LOOKING FORWARD
CONNECTING FUTURES THINKING MEDIATION AND RECONCILIATION
Examples of futures thinking in conflict-affected contexts
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NOVEMBER 2022

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EXAMPLE 1:
INTEGRATING FUTURES THINKING IN THE SCHLAINING PROCESS DIALOGUE: THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ CONTEXT

Background/context
Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has persisted for over three decades. Competing claims about the status of Abkhazia that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union led to war in 1992-1993, and the de facto secession of Abkhazia from Georgia. Contact across the conflict divide has been limited and restricted since, and the peace process has yielded few results to date.

From 2000 to 2007, Conciliation Resources convened a series of 20 dialogue workshops between Georgian and Abkhaz interlocutors. The Schlaining Process was an informal facilitated dialogue that ran alongside formal bilateral Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations mediated by the UN. These regular Schlaining dialogue meetings – two or three each year – formed part of a wider series of engagements undertaken by Conciliation Resources in partnerships with a range of Abkhaz, Georgian and international NGOs, that have continued to this day.\(^1\)

The meetings included participants from a range of backgrounds and levels: politicians, officials, civil society actors, and some who were also engaged in the formal negotiations. A key aim of the Schlaining Process dialogue was to create a safe space in which participants could reframe the conflict to reveal opportunities for addressing areas of disagreement and explore ways in which to find more cooperative approaches to shared problems. By 2007, official positions were becoming more rigid, and it was more difficult to reach agreement on high level participation. After the 2008 war involving Georgian and Russian forces in South Ossetia and the Russian recognition of Abkhazia’s independence, the mediation environment changed. It was not possible to resume dialogue in the Schlaining Process format, though other forms of dialogue are ongoing.

Method/process
Futures thinking was integrated within, and tailored to, the ongoing Schlaining Process dialogue. The dialogue also drew on a number of other methods or approaches, including focusing on the experience of other conflict contexts as a way of engaging participants in dialogue with each other; joint analysis of key current events in the Georgian-Abkhaz context and of conflict drivers; and ‘speculative problem solving’ - taking the risk of going beyond what one feels sure of, and trying out ideas. Facilitators did not refer to ‘futures thinking’ at the time, but the questions they were posing, and the approaches they used would now be recognised as futures thinking methodologies. They encouraged participants to think about future outcomes and what steps needed to be taken to get there. They raised questions about the transformation needed for parties to build the kind of society they wanted to see in future. Sometimes simply by framing questions in the dialogue through a futures lens, and at other times by dedicating parts of the dialogue workshops to future-focused exercises, facilitators encouraged participants to move away from bargaining on issues in the present.

Facilitators did not come to the workshops with set models to share, or particular methodologies to use rigidly as templates, and they did not label sessions as an exercise in a specific approach. Rather, they constructed the content of the workshop by being aware in advance what the parties were emphasising about their needs and priorities, and, in response to the dynamics developing session by session, they adapted methods and offered a situation-specific framework and questions to help introduce new perspectives, or overcome stalemate. Each meeting included plenary sessions and small group activities in either mixed or separate groups. Typically 12 to 14 participants attended each workshop, with some overlap in participants between workshops to enable continuity. Though a number of participants held high-level political or official decision-making or negotiation roles, all took part in the Schlaining Process dialogue in their personal capacity. The emphasis on informality, and non-binding discussion, helped to create space for speculative, creative and challenging thinking, outside of the constraints of more formal processes.

In one dialogue meeting fairly early in the series (2001), participants, working in separate Georgian and Abkhaz groups, were asked to create a ten-year development plan addressing the key challenges for their respective political communities and systems. The objective was to broaden the basis for a substantive dialogue beyond a focus on the conflict. Participants were encouraged to think strategically by creating an integrated programme and to see the exercise as a speculative and an imaginative process. In designing their strategies, the participants were asked to articulate both the direction of development and the specific timeframe

for achievements. The task was not only to think about a development plan for their own society, but to also consider whether (or not) these would help them achieve their goals with respect to the other side. Participants were asked to take into account a range of criteria: economic development, social infrastructure, governance/rule of law, processing the past, IDPs/ refugees, security, relationships with the other side, and foreign relations. An extended discussion following the presentation of the plans highlighted a paradox in relations between the parties. While there appeared very little scope for movement between the parties in the short term, the long-term possibilities for mitigation seemed more positive. The separate plans focused on issues such as the development of democracy and effective and equitable governance mechanisms in the respective societies.

Participants went on to consider whether alternative negotiation strategies would be more productive for achieving their long-term goals. They were asked to identify their preferred outcome and what they considered to be an undesirable outcome at the end of a ten-year period. They also discussed what they considered to be the most likely outcomes and explored the steps that could be taken to help achieve their goals. This session led to a frank exchange about the point at which, for each party, the lack of a negotiated settlement might begin to be more damaging than a negotiated settlement that did not maximise their objectives.

In late 2003, another exercise involved speculative discussion of the future. This session followed an initiative by some Georgian participants outside of the dialogue meetings; they had drafted a detailed concept note articulating a new relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia, with the aim of challenging political actors in Georgia to talk in detail about what concessions they might accept. During the dialogue workshop, again in separate groups, participants discussed the conditions under which Georgia could accept Abkhazia’s independence and the conditions under which Abkhazia could accept being part of Georgia. This was a sensitive issue to raise, and it generated heated debate and a degree of discomfort among some participants, who worried that the brainstorming might imply a readiness for change beyond that which was feasible. The speculative discussion did shift the dynamic of the meeting, though. It allowed for an imaginative, forward-thinking exploration of what participants wanted their societies to look like in future and what they could expect of themselves and their opponents in creating this, or not obstructing it.

During the latter stage of the dialogue process, two other documents were developed by political actors on either side, some of whom participated in the Schlaining workshops – the Abkhaz ‘Key to the Future’ and the Georgian ‘Road Map’. In June 2006, these respective visions were examined side by side by participants in the eighteenth workshop. In critiquing the plans, they found many shortcomings; for all their limitations, however, the plans were perceived by participants to indicate a possible space in which cooperative options for the future could be identified.

Outcomes/impact

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific contribution of a futures thinking approach to the overall outcomes of the dialogue process, as it was integrated within a longstanding dialogue initiative that involved a range of approaches and highly adaptive facilitation. Some elements – such as the written draft visions mentioned above – clearly drew on the insights participants gained from viewing their situation from a speculative, future-focused perspective.

It was also clear that participants were willing to engage in future-oriented sessions and by and large contribute purposefully and thoughtfully. Efforts by facilitators to be sensitive to participants’ concerns from the outset, to encourage speculative thinking, and to be clear that participants would not be held to ideas that arose, helped. In addition, futures exercises tended to be creative and afford a break from more defensive exchanges which prevailed when engaging on the present or past. This contributed positively to energy levels and group dynamics.

Those involved in future-oriented sessions felt they deepened the dialogue and relationships between participants; having a serious and respectful conversation about what one or other party’s future aspirations entailed, even though these were just scenarios, contributed to mutual understanding and respect, and to interrogating their own assumptions and core aspirations. Importantly, a futures thinking approach allowed the unmentionable to be mentioned and accepted as a valid point of view, even if it was challenged vigorously.

Others spoke of a futures thinking approach enabling participants to broaden the range of issues discussed and to probe ideas and the climate for how those ideas might be received, in ways that could feed into the political negotiations process. It was found to be helpful in getting the parties to move away from short-term bargaining and point scoring.

Challenges/limitations

• In the absence of political will to find a solution there are limits to how much an informal dialogue process can influence parties’ engagement, even when key individuals in decision-making positions directly take part. Their participation also sometimes led to tensions with their colleagues when they returned home. In the
broader context of a fragile formal peace process, and a conflict dynamic exacerbated by complex geopolitics, the notion of peaceful transformation began to lose credibility. The strategic calculation of the parties did not lead them to view their best option as a negotiated solution requiring some form of cooperation and compromise. These wider political developments ultimately led to the end of the Schlaining Process, and the resumption of violence in South Ossetia made reaching a settlement in the Georgian-Abkhaz context an even more distant prospect.

- It is difficult to fully engage in scenarios work when there is insufficient information about the realities on either side. In addition, getting participants to think about a collaborative future when one party aims for separation involves overcoming significant resistance. Collaboration and reaching a shared vision is needed even in order to negotiate a separated future, yet accepting this paradox involves confronting deeply-held fears and perceived threats.

EXAMPLE 2: BOUGAINVILLE REFERENDUM SCENARIO ANALYSIS

Background/context
In May 2017 Conciliation Resources facilitated a three-day scenario analysis workshop with 12 staff members of the Autonomous Bougainville Government’s Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI). The workshop developed and analysed ‘what could go wrong?’ scenarios related to violence, political instability and failure to find a political status solution around (before, during and after) Bougainville’s referendum on political status. The jointly initiated process was regarded as an opportunity to bring the new DPAI team together around this analysis and support the department’s work.

Methods/process
The methodology was based on a process used in 2014 by Conciliation Resources around Fiji’s first elections since a 2006 military coup. It was tailored to context and went beyond developing scenarios to identify indicators for instability or violence as the basis for response strategies and planning. The process started with present-day conflict analysis, specifically an actor analysis, focused on the context, attitude and behaviour of a number of actor groups. This was done from the perspective of key groups in society, i.e. not based on assumptions about these groups from the participants’ perspective. This was followed by identification of emerging trends (i.e. what those groups are likely to do in future) as the basis for scenario development. Thirty-one scenarios of concern were identified focused on potential future actions (and inactions) by multiple groups, including Bougainvillean ex-combatants, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) national government, and the international community. Six of these scenarios were prioritised based on the level of likelihood of occurring and potential impact if they did. Early warning and response analysis was conducted on these scenarios. This included a mapping exercise of available tools [skills, processes and relationships] to support responses.

Outcomes/impact
The analysis of different actor groups was designed to inform DPAI’s engagement with those actors based on DPAI’s own knowledge of their behaviours, context and attitudes. This approach has limitations in that it is speculative, but it is nevertheless a useful starting point. The analysis indicated areas that needed attention and served as a tool to signpost actors that needed to be engaged with and issues to work on. The scenario analysis exercise ultimately contributed, in a small way, to a peaceful referendum process in 2019 insofar as it supported the DPAI’s planning and strategy development processes. The process directly contributed to the grounding of the DPAI’s work.

2. This summary is based on an interview with Ciaran O’Toole, Department Director, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Conciliation Resources, and unpublished internal documentation.
enabling more nuanced conversations and thinking on their work, while contributing to the planning of a number of future-focused initiatives, such as comparative learning exercises with South Sudan and dialogue between different factions in Bougainville.

Challenges/limitations

- Although diverse perspectives enrich the process, it is not suited as a dialogue tool between opposing or cross-party groups. The process, as described above, is best used as an analysis tool for one party/group.
- Where a process starts from analysis of the present, the transition from conflict analysis to emerging trends during the analysis process can be challenging and requires good facilitation, with relatable examples. The background, skills and capacities of different groups also makes a difference in this regard.

In developing scenarios from emerging trends, participants must also have a consistent understanding of scenarios among themselves. Asking participants to tell the story as if it is occurring in real time can help in this scenario development process.
- As the process is based upon the context (context, attitude and behaviour of specific actor groups) at a point in time, it is important to return to this analysis, since contexts and potential futures, including perceptions of risk, are constantly evolving. Without a system to regularly update context analysis, indicators and responses, which requires investment of at least a day or two on a periodic basis, analysis soon becomes outdated. There is also a risk of doing harm if it is used without being updated.

EXAMPLE 3: FUTURES FOR DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF HONG KONG’S PROTESTS

Background/context

In January 2020 a futures practitioner in collaboration with citizens’ dialogue platform ‘Let’s Talk Hong Kong’, brought together a small diverse group of 16 participants to consider different possible scenarios for the future of Hong Kong. Participants shared an interest in finding a path forward through the ongoing social unrest. The workshop was conceived as a pilot project to test an approach to using futures thinking as a means to initiate dialogue in conflict situations. The pilot workshop was therefore targeted at a small group of potential facilitators with Cantonese, Mandarin and English language skills. The intention was to enable a decentralised network of individuals to create safe and trusting spaces for similar dialogues, using open-source methodologies, to expand capacity for strategic thinking about the future within civil society groups, and enable the development of shared visions and a shared sense of direction.

Methods/process

Scenarios were developed through a participatory process, which drew on an initial exploration of the current situation and personal experiences of the impacts. Using the analogy of the foundations of Hong Kong, participants identified which ‘bricks’ were under strain and what they wanted to build or strengthen for the future. The process involved consideration of other perspectives, including what others (the police, the government) want for the future. Participants went on to consider a set of three pre-prepared alternative scenarios, expanding both the timeframe and the number of frameworks to consider. Scenarios included ongoing protests and economic disruption, and increasing acceptance of Beijing’s role and rising apathy. Causal Layered Analysis was used to develop visions for the future based on the foundations identified by participants for what they wanted to see. They then considered how this vision would differ from the Hong Kong of today in terms of social structures, mindsets and beliefs.

Outcomes/impact

The objectives of this process included identifying a range of potential opportunities for constructive action. One important outcome was the recognition that Hong Kongers can work together in the present to shape their own future. Through the application of a futures approach, participants found the scenario of ongoing protests could lead to unwanted outcomes, such as increasing military presence and martial law, escalating violence, curtailed freedoms, economic crisis, and mental health impacts. Strategic analysis within alternative scenarios thus exposed how a particular strategy does not serve its proponents’ aspirations.

The case also illustrates how asking people to consider scenarios they find implausible can help reframe perspectives. Participants were reluctant to consider the scenario they considered least

3. This description draws on the following article: Anna Simpson (2020) Futures for dialogue in the context of Hong Kong’s protests. Journal of Futures Studies 25(1) 35–44; and on her presentation at the Reos Partners virtual event on The Potential of Futures Work in Supporting Peace Processes, 29 November 2021.
likely: rising acceptance in Hong Kong of the role of Beijing. However, when prompted, they were able to identify potential for constructive action within severe constraints. For instance, they speculated that rising acceptance of Beijing might lead to more opportunity for universities and businesses in Hong Kong. This recognition exposed and challenged their initial assumption that a greater role for Beijing would lead to more restricted conditions for Hong Kong. The use of pre-prepared scenarios in this pilot workshop indicates that they are a useful tool to bring to the surface and challenge assumptions. Where time is available, the opportunity for participants to develop their own scenarios from factors they have themselves studied and prioritised could be advantageous.

When building a shared vision, a broader range of aspirations came into play such as green space, lower levels of pollution and congestion, and walkable streets. Looking to the future in this way, beyond the intransigent nature of the conflict, can enable a wider sense of what is ‘good’ and highlight potential shared benefits across opposing parties.

### Challenges/limitations

- Participants expressed frustration at the fairly rapid pace of the workshop, wishing to spend more time discussing their personal experience. Such discussions are important to build sufficient trust to sustain the dialogue, with the potential to build on possible ways forward identified through collective action. Participants also felt that a greater diversity of perspectives in the room would be beneficial for reframing.
- Unfortunately, the plan for building a network and continuing workshops was hindered by a new national security law enacted by China, which imposed restrictions and penalties on channels for civic engagement. This illustrates how a process can be quickly overtaken by changes in the external environment. Even so, the relationships and capacity to think about the future gained by the participants will not have been lost and hold potential for the future.

### EXAMPLE 4: A VISIONING EXERCISE WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARADES COMMISSION

#### Background/context

Public processions by unionist and nationalist organisations (referred to as ‘parades’) have long been an important part of culture in Northern Ireland. Small church parades are held throughout the year, but the ‘marching season’ is generally considered to be between Easter Monday and the end of September. Various parades have been highly contentious at times, particularly some unionist/protestant parades viewed by their supporters as festive occasions that celebrate their history and culture, while others may perceive them as intimidating, hateful and triumphalist.

In 1997, the Parades Commission was established following widespread intercommunal violence and public disorder in Northern Ireland. It is an independent, executive, public body with a mandate to consider all public processions and related protest meetings deemed contentious or offensive. It has the power to place restrictions on parades and related protest meetings, but generally only does so if the parties involved cannot reach so-called ‘local accommodation’ about an event. For several years, the body deployed a network of field workers to build relationships at a local level, encourage dialogue with and between parade organisers and people protesting, and facilitate information flow between the Parades Commission and parties on the ground. The field workers were working part time and mostly involved in other community activities.

#### Methods/process

In 2003, some 10–12 people working with the Commission engaged in an informal visioning exercise on the future of parading in Northern Ireland. Most were field workers with the Commission at the time, though two Commissioners and the body’s Executive Secretary also took part. The three-hour exercise was part of a four-day workshop with the field workers to reflect on experiences of the 2003 parading season and strategise for the period ahead in preparation for the next season. The workshop was facilitated by a South Africa-based practitioner who had previously worked with the Commission’s field workers, Commissioners and Secretariat. The visioning exercise stemmed from an observation from the earlier engagement, that it might be useful to place the body’s work in the wider, longer-term context of peacebuilding within Northern Irish society. This is easily lost sight of during an intense parading season.

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4. This description is based on the 2003 Report on September-October work with the Northern Ireland Parades Commission, by M Parlevliet, Human Rights and Conflict Management Programme, Centre for Conflict Resolution, South Africa.
Participants were invited to visualise the future of parading in Northern Ireland by considering what parading might look like in 2030. Warm-up exercises encouraged them to ‘think outside the box’ and to focus on what they would like the future to be, rather than getting bogged down in the realities of the present. They were first asked individually to draw symbols and images of the future, which were then collated to create a ‘collective picture’ of the future. In the ensuing joint exploration of this picture individuals commented on specific images and the group as a whole considered what emerged from the imagery and the conversation. Discussion focused on what the future of parading could or should look like, whether the Commission was working in this direction, and how this could be enhanced. It also touched on whether the Commission’s activities were facilitating ‘visioning’ among communities by encouraging them to think about what the future could entail. The exercise aimed to stimulate dialogue and expand people’s horizons, not to facilitate agreement on the desired future or on the Commission’s vision of the future.

**Outcomes/impact**

The Commission had not engaged in such a visioning exercise before and doing so generated new insights. Participants noted that the body generally did not facilitate visioning among people and communities involved in and affected by parading. Doing so would be important as people in Northern Ireland, it was said, tend to focus on what the situation has been from year to year, rather than looking ahead to consider ‘what could be’. This can instil a sense of resignation as people get stuck in the belief that real change is impossible. It was also observed that lack of clarity on how the Parades Commission sees the future could fuel insecurity and intransigence among communities: if they suspect or perceive the Commission to be working towards curtailing or even eliminating parades, this could negatively affect their attitude towards the body in general and their approach to specific parades.

The discussion concluded that visioning helps actors design and target their activities by setting out a clear direction towards the desired future. Participants considered the exercise very useful in facilitating understanding of the views and positions of others in the Commission and in developing a common vision of the future. The process also seemed to serve an [unintended] motivational purpose, in encouraging those present to reflect on why they are involved in this work.

Despite the process’s limited ambition in terms of wider engagement with the Parades Commission or wider public [see limitations below], in revisiting the process with the Commission’s field workers for this publication, the authors found that in 2011, the body’s Annual Report did lay out a vision for the future of parading in Northern Ireland. It stated that:

> As a Parades Commission, our vision for the future of parading in Northern Ireland is one where all parades are conducted responsibly and are well managed with little or no contention. We want to see parades happen while promoting and respecting cultural diversity. There should be respect for those unionist and nationalist communities around and within which parades occur.

Our vision is also for a parading environment where there is no longer the need for a body such as the Parades Commission to adjudicate on contentious parades.

The vision for parading in the future needs to be clearly expressed particularly by the parading institutions and political leadership. That vision must balance people’s rights and responsibilities, and define how parading fits within a shared society where even the most divided space can be better shared.5

The long-term impact of this statement on the parading context and relevant stakeholders is unclear.

**Challenges/limitations**

- In terms of the future imagined, the field workers seemed more inclined to define it in positive terms (i.e. what it could look like) whereas the Commissioners tended to define it in more negative terms (i.e. what it should not entail). The former highlighted notions such as ‘celebration of diversity’, ‘family affair’, ‘dedicated location for parades’, ‘understanding of cultural traditions’, and ‘exchange’; the latter emphasised ‘no alcohol’, ‘no paramilitaries’, ‘no flags’, ‘no public urinating’, etc. The latter constituted an effort to ‘tweak’ reality to make it more acceptable and legitimate by smoothing its rough edges; the former was geared towards transforming reality and creating an alternative. It was noted that the two are not mutually exclusive.

- The exercise was not planned with a view to feeding into a wider process of visioning within the Parades Commission drawing in all Commissioners. Nor did it seek to contribute to developing capacity and strategies for wider public engagement on the future of parading with individuals and communities involved in parading and protesting. To our knowledge, the Commission did not follow up on this exercise internally or with external stakeholders in any way. The inclusion of the above statement in the 2010 Annual Report, however, suggests that a futures thinking process, even if limited in scope and participation, may still have unexpected long-term ramifications.

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5. See Foreword by the Chairman, Peter Osborne, in Parades Commission (2012) Annual Report and Financial Statements, Parades Commission for Northern Ireland 2010 to 2011, p. 1. Osborne was one of the two Commissioners taking part in the 2003 exercise; he served as the body’s Chair from January 2011 to December 2013.
EXAMPLE 5: THE MONT FLEUR SCENARIOS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Background/context
The Mont Fleur process took place in South Africa from 1991 to 1992 during a politically turbulent time. On 2 February 1990, President de Klerk of the governing National Party announced Mandela’s release from prison and the unbanning of political organisations seeking to end apartheid such as the African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and South African Communist Party. By May 1990, the government and the ANC had committed themselves to a negotiation process and the state of emergency – in place since 1985 – was lifted. Political violence increased rapidly, however, threatening progress towards constitutional negotiations and longer-term stability, even as numerous multi-stakeholder gatherings were taking place on how to address issues of concern during and beyond the transition to democracy.

A request in mid-1991 to economist Pieter le Roux to organise a conference on South Africa’s economic future provided the spark for the Mont Fleur process. Keen to try a different approach, he opted for a scenario process and joined forces with political scientist Vincent Maphai. Their initial idea was to create a set of scenarios that would offer an alternative to the establishment-backed scenarios prepared through Anglo American. See the ’Looking Forward’ Briefing Paper Example 17 for more on this process. They approached Shell’s scenario department to help with facilitating the process; Adam Kahane, the then head of the company’s social/ political/ economic/environmental scenario team, was engaged to provide it. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Swiss Development Agency funded the process, which revolved around the question: what will South Africa be like in the year 2002? Its purpose was ‘not to present definitive truths, but to stimulate debate on how to shape the next ten years’.

Methods/process
Encouraged by Kahane to include some persons who could provide challenging, alternative perspectives on the South African situation, Le Roux and Maphai convened a very diverse team of 22 people, including politicians, academics, trade unionists, business people, community activists and others from across the ideological spectrum. Participants included individuals serving on the National Executive Committee of the ANC and the Economic Advisory Council of the President (of the white minority government), increasing the likelihood of insights and relationships gained through the process filtering through to the formal political negotiations. They met in three workshops of three days each between September 1991 and March 1992, with additional work taking place in between. After analysing the country’s social, political and economic crises, the team compiled 30 initial ‘stories’ about the possible course of events in the ten-year period considered. Some concurred with the official narratives of team members’ organisations; others were contrary to them. They included tales of revolution, economic growth through repression, right-wing revolts and free-market utopias.

Careful examination resulted in 21 stories being discarded, due to lack of internal consistency or plausibility, for example. The team then pared down the nine remaining stories to four, representing four possible outcomes to three key questions: Will the negotiations result in a settlement? Will the transition (from apartheid to multi-party democracy) be rapid and decisive? Will the new democratic government’s policies be sustainable? The team developed these four stories into a brief logical narrative. Each scenario conveyed a specific message to South African leaders and the public at large, conveying relatively abstract political and economic concepts through imaginative names: that a non-negotiated resolution of the crisis would be unsustainable (Ostrich), that a weak coalition government unable to deliver was not going to last (Lame Duck); that implementing populist economic policies by a new government would be risky (Icarus); and that there was potential for a successful outcome (Flight of the Flamingos).


7. The initial name of the Mont Fleur project was ‘An Alternative Scenario Planning Exercise of the Left’ (Kahane, Transformative scenarios planning, p. 4). Both Le Roux and Maphai worked at the (black, ANC-aligned) University of the Western Cape (UWC) at the time, respectively as director of the Institute for Social Development and head of the political science department. Mont Fleur is the name of the conference centre outside of Cape Town where the workshops took place.

8. For a list of those participating in the Mont Fleur process, and their positions at the time, see Le Roux et al. The Mont Fleur Scenarios, pp. 21–22.
Diagram 1: The Mont Fleur Scenario Process

1. **Brainstorming**
   - 30 initial ideas

2. **Research**
   - 9 preliminary stories

3. **Assessment**
   - 4 draft scenarios

4. **Refinement**
   - 4 final scenarios

5. **Dissemination, debate, and use**

**Team Members' Ideas**

- **First team workshop**
  - September 1991

- **Second team workshop**
  - November 1991

- **Third team workshop**
  - March 1992

Source: Le Roux et al. (1996)
Outcome/Impact

The set of scenarios was the most visible result from the process. To facilitate dissemination, a 14-page report was published in two national newspapers, a 30-minute video was produced with cartoons and presentations by team members, as well as a summary booklet and pamphlets. Team members presented and discussed the scenarios with many different groups, including the national executive committees of the ANC and PAC; the National Party; government departments; financial institutions; major corporations; trade unions and civil society organisations. Other important results from Mont Fleur included the creation of informal networks and new understandings among influential people across the political spectrum, a shift in language and thought, and a broader awareness among diverse societal actors of choices to be made and possible implications thereof. The entire team strongly advocated making choices that would influence South Africa’s trajectory towards the Flamingos outcome; they viewed this as the optimal scenario, and broadly agreed on the conditions required for success.

Several analyses highlight the scenarios as having had a reconciling, nation-building role in the period to 2000s, and as underlining the need to keep National Party decision-makers focused on facing reality and to get parties at the constitutional negotiations to settle rapidly and decisively. They also point to the Mont Fleur process as having been influential in steering the ANC’s economic thinking away from macro-economic populism, rapid fiscal expansion, state appropriations and summary wealth redistribution towards fiscal discipline and conservative economic policies. The latter was the Flamingos-scenario economic position and arguably helped to ensure financial stability in the first decade following the transition. This reversal – dubbed ‘the Great U-Turn’ by prominent journalist Allister Sparks in his analysis of the South African transition – is particularly associated with Mont Fleur participant Trevor Manual, who was the ANC’s chief economist at the time of the process and became the country’s first black Minister of Finance. The process also probably contributed to significant shifts in the policies of the PAC, following presentation and discussion of the scenarios in the party’s National Executive Committee. This included the party’s decision to abandon the armed struggle and participate in the upcoming elections, both of which it had refused to consider until then.

Challenges/limitations

It is difficult to establish precisely to what extent ‘Mont Fleur’ contributed to the transition to democracy in South Africa aside from the [significant] shifts in policies outlined above. The process was separate from the negotiations between the government, ANC, and other political organisations. Yet several participants were very close to persons involved in the talks, so considerable influence is likely; the participation of senior political figures in the ANC, PAC, and senior business people with links to the white minority government will have helped in this regard. Also, some participants went on to prominent positions in the new government and were able to influence South Africa’s trajectory in the longer term. That said, the Mont Fleur process is nowadays seen in a more critical light in South Africa. Many view the ANC’s emphasis on market-led economics from 1996 onwards as having curtailed transformation of the economy and society in the long term. Deep inequalities and entrenched racism, which persist partly due to limited action to tackle social and economic patterns of exclusion, continue to threaten peace, reconciliation, human security and stability in South Africa.

9. See Kahane Transformative scenarios planning.
11. See Sparks Beyond the Miracle.
13. See Kahane Transformative scenarios planning, pp. 11–12, with quotes from Le Roux and participant Mosebyane Malatsi [economist in the PAC at the time] who together presented the scenarios to the PAC’s executive committee after the Mont Fleur process ended. Gordon (Limits and longevity, p. 11) writes that ‘it is widely agreed’ that the PAC underwent a similar shift in economic policy internally as the ANC did, following the participation of delegate Mosebyane Malatsi in the process.
EXAMPLE 6: DESTINO COLOMBIA: A TRANSFORMATIVE SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT IN COLOMBIA

Background/Context

The Destino Colombia project unfolded at a time of great division and conflict in Colombia, from 1996 to 1999. The country had been embroiled in violent conflict since the 1960s, with successive waves of confrontation between government, left-wing guerrilla and right-wing paramilitary forces that also involved criminal gangs and drug traffickers. Kidnappings, murders, forced displacement, disappearances, extortion, torture, and rape were prevalent, even as the country stood out in Latin America for its relatively stable constitutional system, sophisticated legal and institutional framework, vibrant civil society and dynamic business sector.

The project was initiated in 1995-1996 by businessman Manual José Carvajal and Juan Manuel Santos, a politician and former journalist. Having read about the Mont Fleur process [hyperlink], they thought something similar might be helpful to Colombians. They began by organising a large meeting to test the idea, involving high-level politicians and military officials, religious leaders, prominent business people, academics, and some guerrillas; Kahane was invited to present on the Mont Fleur experience. Based on the interest expressed, the project went ahead with a first phase of convening and scenario construction during 1996 and 1997, funded by the Colombian private sector. In 1998 and 1999, the focus shifted to publicising the scenarios, broadening the strategy conversation and building a shared national vision.

Methods/process

Santos realised that, as a politician, he was too partisan to be able to convene such a process and stepped back in favour of a broader, more neutral, organising committee of six. They were to assemble a group of people that reflected the whole conflicted society, legitimate players with plausible commitments to Colombia’s future who were not considered too criminal or corrupt by the convenors. They established a scenario team of 43 individuals, including guerrillas and paramilitaries, academics, activists, peasants, politicians, trade unionists, young people, journalists, military officers, and business people. Remarkably, the two illegal, armed, left-wing guerrilla groups – the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army) – also took part in the process, with four guerrillas participating by phone from prison, exile or the mountains.

The group met three times over four months (totalling ten days), to imagine which paths Colombia might follow over the next 16 years, and the consequences of each. They first listened to participants’ views and positions on the problems facing Colombia, then drew in knowledge from national and international experts to deepen their understanding of the country and its place in the world. Four scenarios emerged from their collective reflection as the most relevant, novel and substantial: ‘When the Sun Rises We’ll See’ (a warning of the chaos that would ensue if Colombians failed to act and just let things be); ‘A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush’ (a story of negotiated compromise between state and society, under continuing pressure from armed groups); ‘Forward March!’ (a story of Colombians electing a government that would impose order by crushing the guerrillas militarily); and ‘In Unity Lies Strength’ (a story of bottom-up change involving Colombians’ individual and collective mentality transforming toward respect for differences and cooperation).

Outcome/impact

The scenarios were distributed as an insert in major newspapers and magazines and through articles and editorials, radio shows, a video broadcast on national television, and large public meetings in all the region’s capitals. Participants also engaged in strategic conversations across government, business and community groups. In its report, the team explicitly stated that all participants agreed that the four scenarios were all possible, but that they ‘neither recommend nor express preference for any particular one. What we do agree on is that it is necessary for us Colombians [...] to find the time and space to carry out an intense conversation, a serious analysis of the future of our country.’ They also highlighted that their agreements were ‘most valuable because they were arrived at by way of difference. It was the first time that a group of such dissimilar people had listened to each other, showing respect and tolerance in order to accept and give credit to the others’ ideas. This allowed us to acknowledge the possibility of reaching agreement without sacrificing our principles, and led us to conclude, in all humility, that enormous improvements and profound changes were needed to achieve the common good.’

Indeed, while the Mont Fleur process had taken place in a context and at a time where countless multi-stakeholder forums were happening, the Destino

15. Kahane Destino Colombia.
Colombia workshops were ‘perhaps the only place where the full range of Colombian stakeholders met to discuss seriously and openly what was happening, might happen and should happen in their country’.16 This was a powerful feature of the project with a message for Colombian society at large. Yet the more systemic impact of Destino Colombia was unclear for a long time – and remains difficult to establish with any certainty. In 2006, a report suggested that the greatest impact of the project was in the personal realm, on those who participated in the process, and was less present in their professional lives and at broader public policy decisions and social processes.17 Yet in 2010, when Santos became president, he referred to the scenarios and the remarkable collaboration across divides, and highlighted the fourth scenario as the recurrent theme in policies of his new government – thus centralising the scenarios in his narrative of developments in his country. He also cited Destino Colombia upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016, noting that it was this process that had made him see that peace was possible and realisable through negotiations.18

Challenges/limitations

At the start, key challenges related to safety and fear. The guerrillas had been offered safe passage to the workshops by the government but thought this too risky – hence the decision to participate by phone. Meanwhile, many other participants were initially terrified of engaging with the guerrillas, and feared retribution for what they may say. After Kahane had raised this fear with the guerrillas, they promised not to kill anyone for anything said in the meetings.19 What also helped to mitigate safety concerns was the group’s decision to set ground rules to improve the quality of the conversation. For example, they agreed to be straightforward in expressing differences of opinion; to assume good faith of others; to be disciplined and punctual; to be willing to learn; to respect others’ right to speak; and to exercise tolerance and confidentiality.

A later challenge entailed the results from the project being ignored by the government at the time, headed by then President Samper. Members of his administration had been excluded by the convenors from participating as his election campaign was thought to have been financed in part by drug traffickers (who had been excluded too). Carvajal later said he thought that this attempt to be ‘aseptic’ had been counterproductive, as the Colombian government did not engage with the scenario team’s work until after the end of Samper’s term.20

It is hard to substantiate the failure or success of Destino Colombia in definitive terms. Kahane’s writing reflects that the outcome and impact of the process may look different across different time frames as conditions in the context change.21 Assessments may also vary depending on the perspectives and positions – as happens with reconciliation too.

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17. As referred to in Kahane New stories can generate new realities p. 4. See also transcript of conversation between Kahane and Santos on 19 October 2021, available here.
19. Kahane New stories can generate new realities, p. 3.
20. Ibid.
21. Kahane writes: ‘In 2004 the project was pronounced dormant or dead; in 2007 I heard stories about the project’s continued influence; and in 2012 the president of Colombia announced that it had always been alive and was now the leitmotif of the policies of his new government. What I have learned from this experience and others is that you must try to do this as best as you can, but that its failure or success – like most things about the future – cannot be controlled or predicted or even known.’ (New stories can generate new realities, p. 2).
Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. We work with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts.

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