

Edited by Aaron M. Cohen

Mapping New Zealand's Long-Term Future

Over four days in March 2011, conference goers at *StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future* envisioned the most preferable long-term future for New Zealand and searched for innovative ways to meet future challenges. The conference, sponsored by the Sustainable Future Institute, was held in Wellington.

StrategyNZ participants discussed the past, present, and future of the country, looking ahead almost half a century to the year 2058. With an eye on policy, attendees explored a variety of issues, including health, education, technology, the environment, and the economy.

The event kicked off with a two-day futures-studies course conducted by **Peter Bishop**, associate professor of strategic foresight and coordinator of the graduate program in futures studies at the University of Houston. Bishop gave overviews of futuring and forecasting techniques as well as strategic planning methods.

Afterwards, during a workshop held over the next two days, participants broke into groups of 10 to create "strategy maps"—the strategic foresight tool from which the conference gets its name.

Strategy maps are diagrams that graphically depict a set of goals and strategies. These visual tools can help people see more clearly the ways in which objectives, resources, and various other facets of a given strategy interrelate with one another, providing a clearer sense of cause and effect and the best way to move forward with a plan of action.

At the conference's conclusion, workshop groups had an opportu-

nity to present their strategy maps to several members of New Zealand's Parliament.

Coordinators plan to present the results of StrategyNZ at the World Future Society's annual meeting, WorldFuture 2011: Moving from Vision to Action, in Vancouver, Canada. Co-presenter **Wendy McGuinness**, chief executive of the Sustainable Future Institute, chairs both the New Zealand chapter of the World Future Society and the Millennium Project's New Zealand node.

Audio files and PowerPoint presentations from most of the speakers are available for free download on the Sustainable Futures Institute's Web site, as are the various workshop groups' outputs.

Attendees will also be involved in the preparation of the third in a series of three e-books, *Exploring the Options*. (The first two will be *Exploring Future Studies* and *Strategy Maps: Exploring New Zealand's Long-Term Direction*.) A print book, *Exploring New Zealand's Long-Term Future*, will be published as well.

Sources: Strategy NZ, <http://strategynzsite.info>. Sustainable Futures Institute, www.sustainablefuture.info.

Delphi 2.0: Wild Cards and Weak Signals

The European Commission-funded iKnow (Interconnecting Knowledge) project is reaching out to those in the larger futuring and foresight community for help evaluating key wild cards and weak signals in its extensive, ever-expanding database. The project calls its online evaluation an "international Delphi 2.0 survey."

In classical Delphi polling, groups of experts are individually and anonymously surveyed in a series of rounds. They are presented with a summary of responses in each subsequent round and work to narrow those down, such as by assigning the responses a rating. The process may continue until the experts reach con-

sensus on a given issue, if that is the end goal.

In a Real-Time Delphi survey, the entire process takes place online and is opened up to anyone interested—it's a method of crowdsourcing, in a way. The series of rounds is eliminated (but anonymity is preserved), and responses are available for viewing as soon as they are submitted.

The iKnow Project's database is intended to aid the practice of studying, understanding, and anticipating the wild cards and weak signals that are "potentially 'shaping and shaking' the future of science, technology, and innovation."

Wild cards are widely understood as low-probability, high-impact events; iKnow divides them into three categories: intentional, unintentional, and nature-related "surprises."

Weak signals, on the other hand, are trickier to define. The iKnow project classifies them as "unclear observables warning us about the probability of future events (including wild cards)." Examples the organization gives include current policies, past wild cards, and emerging issues, which reveals just how wide-ranging the term can be.

The categories range from information and communication technologies to social sciences and the humanities.

Source: iKnow, www.iknowfutures.eu.

A Playful Utopia

This past March, South By Southwest Interactive (SXSW) attendees in Austin, Texas, had the chance to attend Plutopia 2011: The Future of Play. Held at the Mexican American Cultural Center, the event showcased configurable, experiential, and interactive works—art installations, projections, demonstrations, games, live performances, and more. The works on display exemplified some of the ways that emerging technologies are being incorporated into the arts.

To submit material to Future Active or News and Events for the Futurist Community on the Web, contact Aaron M. Cohen, staff editor, acohen@wfs.org.



WFS member and Plutopia chief creative officer **Derek Woodgate** (left) and futurist and author **Bruce Sterling** discuss the future of play during a press conference at Plutopia 2011.



The Edge of Imagination Station at Plutopia 2011 invited partygoers to create digital stop-motion animation sequences using various toys and props as well as chalk drawings.

San Francisco-based game manufacturer Sifteo showed off its interactive gaming cubes, originally developed at the MIT Media Lab. (Co-founder **David Merrill** was a featured speaker at Plutopia 2011.) This electronic gaming system features small blocks with color LCD screens, built-in wireless communication, and motion sensors that enable them to respond to players as well as other Sifteo Cubes. According to Merrill, the company "aims to empower people to interact with information and media in physical, natural ways that approximate interactions with physical objects in our everyday lives."

In the courtyard of the cultural center, French artists **Grégory Lasserre** and **Anaïs met den Ancxt**, who collaborate as Scenocosme, displayed a hanging garden of interactive musical plants. These digitally enhanced "hybrid" plants, which they call *Akousmaflore*, respond to motion and touch by making different sounds.

Nearby, the Edge of Imagination Station invited partygoers to create digital stop-motion animation sequences using various toys, props, and chalk drawings. Across the courtyard, the University of Texas Department of Computer Science showed off its robot soccer team. (Robot soccer was reported about in



Appearing live at Plutopia 2011: The Future of Play, the Austin-based group Total Unicorn combines animation, electronic music, and performance art.

the January-February 2011 issue of *THE FUTURIST*.)

Other highlights included the improvisational group Text of Light (featuring **Lee Ranaldo** of seminal art-punk band Sonic Youth and artist/composer **Christian Marclay**, among others), who spontaneously composed moody soundscapes to accompany projections of experimental filmmaker **Stan Brakhage's** abstract films. Futurist, design critic, and science-fiction author **Bruce**

Sterling was also on hand to give the opening speech, as he has done at Plutopia's previous SXSW parties.

Founded in 2007, Plutopia is a future-focused entertainment company that creates what it calls "sense events." The company, whose name is a "mash-up" of pluralist utopias, looks ahead to a technologically enhanced, interconnected future that is worth getting excited about.

Source: Plutopia, www.plutopia.org. □