- Get the "whole system" in the room. Invite a significant cross-section of all parties with a stake in the outcome.
- Focus on the future (vision) and not on the past (problems). Treat problems as information, not action items.
- Focus on common ground, and not on conflicts. Treat conflicts as information, not action items.
- Explore the "whole elephant" before seeking to fix any part. Get everyone talking about the same world. Think globally, act locally.
- Encourage self-management and responsibility in working groups.
- Look for measures, projects and planning only after you have reached a consensus on objectives and a desirable future (visions).

c) Five Ground Rules

- All ideas are valid
- All information is public
- Strict time frames
- Future focus and common grounds-vision points
- Have fun!

d) Setting

- The composition of participants is a crucial point as to the quality of the results (acceptance, stability, sustainability). The first principle says: Get the "whole system" in the room. Invite a significant cross-section of all parties with a stake in the outcome.

  The ideal Future Search Conference happens with 64 participants that are representatives of the "whole system" that has to be defined. If e.g. your subject of the conference is a central city planning topic it may make sense to assemble a representative "copy" of the civil society of your city in the conference room. In practice this means you have to look for eight different interests or perspectives to the subject (e.g. politics, administration, economy, social groups, environmental groups, culture / education, religious communities, sport/ leisure etc.). There is no right or wrong in the composition, als long as all interests in the preparationteam have

  the impression that no perspective, that is important for that subject, is missing. If you have forgotten an important perspective it will raise its voice afterwords and make trouble. The results of the conference will not last long and be effective.
- Once you have identified the 8 interests or perspectives you can approach groups that represent these interests and ask for 8 persons as stakeholders for this perspective. They will be invited to the conference.
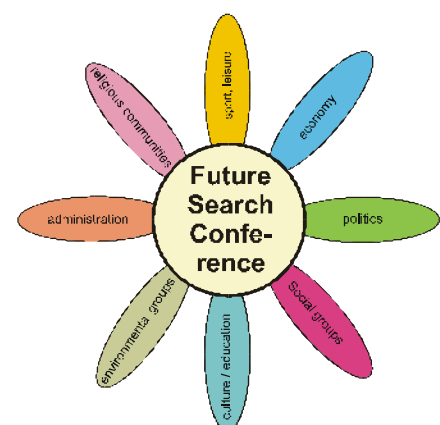
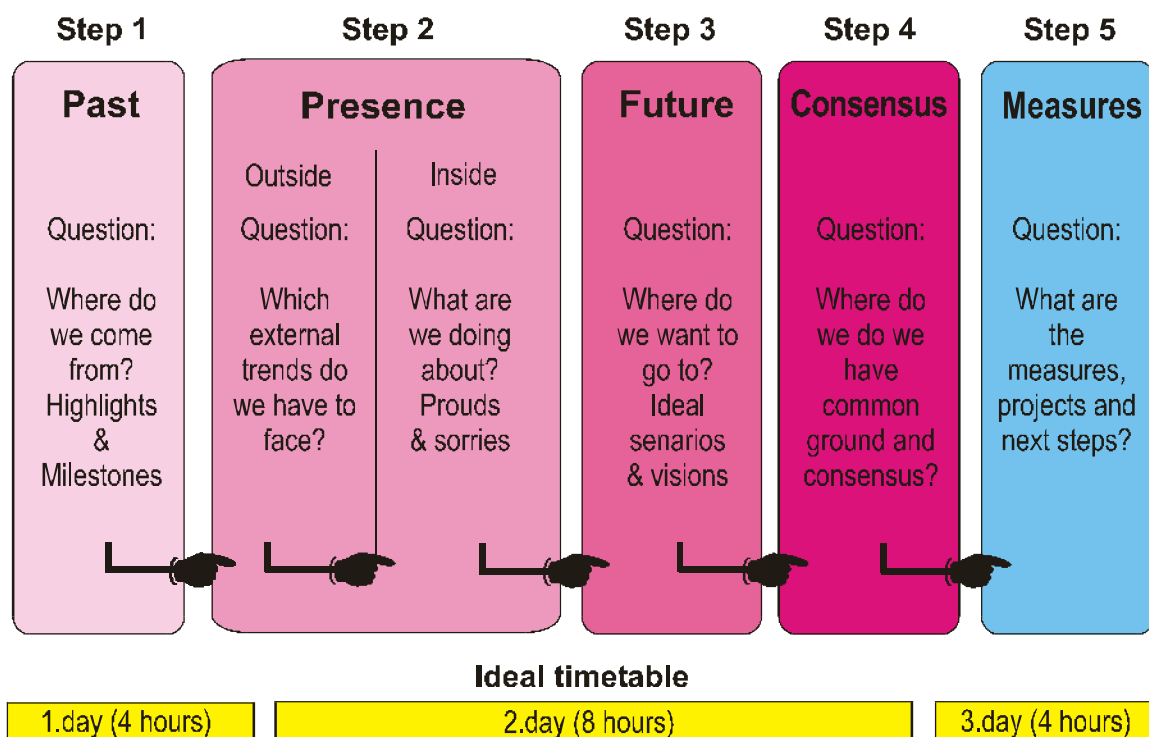- In a large conference room you have eight tables with eight chairs.
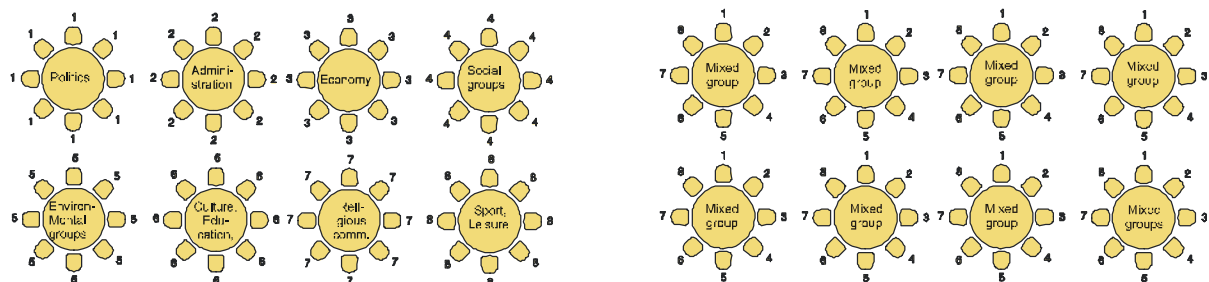
  It depends on the step of the conference that they work either within their perspective (all 8 politicians at one table, all 8 members of the administration at one table, all 8 members of the economic sector, all 8 social groups etc.) or you have mixed tables (at each table you have 1 politician, 1 member of the admistration, 1 member of the economic sector etc.). It's the basic charme of this conference that you have to discuss the questions in always changing the composition of the tables and argue either with your colleagues or with other interests and perspectives that are part of the whole system.
- Each step of the conference contains rational and emotional emlements.
- Each step of the conference aims on identifying common grounds.
- There is a constant change of work as an individual, in small groups or in the plenum.
- You need flipcharts for each table and large sheets of paper on the walls for drawing. It must be allowed to pin intermediate results on the walls so you have always the greatest possible transparency for the working results.

3. Future Search Methodology and Timetable

Steps of a Future Search Conference

Step 1	Step 2		Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Past	**Presence**		**Future**	**Consensus**	**Measures**
	Outside	Inside			
Question:	Question:	Question:	Question:	Question:	Question:
Where do we come from? Highlights & Milestones	Which external trends do we have to face?	What are we doing about? Prouds & sorries	Where do we want to go to? Ideal senarios & visions	Where do we do we have common ground and consensus?	What are the measures, projects and next steps?

Ideal timetable

1.day (4 hours)	2.day (8 hours)	3.day (4 hours)

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Step 1: Focus on the Past: Highlights and Milestones
Participants create a) personal, b) community and c) global histories by writing key events on large strips of paper on the walls. Time lines could be the years 1980-90, the years 1990-2000, the years 2000 – today.
This helps to make history visible, discover patterns and understand what the past means. After analyzing the timelines, small groups were assigned the task of "telling the collective story of the past" from one of the three points of view.

Step 2: Focus on the Presence: External Trends / Prouds and Sorries
The whole group makes a "mind map" of trends affecting them now and identifies those trends most important for their topic. Participants then fix sticky coloured dots onto those they think most important. This helps everybody focus on talking about the same issues. In stakeholder groups participants identify the 3-5 trends of greatest concern to their stakeholder group and describe what they are doing (collectively or individually) now about key trends and what they want to do in the future. Stakeholder groups report what they are proud of and sorry about in the way they are dealing with the future search topic.

Step 3: Focus on the Future: Ideal Scenarios
The next task required participants to create future scenarios. Small groups were asked to take a trip to the year 2020 and describe the situation (solved problem) in that year as if it had already been accomplished. This is a very funny step in the conference using creative methods of brainstorming and playing. Each vision is played and acted out to the other participants. Still barriers to the visions are also identified.

Step 4: Focus on Consensus: Identify and confirm Common Ground
As mixed groups, participants create a list of the things that appreared to be common ground among the future scenarios. This include values, principles, and big ideas. Working in combined small groups, participants clarify the common ground even further. Lists are merged one last time, and once again groups are asked to identify common ground. This step ends up with an understanding of common ground that is shared by everybody in the room. Diverse Groups post themes they believe are common ground for everyone. Whole group dialogues to agree on common ground. Shared vision identified, first by small groups and then by everyone. Projects to achieve it identified.

Step 5: Focus on Action Plans: Measures, Projects and Next Steps
Measures and projects are planned by self-selected action groups. Each small group reports back to the full group with vision statement(s) capturing the essence of their category, as well as short- and long-term action plans. If possible, volunteers sign up to implement action plans they would like to help to become realized. This is the place, were public commitments and cooperations are set up and arranged e.g. between NGO´s and public administration and/or among companies and/or privates. If at this point of time nobody wants to take over responsibility and engagement for parts of the results than the results can only be vague recommendations.

Closing the Conference is only the beginning
The conference closes with a feed-back. Each participant shares a word or two about how they now feel as the conference cames to a close. Quite often many feel hopeful and positive, others mention feelings like committed, excited and proud.

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Because of the nature of the Future Search process, only a limited number of people are able to attend the conference. However, steps are being taken to ensure that Future Search results are provided to interested persons ourtside or even the general public.

These communication efforts can include:
- The production of a video tape and or photo coverage of the conference
- A summary report of the conference
- Formal presentations of the conference e.g. at the city council
- Future Search Report posted on a web site and an e-mail address for submitting comments
- Sub-Committee meetings to finalize Vision Statements and develop draft goals, action steps and measures.

4. Future Search Conference Applications
Future search is used on every continent and in many different cultures. Neutral concepts like past, present, future, common ground and action provide a big empty vessel into which people, regardless of culture, pour their many realities.
Future searches affect every part of society - social, economic and technical.

Here are some examples where effective stakeholder involvement can greatly improve the process:
- Planning, zoning, or other similar public processes.
- Developing or amending a general plan.
- Implementing a general plan in areas such as housing.
- Building a shared vision for a neighborhood or community.
- Building or re-vitalizing a neighborhood organization.
- Regional planning on issues such as transportation, land use, economic development or sewage disposal.
- Departmental re-organization, closure or merger.
- Building a new agency, bringing in a new top manager, establishing a new commission or learning to work with a new group of elected officials.
- Improving and implementing service delivery systems.
- Commercial expansion, real estate development or other projects requiring public approval.
- Environmental and development issues (agriculture, conservation and land use).
- Community planning (including housing, employment, transportation).
- Economic development (business, banking, manufacturing and technology...).
- Congregations (religious communities)
- General Education (private, public, elementary and secondary schools)
- Higher Education (colleges, universities and technical institutes
- Healthcare (hospitals, nursing and mental health).
- Human services (aging, child care, cultural institutions, domestic Violence, family planning, museums, welfare reform, youth, public safety, homelessness)

Used Sources:
http://www.futuresearch.net
http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/method66.htm

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## B Case Study: Developing the South City of Nuremberg

1. The Cause of the Conference

Nuremberg today is a city of 500.000 inhabitants in Bavaria, Germany. The so called "South City" is the industrial heart with about 70.000 inhabitants and an area of 1.245 ha. When the industrialization started in the 30ies of the 19th century we had a boom of big manufacturers like SIEMENS SCHUCKERT, MAN, Leistritz or ALCAN Aluminum. Lots of jobs were created and we had a growth of inhabitants. Between 1970 and 1998 we had a severe change of economic structure in the South City with joblessness for more than 10.000 people in the metalprocessing industries. All of a sudden the South City had to realize that the economic basis had broken down.

The question was what would the future of the South City be like? Where to do we want develop the South City? What is the new identification? What are the strong points and potencies of the South City? What kind of new jobs can be expected and developped? What do the people living there need most in their quarter?

We were lucky that the South City became admitted to the EU-programme "Objective 2: Revitalising areas facing structural difficulties". Objective 2 of the Structural Funds aims to revitalise all areas facing structural difficulties, whether industrial, rural, urban or dependent on fisheries. Though situated in regions whose development level is close to the Community average, such areas are faced with different types of socio-economic difficulties that are often the source of high unemployment. In this situation the City of Nuremberg had the chance to develop the South City with the help of 45 Million Euros from the two European fonds ERFRE and ESF as a 50%-grant.

In order to meet the real needs and objectives of the inhabitants of the South City when talking about the future we were looking for a participation model that would involve every perspective to life in this quarter. We chose the Future Search Conference that finally took place on june 30 and Juli 1st 2000.
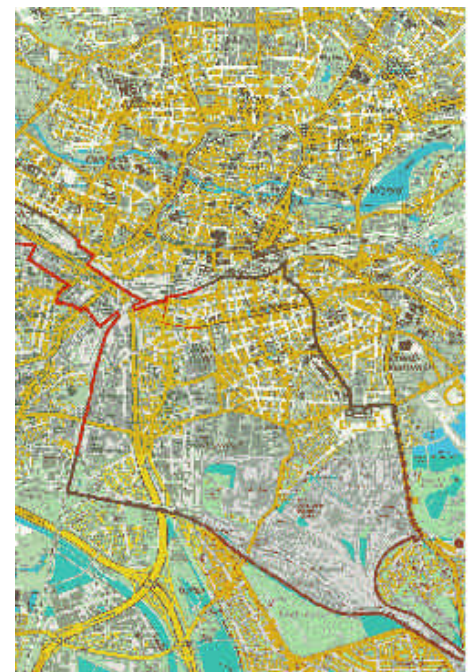
2. Prearrangements

This type of conference needs a good preparation. The first principle says: Get the "whole system" in the room. For us the "whole system" was the population of the South City that lived there (70.000), plus companies and people that worked but didn´t live there (30.000). We invited to four meetings in preparation for the conference addressing existing groups and companies and asking them who else is important to represent the "whole system South City".

It turned out that we had to organize a conference for about 200 people in order to get the following eight perspectives in the room: economy and commerce, housing and traffic, culture, education / formation, environment / ecology, urban renewal (we had some projects in this quarter), youth and social justice, non-organized individuals. The repre-

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sentatives of the city council and the public administration did not built groups of their own, they were asked to join one of these 8 groups.

Further more we presented the neutral moderators, introduced this special kind of Futere Search Conference, asked for topics to discuss at the conference, discussed what to do with the results of the conference and developed a time-table. These meetings were attended by about 50 persons each and being convinced of the sense and value of this conference they acted as multipliers to bring the right people to the conference. The number of 200 participants is much more than the "ideal" 64 persons of the normal model but it can work well if you have the right location, assisting personnel and sufficient work equipment. We also changed the classic model of a Future Search Conference a little bit and tailored it to the specific needs of this situation.

3. The Realization of the Conference

The conference took place in an empty hall of the Deutsche Bahn AG (German Railroad) right in the middle of the South City. For catering we installed a big tent outside.

Step 1: Focus on the Past: Highlights and Milestones

Starting the conference with this first step we asked the participants to look back to the past of the South City but with the task to identify the "treasures and jewels" of the quarter that were worth conserving and developable for the future.

In order to be more flexible we did not work with tables but with 18 circles/groups of chairs with 10-12 participants each, looking at this question from the following perspectives:

- economy and commerce (4 groups)
- housing and traffic (3 groups)
- culture (1 group)
- education / formation (2 groups)
- environment / ecology (1 group)
- Urban renewal (we had some projects in this quarter) (2 groups)
- Youth and social justice (1 group)
- non-organized individuals (4 groups)

The outcome was a huge collection of precious elements that were typical for the quarter in the past and appreciated by the inhabitants.

Step 2: Focus on the Presence: External Trends / Prouds and Sorries

The second step focussed on the external trends in the presence the South City has to face. This topic was discussed in mixed groups at the 18 tables and the results flowed into a great mind-map. In the end the question was, which of the recognized trends and developments bear chances for the future of the South City.

Step 3: Focus on the Future: Ideal Scenarios

This step was the most enjoyable part of the conference. The moderators asked the participants (sitting in their group of the 8 perspectives) to make a mental journey to the year 2015 (they helped with music and a time-trip) and to imagine how the challenges of the year 2000 were met. They asked for solutions already achieved and used kreativ brainstorming methods to imagine them. Each group should express their ideas and visions in a fantasy collage. Then there was an open market of ideas where each group presented to the others their ideas.

Step 4: Focus on Consensus: Identify and confirm Common Ground

After that the plenum figured out the common elements in the different visions and made a list of them in different fields of action (like economy/commerce, housing, traffic, neighborhoods, public places, green in the city, culture etc.). By putting sticky dots at the different ideas we found out the degree of consensus.

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## Step 5: Focus on Action Plans: Measures, Projects and Next Steps

It´s quite natural that a conference with 200 people and 16 hours time cannot work out measures and projects in detail. A lot of further information and discussion is needed to find out whether an idea or project invented is worthwhile to pursue or not. So the final step of the conference was to present the most highranking ideas/projects and to ask who fancies this idea and likes to deepen and proof it in a work group. At that stage 21 thematic work groups were founded and people signed join them. In each group one person agreed to lead the group and to invite for the first meeting.

4. The short and longterm Results of the Future Search Conference

The short term results of the Future Search Conference were a bunch of interesting ideas and projects for the South City and many participants who were willing to explore them in 21 working groups. As most of the members of the work groups were citizens who worked on an voluntary basis, the administration offered one of its members to every working group for organisational, technical and professional help. A documentation of the conference was sent to the participants and three months later there was a meeting were 21 working groups presented a bunch of 77 projects for the future of the South City. This was the final result of the conference as to the content.

Within the next 6 years 71 of them were realised: 23 projects in the social field, education and qualification with 6,5 millions Euro investment and 48 projects in the fields of construction, technology, economy/commerce and culture with 52,5 million Euro investment. The over all investment was 59 million Euro including 27 million Euro subsidies from the EU objective-2-programme.
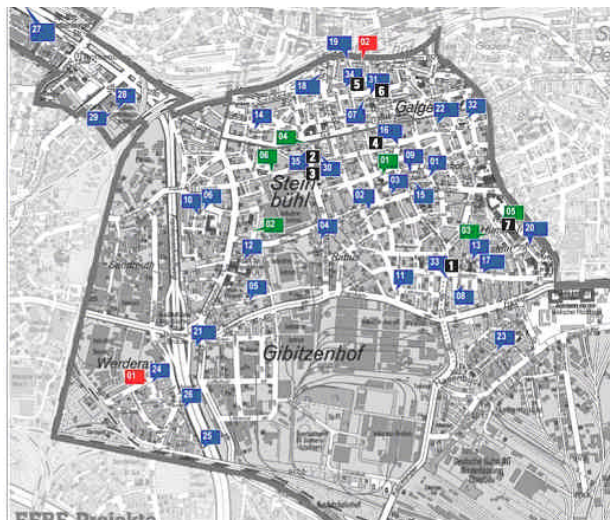
Because of the intense participation of the inhabitants of the South City in finding out what the future of their quarter should be, there was no resistance or opposition in implementing the projects.

Left: Location of projects in the South City Status April 2005 (blue = finished, green = beginning 2005, red = beginning 2006)