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Foresight and governance: how good can it get? The case of stakeholder image construction in a municipal vision project

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The article addresses the theme of foresight and equality in the area of stakeholder participation in governance. Empirically, the case at hand illustrates the challenges posed by stakeholder participation based on the concept of 'Inclusive Foresight'. A still understudied aspect of inclusive foresight is how these inclusion procedures are publically and politically legitimised, except with reference to the demand for more genuinely democratic decision-making. Drawing on fieldwork studies of a Norwegian municipal vision project conducted in 2006 it is shown how a specific image of young people was constructed which explained their participatory potential and argued for their authenticity as important social stakeholders. The term stakeholder image construction describes here a pre-defined process in which a social group is associated with seemingly inherent characteristics, including social, cognitive and political dimensions. By creating a specific image of young people, the project leadership resolved issues of stakeholder interests and futures literacy before they received their contributions. Constructing a desired image of specific stakeholders predefines considerably their potential as participants and the scope of their contributions in visioning projects. The article contributes to discussions of inclusive foresight by showing how stakeholder image construction poses questions of power relationships in municipal long term governance.

Keywords: foresight; visioning; municipal planning; stakeholder; participation

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Introduction

Foresight is among the most widespread and accepted forms of organised future-oriented activities today.[1] As a widely applied method for dialogical future thinking, foresight comes in many shapes and sizes. Discussions of foresight highlight the need for a trade-off between a workable common understanding of generic features and contingent national, trans-national and organisational issues.[2] Public sector institutions within health services, energy, transport or local government, acknowledge the increasing demand for democratic dialogue about the future with affected parties and interest groups. There is an increasingly participatory dialogue about the future between organisations and various social groups, such as knowledge workers (including experts), stakeholders and users of public services. In its ideal form, Foresight today integrates long-term planning,

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multi-stakeholder dialogue and the idea of shaping the future by influencing public policy and strategic decisions.[3]

In their seminal paper on 'Inclusive Foresight' Loveridge and Street (2005) argue that the credibility of foresight is dependent on extending participation to social stakeholders, especially those not normally seeking participation themselves. They suggest that specific process management and principles will enable such an extension into the social sphere, without causing the process to become chaotic. A still understudied aspect of inclusive foresight however, is the question: 'How are these inclusion procedures publically and politically legitimised, other than by the continual demand for more genuine democratic decision-making?'

Loveridge and Street (2005, 47) describe stakeholders as 'individuals or groups which can be affected by and/or affect an organisation and its activities'. They can be organisations or governmental entities who have a stake in or may be impacted by a given approach to policy making, as for example within the areas of environmental regulation or energy conservation. In the Norwegian municipal visioning project stakeholder participation was socially and politically legitimised by the municipal government and the municipal employees responsible for the project. The stakeholders in this particular case were participants in a communal effort, also called 'local stakeholders'. They were not an organisation or a political entity with predefined power or influence in the project but young people between 14 and 19 years of age. To underline the importance of participation in the vision-building project, the project leadership drew upon a specific image of young people as stakeholders in municipal development. This article focuses on the question: How did this particular image of young people as stakeholders influence their involvement and the final results of their participation in the project?

The idea of an 'image' of stakeholders is here not used in a managerial sense, as in the image of an organisation or firm which continuously has to be updated and refined in order to attract the desired target group of customers. However, similar to Fombrun's (1996) definition 'image' is here related to seemingly inherent characteristics, including socio-economic, cognitive and political dimensions we associate with a specific social group. Whereas Fombrun discusses how a company should take care of *its own image* in order to communicate effectively with its stakeholders, the question here is which image an organisation might create of *its stakeholders* to legitimise its strategic choices. This specific case of municipal visioning illustrates how an image of young people was created in order to endow them with stakeholder characteristics that fit the objectives of the vision project.

Relevance of case study

What picture do we have of young people between 14 and 19 years of age? What results can we expect from their participation in a visioning project in terms of knowledge, perspective or future literacy? There are various examples of national endeavours to encourage participation of young people, such as the 'Young Foresight' programme for schools in the UK, the German Futur project, and 'Jugend denkt Zukunft', a country-wide cooperation programme between German businesses and schools. One might argue that many people and organisations share a similar idea of this particular social group and their participatory potential. The present case of a Norwegian municipal vision project points to the often implicitly assumed shared understanding of who young people are and how their participation in foresight can contribute to its success. It is not the aim of this paper to discuss whether this image is wrong. More importantly, the discussion will highlight how such an image creation can influence the participatory potential of social groups up to the point where we might question the added value of their contributions. In regard to foresight

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this might be particularly relevant when the goal is to create a shared and desired picture of the future, as is often the case in municipal visioning projects.

Visioning in the context of foresight

How should visioning be understood in the context of foresight practises? According to the Foresight Online Guide published by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (JRC-IPTS) (2005–7) 'a vision *is an imagined representation* or a shared picture of the (usually desired) future'. The World Future Society, an international organisation propagating foresight, describes visioning as 'the process of creating a series of images or visions of the future that are real and compelling enough to motivate and guide people toward focusing their efforts on achieving certain goals' (Cornish 2004, 300). Visions as *desired images of the future* can be the result of a range of different foresight processes; for example in the context of regional, national and trans-national development programmes. Visioning as an activity, however, differs from other foresight methods, such as scenario planning.[4] In foresight literature visioning is part of a more complex process, involving not only the creation of a desired future picture, but also preceding steps, such as understanding past and present, and exploring the future in different scenarios (Godet 2001). In the literature on municipal planning, visioning is regarded as a separate method, as a more direct process of establishing a desired vision of a communal future not necessarily based on different future scenarios.[5]

This latter approach is politically crucial for public organisations trying to develop policy and long-term thinking. Policy makers in public sector planning are often more interested in the scenario approach, in exploring *different possible futures* and understanding *future risks*. Ling (2002, 127, n9) writes that 'All policy makers are expected to think about the risks associated with a policy and how these might best be managed'. Yet the uncertainty of different scenarios is also seen as 'politically weak and administratively untidy' as they rarely point unequivocally to one course of action. Visioning here has the clear advantage of concentrating on creating a shared and desired picture of the future from the very beginning of the process. This, however, emphasises questions such as to what extent stakeholders should be involved in the process, which ideas of the future should be labelled as 'desired' and how the resulting visions should be used in the planning context.

As pointed out by Shipley et al. (2004, 195) there was virtually no mentioning of visioning as a collective activity within the planning profession before 1990. After that, planners began to talk about 'community visioning' as a new method of 'soliciting stakeholder input for the creation of collective plans'. The rather scarce literature on municipal visioning has been criticised for its lack of a consistent theory or method. The term 'visioning' itself has been characterised as being 'so vague in practise that it sometimes runs the risk of being rendered meaningless' (Shipley et al. 2004, 196). As the case of a municipal visioning project discussed in this article illustrates, visioning as a form of community participation does not yet follow commonly recognised principles and processes. There is apparently a need for further investigation into the concrete practises of visioning, especially in the context of local long-term planning, such as in urban and municipal development.

Theoretical background

This paper is inspired by three research areas addressing foresight as a socio-political phenomenon around the millennial turn. Scholars of science and technology studies (STS) have called attention

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to the specific qualities of foresight, arguing that its practices point to certain ways of framing and rationalising the future (Rappert 1999). Brown, Rappert, and Webster (2000, 4) have pointed out that from an STS point of view foresight practices are not so much about looking into the future, but looking at the future: 'Our purpose is to shift the discussion from looking into the future to looking at how the future as a temporal abstraction is constructed and managed, by whom and under what circumstances'. They emphasise that future negotiating processes have to be studied according to how they are performed instead of looking at them as mere problem-solving tools for more prudent strategic decision making.[6]

The *Sociology of expectations* analyses foresight practises as structured around expectations and promises in technology, science and innovation.[7] Expectations embrace both the possible, probable and the highly unlikely, and thus address the uncertainty of the future. Scholars of organisation theories, however, have questioned the direct influence of scientific expectations and technological promises on strategic development of organisations (Sanz-Menéndez and Cabello 2000; Burt 2007). They have studied foresight in the context of organisational identities and the ways individuals fulfil identities and follow rules and procedures (Bood 2002). Schwandt and Gorman (2004) argue that organisations do not necessarily follow a straight and rational logic of techno-scientific expectations and promises. Building on these arguments Jenssen (2007) advocates a more cautious approach to the importance of foresight as a strategic tool for policy and decision-making by emphasising the complexity of organising and organisations.

Thirdly, this discussion of stakeholder image construction in foresight is inspired by issues of reflexivity in social theory (Giddens 1991; Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003; Lash 2003; Latour 2003), as a form of governance (Wynne 2002; Grunwald 2004; Cunliffe 2005; Konrad and Voß 2006) in designing foresight processes and adaptive planning (Grin, Felix, and Bos 2004; Weber 2006) and as a critical tool in qualitative research (Lynch 2000; Colombo 2003; Cañellas-Boltà and Strand 2006).

Reflexivity is a broad concept, with roots in philosophical, literary and social as well as natural science discourses. In the context of future orientation, reflexivity has evolved from an understanding of human practice as described by Garfinkel (1967) via a social theory of modernity introduced by among others Giddens (1991) and Beck, Bonss, and Lau (2003), towards a new understanding of foresight methodology and practice (Fuller and De Smedt 2008). Most literature today sees reflexivity as a *positive value in itself*, a practice to aspire to and to be followed by social institutions. Beck, Bonss, and Lau (2003, 2) refer to 'reflexive social institutions' as central agents charged with the responsibility to make 'reasonable decisions about the future ... in a world that is, in some respects, literally boundless'. Foresight is thus a coordinated response to uncertainty and risk. Giddens (1991, 29) argues that the 'popularity of futurology in the system of high modernity is not an eccentric preoccupation ... but signals a recognition that the consideration of counterfactual possibilities is intrinsic to reflexivity in the context of risk assessment and evaluation'.

Foresight is thus an expression of the constant self-monitoring of social institutions, their ability to address present and future issues and to act responsibly in a changing environment. Less attention, however, is given to the paradoxical aspects of reflexive knowledge in its relation to expectations and the organisation of the future. How do we mobilise knowledge for future-oriented activities and expectations about future development? Giddens (1991, 29) argues that our present knowledge about social institutions and relations between social actors relates to *existing structures* and could limit our openness to new insights. Thus reflexive knowledge might in the end confound our expectations. Therefore we need a broader understanding of reflexivity

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in foresight as containing both enabling and constraining features, a discussion that has been developed elsewhere.[8]

Methodology

The research on this particular visioning project in a Norwegian municipality is part of a PhD project studying different practises of foresight in the public sector. The research was conducted by applying 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995, 95–117). Ethnographic research involves fieldwork, where 'observation, participation as well as structured/non-structured conversations and interviews are equally important sources of data' (Thygesen 2009, 56, n7). Multi-sited ethnography means conducting fieldwork in different locations which are chosen on the basis of assumed relevance for the study. The visioning project took place in various settings, including social science lessons at secondary schools, student meetings, workshops conducted with different stakeholders, internal meetings of the department responsible of the project and open hearings in the community council related to the project. The goal of the fieldwork research was to observe the process of this project in all of these settings, although only the hearings in the council were open to the public.

To get access to the other environments contact was established with the visioning project leader in the municipality's administration. Having acquired access to the project, the fieldwork activities included observations at all project sites, as well as interviews with schoolteachers, politicians, municipal employees in the planning and social development department, visioning workshop participants and foresight practitioners. Before and after the phase in which the schoolchildren's ideas were collected, a telephone survey was conducted with the 20 municipality schools about their intentions to participate in the project and later verifying their actual involvement.

The empirical study is based on 34 hours of in-depth interviews and fieldwork observations in those various settings. The goal was to follow the visioning project in the different social settings and to collect 'relevant ethnographic moments' (Van't Klooster and Van Asselt 2006) during the 7-month project period. For the discussion at hand ethnographic moments were chosen which were 'indicative of dissonance' (Herzfeld 1997) and highlighted 'contesting values or problematic social changes of some kind' (O'Connor 2004). This article is based on the collection of specific moments in which the idea of assumed shared values collided with the ideal of community engagement.[9] The following discussion of how an image of schoolchildren as stakeholders and participants was constructed by the visioning project leadership touches on possibilities and limits of inclusive foresight in municipal planning processes and expounds the challenges of our contemporary understanding of communicative planning tools as power instruments (Pløger 2002).

Requested vision: a desired future picture of Lundal

The municipality of Lundal[10] is closely situated to the Norwegian capital of Oslo and one of the richest municipalities in Norway. In September 2005, the municipal administration conducted a survey measuring their inhabitants' satisfaction with the community services provided. The results of the survey showed an overall satisfying result, except for one group of inhabitants, young people between 14 and 19 years of age. According to the survey this social group was least satisfied with communal offers for social and cultural engagement. Therefore, the municipality leadership decided to focus more deliberately on the needs of young people. Among the activities suggested by the community council was the idea expressed by the mayor of Lundal: 'All pupils and students in secondary schools and colleges should be invited to participate in a vision project organised by the municipality to create a desired picture of their community in 2020'.

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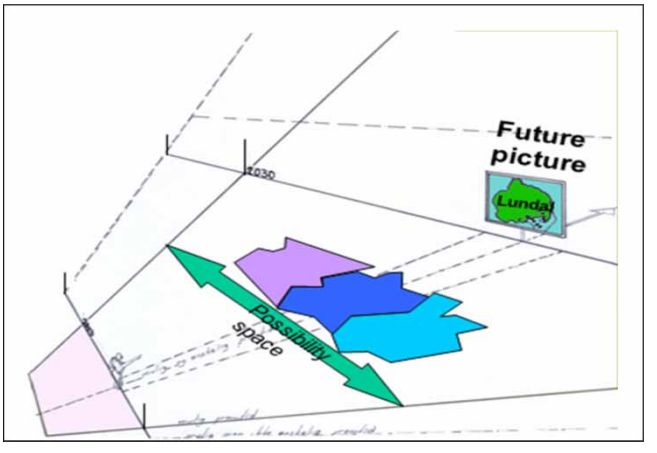

Figure 1. The future picture of Lundal was clearly situated within the possible and desirable. From power point presentation by project leadership, March 2006.

The visioning project was organised by a project group consisting of one of Lundal's municipal administration employees and two teachers representing secondary schools and colleges. The resulting visions were planned to be part of the revised municipal long-term plan regarding social development of the community (2006–2020). The objective was to produce a vision of Lundal which was clearly situated within the realm of the possible and desired. The project leader presented an illustration to school officials, social science teachers and students which showed a possibility space with three broad areas shaded in different colours (Figure 1). These broader areas were called alternative 1, 2 and 3 and meant to illustrate possible and desirable future outcomes of municipal development without defining these further. This pointed towards a relative flexibility of what was regarded as possible and desirable development. Yet these three areas were already situated around one central dotted line which led straight to the desired future vision, a narrow frame with a picture entitled 'Lundal'. For the figure standing at the left end of the dotted line, there is only one road to follow. A similar illustration used during presentations of the project showed several figures without the orientation symbolised by the future picture in front of them. They were wandering in all directions; some of them stranded even outside the possibility space, indicating that without a clear vision of the future long-term planning would only lead to chaos and a waste of time and resources.

The participation of the young people was part of the vision project and their contributions were considered important for how this future picture should be developed. At the same time, the municipal project leadership clarified early on how their contributions would be handled in the context of municipal planning. The project proposal written by the municipal administrative leadership underlined the powerful position of the political representatives in the vision project:

> The social part of the municipality plan is characterised by long-term planning including a broad social approach and substantiation of those visions and goals which the community council desires for the development of society. In order to obtain operative power the visions and goals should be anchored in/embedded on all levels of the municipality plan.[11]

Thus the resulting visions were already defined as those desired by the political leadership of the municipality of Lundal. The process of the visioning project was also defined as being guided by

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the interests of the political representatives, both as contributors to the future pictures and as the ultimate recipients of a vision proposal:

> The head of administration proposes that suggestions are collected from young people at secondary schools and colleges to structure the future pictures. These future pictures will be discussed and supplied with suggestions from other actors *and where the politicians would like to be represented* before the head of administration writes a proposal for visions and goals which will be discussed in the community council.[12]

With those clear definitions regarding process and result already in place, one might expect the participation of the young people to be relatively open and inclusive. The following data, however, shows that the collection of young people's contributions was preceded by the construction of a specific image of them as stakeholders. This construction was partly a way to agree on how young people should be regarded as a social group and partly to control the output, i.e. their contributions to the vision project. This paper argues that constructing a specific image of young people as stakeholders points towards a dilemma of inclusive foresight that cannot be rectified by specific management and process principles. It arises when social stakeholders are made participants in a foresight process aiming at producing *one desired vision of the future*.

Social-economic, cognitive and political stakeholder image construction

The initial justification for involving young people in the vision project and giving priority to their ideas about Lundal's future was expressed by the community council in September 2005: 'The young people *are* the future; therefore they should be involved in discussing it'. Another argument used during the meeting was that the young people of today would spend most of their lives in Lundal. Defining young people as *embodying the future* made them important stakeholders in the further development of an already wealthy community.

One important aspect of creating an image of young people as primary stakeholders was their social and economic position within the community. During several presentations of the project, the project leaders showed an illustration figuring predators fighting over the right to decide area planning in Germany's capital Berlin (Figure 2). 'Why the young people?' the presentation asked. The presenting project leader argued that the young lack 'intensity and aggression' associated with the strongest driving forces in future decision making. They were assumed to have no capitalist aspirations. This would be an advantageous precondition for developing their future ideas.

Thus a specific social-economic image of young people as stakeholders was indispensable for their participation. The assumed lack of spatial and economical interests, however, was also accompanied by a request expressed by the municipal project leadership:

> The community council chairmanship of Lundal would like suggestions from the community's school children for the rollover of the social part of the municipality plan. This means that this time the focus is on areas of action which address the *well-being of the citizens and less physical projects to be conducted*. It is the ideas about what we should put effort into which are the most important and these ideas might result in physical projects which the municipality can analyse later.[13]

The image of young people as being free from capitalist motives was coupled with a clear request to leave out ideas about physical future projects. Apparently the assumed essential absence of capitalist interests was not enough to direct the young people's ideas in the desired direction. To avoid political discussions about unrealistic use of municipal areas resulting from the young

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Figure 2. Illustration by German cartoonist Rainer Ehrt used by the vision project leader to underline the lack of capitalist interests in young people's ideas about the future. Power point presentation, March 2006.

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people's suggestions, they were asked to focus on the 'well-being of citizens and on ideas about what 'we should put effort into'. In order to do that, they were asked to talk to their parents, neighbours and friends, thus adapting the knowledge of other, more informed social groups to create their 'own' ideas.

Another precondition was a request to imagine themselves as grownups. They were asked to use their estimated age of about 30 years in 2020 as a starting point for their visionary ideas.[14] Although as stakeholders their social definition as 'young people' was essential for their participations, when it came to their contributions their present social status was not what the project leaders were interested in. They suspected that visions taking their starting point in the young people's present situation would result in enumerations of their daily needs and desire and not be connected to an idea of their community in the future.[15]

Furthermore, the project leadership presumed the children's ideas to be unstructured and non-reflective, essentially *mirroring* their hopes, beliefs and concerns about the future. Therefore their ideas would have to be developed into short stories, which would show desired descriptions of Lundal in 2020. These future pictures were to be written using expected trends in municipal development coupled with the young people's ideas. The finished stories were then to be discussed in workshops, one with participants from different service compartments of the municipality and one with politicians. The most desired future pictures should lead to one collective vision. The project group suggested design depicted in Figure 3.

The young students' ideas would thus be the initial creative input to the future pictures which would lead to a desired vision of Lundal. Nevertheless, they were undergoing a systematic revision process conducted by the project leader and 'everything too fantastic will be eliminated'.[16]

Result and outcome of the vision project

According to the municipality's official project report, nine out of 20 secondary schools and colleges participated, with a reported outcome of 300 different ideas. Several topics were being repeated among the young people, such as improved care for the elderly, improved child welfare and improved health care. The municipal project leader ordered the ideas collected from the

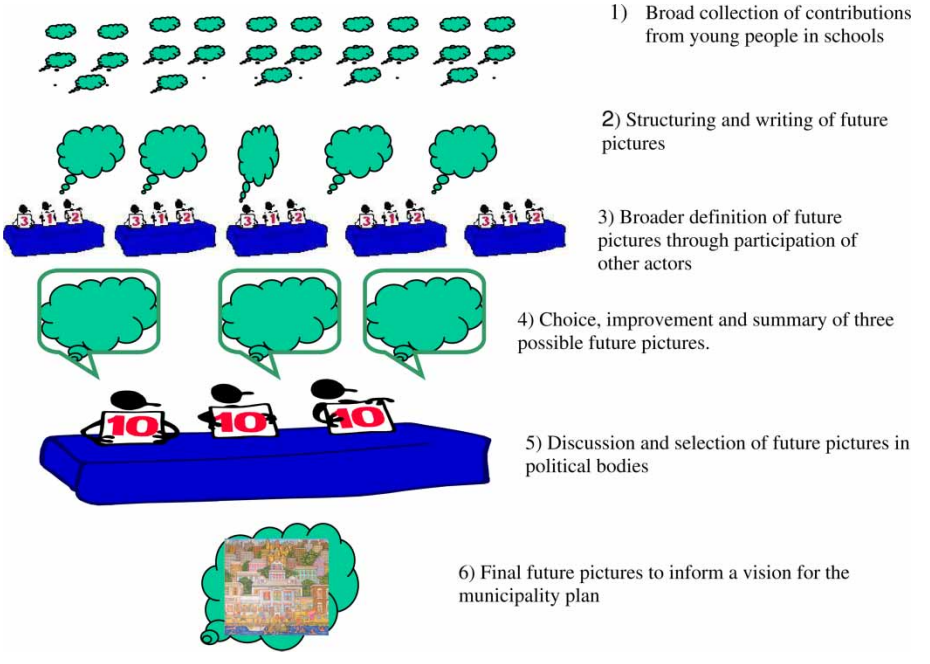

Figure 3. The design of the municipal vision project according to the project group, February 2006.

schools systematically and created three future pictures, adding survey data and material from other sources. These future pictures were then presented in a workshop with communal and cultural organisations to discuss which of these were most desirable. Some grown-up participants criticised the future pictures for being too rosy and promising. They criticised the absence of reflexive and critical inquiry into these future visions and warned about the possible alienating effects such visions could have on social groups already living on the fringes of society. Politicians, however, expressed surprise at how similar the young people's ideas were to their own political party programmes. The project leader commented on these aspects at the end of the vision project:

> I cannot claim that there have been many revolutionary ideas. But this is the way society works; we are not supposed to come up with revolutionary ideas all the time. I am not sure about this, but I am of the opinion that development in a municipality is not suited to especially deep reflection concerning all consequences . . .. Once we have discussed financial conditions, time and the political premises for such processes, it is difficult to imagine deeper analyses of possible visions. Therefore we rather call it future pictures, or scenario seeds, which could be developed further if one wishes to do so.[17]

Although the future ideas were presented as being entirely created by the young, the resulting visions were not included into the long-term municipality plan. Instead, the politicians suggested that the future pictures should be used by the young people's community council (YPCC). This is an organisation consisting of pupils' representatives from all secondary schools and colleges in the municipality and was founded to inspire pupils and students to engage in social and political debate. The municipal leadership suggested that the YPCC could use these future pictures as a basis for their own visions, values and goals. The vision project organiser later explained in an interview that there were several reasons why the politicians refused to discuss or agree

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on a desired vision, for instance upcoming municipal elections. Instead of contributing to the organisational knowledge and attaining operative power in the municipality plan, the future visions were 'redirected' to being used by the young people themselves, arguably with less political and operative impact.

Stakeholder image construction: from authority to authenticity

This specific case of a municipal vision project is not about the involvement of authoritative experts in foresight. According to the UNIDO textbook on Foresight methodologies 'expert panels should not stray into the realms of wishful thinking – their analyses and recommendations need to be based upon sound data of the past and present, as well projections of those trends that can be projected with reasonable confidence of accuracy, i.e. demographic change' (Keenan 2002, 55). Further, this particular case is not an illustration of what Loveridge and Street (2005, 32) discuss as 'inclusivity in technology foresight studies' in which 'experts and non-experts regard each other *as equal but with different agendas and capabilities each needs to seek to understand'* [italics added]. The stakeholders described in this case are also not sponsors of the exercise or 'organisations that might be expected to act in the light of the exercise's findings' (Keenan 2002, 49).

This case addresses what Loveridge and Street call the 'third question' of foresight (2005, 38). They argue that foresight has for too long concentrated on 'What is possible?' and 'What is feasible?' and should now be concerned with the question 'What is desirable?'[18]

In the case of the Lundal vision project, long-term social planning was intended to be influenced by young people between 14 and 19 years of age. Most of those belonging to this age group have no right to vote nor are they entitled to exercise influence as individuals on public policy making in any other form. Their life experiences with public health and welfare are still rather limited compared to older social groups. In both respects they can be seen as counterparts to the usually implied preconditions for any participation in a future-oriented activity: participants should possess some type of knowledge, if not expertise then lay knowledge about a specific area, defining them as non-experts (Cañellas-Boltà and Strand 2006), or they should be able to influence the activities of an organisation. Although the young people did not represent either of those categories, they were still invited by the municipal leadership to participate in this project as legitimate members of their community, holding a stake in the further development of their closest surroundings.

The participation of young people as stakeholders in the vision project is an example of a wider legitimation movement that does not base stakeholder participation on *authority* but on *authenticity* (Brown and Michael 2002). Their genuine position as young people in the community was the starting point for politicians, administrative leaders and project organisers, from which they constructed an image of this group as authentic stakeholders regardless of their knowledge or possibilities to influence political decision making. They were described as embodying the future, living their future lives in the community, and possessing no capitalist interests (Table 1). Interestingly, however, this image construction as authentic stakeholders was not enough to define their role as participants. The municipal project organisers had to ensure that the contributions were in line with the desired outcome: no juvenile wishes and demands connected to the present, no ideas about physical projects, only ideas about social well-being and a clear dissociation from too fantastic notions. Through both image construction and the pre-processual framing of contributions, the project leaders thus ensured that the future ideas contributed by the young were well within the possible and the desirable.

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Table 1. From stakeholder to participant – how the young people were defined as authentic stakeholders, while their contributions had to be framed by certain directed pre-conditions.

Areas	Pre-definitions as stakeholders	Pre-conditions for their contributions as participants
Cognitive	Young people *are* the future	Imagine yourselves as grown-ups in 2020!
Social	Living their future lives in Lundal	Concentrate on issues of well-being in society! Ask your parents and neighbours!
Economic	No capitalist interests	No ideas about physical projects!
Political	Their future ideas are basically unstructured and non-reflexive	The contributions would need narrative structure and other actors' input – too fantastic ideas will be erased!

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Visioning at the service of 'good'

Practitioners and scholars have discussed the value of a futures approach in the field of community planning as not necessarily 'in discovering new factual knowledge about sustainable urban development, but in producing perceptions and insights to that body of knowledge and 'imagineering' novel ways of addressing city sustainability' (Ratcliffe, Krawczyk, and Kelly 2006, 9). The idea fits both the objectives of municipal visioning, and the approach proposed within inclusive foresight as giving room to lay knowledge and inclusive, non-expert participation. It follows up on the idea of participation as not being based upon knowledge-founded authority, but on representing an authentic social group, contributing perspectives and insights different from all the others. This was also the original intention expressed by the municipal leadership to explain why the young people were asked to participate in this vision project.

As I have tried to show in my presentation of Lundal's vision project, an additional stakeholder and participant construction by the project leaders was needed to ensure a desired outcome of the project. The young people were asked to contribute with ideas matching their image as stakeholders already constructed. This case illustrates thus not only challenges of inclusive foresight taken up by Loveridge and Street (2005) but also much wider problems regarding good governance, long-term planning and decision-making.[19] If the young were authentic stakeholders, what perspectives and insights were they to contribute to the project? The case shows that their perspectives were already pre-defined. The project leaders might have been a bit hasty in declaring their contributions as nonreflective and unstructured. According to vision project members participating in school lessons at one college in Lundal, at least the older among this age group reflected upon what their own ideas about the future might be, based on the knowledge acquired by asking parents, friends and neighbours.[20] Nevertheless, the scope of their possible contributions was clearly limited through the preconditions they received from the project leadership.

Norwegian scholars of planning theory have argued that there is little use in trying to separate communication and power in planning processes: 'Communication is always characterised by the protection of interests and not by individual freedom or the search for consensus' (Hagen and Asmervik 2003, 9; Pløger 2001).[21] They argue that one of the problems municipal planning is confronted with is the frequently assumed existence of universal values which everybody can agree upon.[22] These universal values are being included in laws and regulations on planning procedures with no further reflections upon what *the good values* are and whether planning should be an activity at the service of 'good' (Hagen and Asmervik 2003, 5). Foresight practices are often based on the assumption of shared values beyond dispute. This becomes a power-related issue when organisations intend to create one desired vision of the future. The case discussed here illustrates

that power in such processes is both hierarchical and relational, yet 'not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others . . .. Power exists only when it is put into action' (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 219).

The administrative and political leadership's construction of a specific stakeholder image and the preconditioning of the young people's contributions is a good example of exactly this performative way of exercising rhetoric and representative power in a municipal planning process.

Conclusion

Foresight belongs to the tool-box for achieving good and reflexive governance[23] and thus strengthening the participatory and future-oriented aspects of governing. The challenge of foresight methods and participatory processes for governance, however, is the prevailing clear distinction between areas of governance, as steering and decision-shaping and of politics as decision-making (Johnston 2002). Foresight as well as governance is often seen as consisting of networking and process-oriented elements of governing rather than its antagonistic, power-related ones.[24] Literature on governance seldom questions this distinction, premising that governance itself does not include power-relations, but helps identifying power structures related to government (Stoker 1998). However, since foresight methods and practices are always part of an organisational setting, local, sectorial, regional or otherwise, they are involved in the practical reality of political and social agents competing for the right to represent future developments. This paper is a contribution to the discussion about the relationship between foresight and the democratic challenges of good governance and long-term planning.

Stakeholder image construction is a political issue in foresight. In the case of Lundal's visioning project, the contribution of young people eventually mirrored existing political programmes. The final question is: 'How could this be different?' If municipal visioning is supposed to produce a shared picture of the desired future, it cannot be too far away from the municipality's idea of the future. Otherwise they cannot share it.

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Notes

1. Foresight is a highly diverse activity which makes it difficult to give a comprehensive overview of different organisations, networks, schools and publications that discuss foresight as practice and as a 'school of thought' (Van Notten 2005, 5). According to Georghiou et al. (2008, 12) foresight differs from other forms of future orientation only in two respects: It is not 'only forecasting (let alone prediction)', and it is not 'Ivory tower' future studies, in which an expert academic 'produces its vision of the future or of alternative futures'. Apart from that, many methods, also forecasting methods can be included. Foresight practitioner and theorist Ron Johnston (2008, 18) asserts: 'Most OECD member

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countries (i.e. the advanced industrial nations), almost all European countries, and many Asian and South American countries have conducted national foresight studies'.

2. See Cuhls (2003), Cuhls and Georghiou (2004), Rask (2008), Van't Klooster and Van Asselt (2006).
3. About the relationship between foresight and decision making see Brown et al. (1999), Ringland (2002), Brown, Rappert, and Webster (2000), Böhle (2003), Genus (2006), Georghiou (2001), Johnston (2001), Berkhout and Hertin (2002).
4. In scenario planning a set of alternative scenarios are created to achieve an understanding of the range of possible future developments, more or less regardless of what we wish the future to be. Visioning, however, emphasises positive values, on the assumption that images of *a desired future* can direct individuals' present behaviours, guide choices and influence decisions. As with other future methods, the perspective on visioning is dependent on the context in which it is used. For more insight into scenarios and visions work, see Van Notten (2005) and Gertler and Wolfe (2004). For an in-depth discussion of different types of scenarios, see Van Notten et al. (2003).
5. On visioning in municipal planning, see Shipley and Newkirk (1999), Shipley (2002), Shipley et al. (2004).
6. Slaughter (2004, 92–4) sees the development of Critical Future Studies (CFS) following the traditions of STS in 'challenging the inevitability and the taken-for-grantedness of the familiar, as well as of the novel and the new'. CFS does not regard new technologies as merely 'tangible, reified items out there in the real world', but as 'objectifications of various types of social relations'. He describes CFS as belonging to the layer of critical and epistemological futures work that goes furthest in studying the social construction of reality, and of the future, by taking into account the role of language and of power.
7. The sociology of expectations is influenced by Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), but also by economics, innovation studies, organisational studies, linguistics and semiotics, see Van Lente (1993), Brown, Rappert, and Webster (2000), Brown and Michael (2003), Borup et al. (2006).
8. The term 'expectational reflexivity' covers those simultaneously enabling and constraining situations in which collective expectations are predefined by governmental actors who need to establish future visions firmly within the frame of existing governmental structures. Expectational reflexivity delimits our ability to influence the future, simply because existing rules and constraints are taken for granted as preconditions for future environments (Jenssen, forthcoming)
9. Community engagement refers to the process by which community benefit organisations and individuals build ongoing, permanent relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of a community (definition from wikipedia.org). The notions of active citizenship and community involvement have become increasingly prominent in political discussions and policy practices within planning and future oriented governance (Stukas and Dunlap 2002; Marinetto 2003).
10. The informants involved in the visions project requested to keep their municipality's identity unrevealed. Verification of the project can be provided by contacting the author.
11. Proposal sent by Lundal's head of administration to the community council, September 2005, p. 7.
12. Power point presentation employed by the vision project leader, March 2006 [italics added].
13. Invitation sent by Lundal's head of schools to all secondary schools and colleges, February 2006 [italics added].
14. From Invitation.
15. Interview with vision project leader, April 2006. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.
16. Interview with vision project leader, April 2006.
17. Interview with vision project leader, June 2006.
18. In this respect, foresight practises and guidance literature interact with research areas of science and technology studies (STS), especially regarding insights about the relationships between 'given facts and future values'. As Brown (2005, 331) writes: 'in a wide range of contexts, present day evidences, proofs, facts or truths are giving way to future-oriented abstractions premised on desire, imagination and the will to the yet "not present"'.
19. According to The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP 2009) good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimised, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.
20. Local newspaper article, 5 April 2006.
21. See also Flyvbjerg (1998).

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22. Theorist of urban planning Huw Thomas takes a pragmatic position when discussing the relationship of planning, power and values: 'when we do good we use power. When we help some we exclude others' (Thomas 1994, 217). On communicative ethics, see Habermas (1998).
23. According to Voß and Kemp (2006, 4) reflexive governance 'refers to the problem of shaping societal development in the light of the reflexivity of steering strategies – the phenomenon that thinking and acting with respect to an object of steering also affects the subject and its ability to steer'.
24. If foresight is meant to enable governance in the sense of 'steering' rather than 'governing' then power-related aspects of foresight have to be addressed more specifically in order to uncover hierarchical structures. Loveridge (2008, 135) addresses one of the persisting dynamics in foresight which is the narrowness in both participation and focus of institutional foresight programmes: 'The question of participation in institutional Foresight programmes remains unresolved and largely hidden as the polity is unaware of their existence'. In this article this argument is extended, including the aspect that participation is often pre-constructed because a certain image of a group of participants forms their contributions and the expectations regarding their participation.

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