Storytelling to stimulate imagination: "Futuring the City"

Introduction

Imagination is 'the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images, or concepts of external objects not present to the senses' (Oxford Dictionary). It influences how we act here and now, and acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy: our expectations of the future guide our actions (Hayer and Versteeg, 2019). In the context of smart cities, imagining futures is an exercise mostly restricted to governments and corporates. However, we consider it important to make it a collaborative exercise where multiple sectors of society take part in it. Under this premise, we adapted the card game the "Thing from the Future" (Candy and Dunagan, 2017; Candy, 2018) customizing the cards of this game to the smart city context but keeping the game mechanics. We describe our game adaptation in the sub-sections below.

Goal of the session

The main goal of the game is to trigger participants' imagination about urban futures, and to reflect on the changes of urban life and our values as a result of the implementation of technology in the city. To this end, participants need to create a thought-provoking short story based on four cards they draw from a card deck.

The intended outcome of this method is a set of narratives that can be used during the ideation of smart city solutions and to anticipate alternative impacts of smart city technology.

Description of the method

The deck has four different types of cards: (1) arc, (2) technology, (3) city and (4) values.

Arc cards (A) outline the type of future where smart cities exist, and how far in the future it will take place. There are four types of arc cards:

- Growth: a future in which "progress" has continued.
- Collapse: a future in which society as we know it has come apart.
- Discipline: a future in which order is deliberately coordinated or imposed.
- Transformation: a future in which a profound historical evolution has occurred.

Technology cards (T) include different types of technology that could potentially be implemented in the city.

City cards (C) include places where urban life happens.

Value cards (V) include values or principles that people consider important in life at the individual and collective level (i.e. autonomy, freedom, friendship).

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Participants get one card of each type (ATCV) and they reflect on of how given a specific societal development, the introduction of a technology has led to a specific mood in citizens that changes the city (or places in it).

- It is possible to play the game individually or in groups. While playing the game, it is important to remind to participants the following:
- This is an imagination game; therefore, all ideas are welcome and inspiring.
- Do not focus on the feasibility of the story.
- Although all card combinations can lead to inspiring stories, if you feel stuck, feel free to draw another card to avoid being stuck.

For individual play

When played individually, the game helps to reflect on the interaction between technology and urban life. Technology might be implemented to fulfil a specific goal, but the impact it has on urban life goes beyond its original purpose. Played individually, the game can help lateral thinking, or idea generation for specific urban challenges, as well as helping to anticipate unforeseen technological effects.

For group play

Played in groups, the game has the same goal as for individual play. It is an imagination game that supports idea development and anticipation. Furthermore, when played in groups of people, it has a competition element since players can vote for the story that they consider most exciting, inspiring or fun.

If you would like to see the cards we used, have a look at this link.

If you would like to read 60 stories that we collected during the Dutch Design Week in 2019 while using this game, have a look at this link.

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References

Candy, S. (2018). Gaming futures literacy: The thing from the future. In *Transforming the Future (Open Access)* (pp. 257-270). Routledge.

Hajer, M., & Versteeg, W. (2019). Imagining the post-fossil city: why is it so difficult to think of new possible worlds? *Territory, Politics, Governance*, *7*(2), 122-134.

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