

A Planet 2050 Vision – Notes from the QUEST ES4 2008 participants

The best way to predict the future is to invent it. (Alan Kay)

This vision paper was compiled using the inputs of ~25 post-grad summer school participants to an informal discussion about envisioning the world in 2050.

Their names and further details about the summer school are on the ES4 2008 website: quest.bris.ac.uk/workshops/ES4_08.

Projecting some present-day trends – technological, geopolitical and environmental – can give a rather bleak outlook:

- Happy pills, drug dependence, mass depression
- Genetic screening, designer children
- Less individualism, cultural/religious extremism
- Surveillance society, people-tracking
- WWII over water (supply, sea-level rise)
- Developing/developed world divergence
- Less amenity space, mass extinctions, less natural biodiversity, environmental apocalypse

Or alternatively we could see... world peace, greater equality, fairness, and decent mobile phone coverage. Our discussions touched on very diverse aspects of “The world in 2050” ranging from progress in infrastructure and technology through to changes in human character. We wanted cures for diseases. We also wanted violence and greed to be eradicated. (See the wishlist overleaf for some other ideas).

We discovered that utopia for some would be unbearable dystopia for others. There was good consensus on some issues, such as the need to redefine ownership of the natural environment, to recognise the value of human and social capital better than at present, and to extend individual awareness of sustainability matters to a collective conscience through new approaches to education. But – still in this governance domain – there was strong disagreement on the extent to which an authority could and should impose control on society to deliver a “better” world. Some of the suggestions in the “top-down” vein were:

- Three-day weekends, more flexitime – better work/leisure balance
- A common (2nd) language, ubiquitous communication more cross-cultural
- 10-year limits on patents/copyright
- Secularisation of government
- Banning of private motorised transport, to be replaced by hire cars, share cars, city bikes (with new cycling infrastructure)
- Application system for flights
- State-funded product evaluation resource instead of advertising
- No meat (or only on prescription...) Carbon neutral food production
- 0.8 child credits per person – tradeable, awarded on successful passing of parenting test.
- Free health care to 65, cull at 85

A disclaimer – as scribes, we have faithfully recorded what was discussed, only re-ordering the list slightly to put what we hope were the more satirical ideas at the bottom. We choose to interpret this list as evidence that this group of young scientists senses a need for

radical and rapid responses to today's socio-environmental problems! The wishlist below can be seen as a statement that today's knowledge and technology can and should be applied creatively for a better future.

A wishlist:

Climate	Stability, "programmed weather" – sunny weekends, rain at night; solar shields for white Christmases
Biodiversity	Lots! Including butterflies and bees networks of reserves. GM pygmy elephants etc for house-pets; stingless bees...
Energy	Solar powered spaceships, airships not airlines, electric cars Zero C, no coal, environmentally friendly renewables
Food	Enough. Sustainable farming (see biodiversity); crop rotations GM? No waste, no food wars, organic (in vitro?) meat Safe food colourings/additives Albedo-altering crops Lots of honey from the stingless bees (sustain biodiversity)
Population	Stability, stronger social ties, caring new localisms Planned migration, peace & happiness, good governance, human rights, freedom of thought
Economy	No wars Stability/dynamism (need "bad" times to appreciate good times!) Rich/poor divide reduced, convergence in standard of living Reduced poverty, provision of homes Governance and agreements – local <u>and</u> global solutions to problems Barter economy – no investment bankers!

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– on behalf of all the ES4 2008 participants