

STARTING NOW

A REPORT FROM SEMINAR 3 "NO FIXES, PAL!", 2-3 NOVEMBER 2011 AT 'SKOVSKOLEN' IN NØDEBO, UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN.

By Gitte Larsen, Director House of Futures

At this two-day seminar we emphasized "the starting now" in the project 'In 100 Years – starting now'. We looked for the future in the present as it is embedded in technology, science and nature. We listened to international and Danish speakers and heard about their visions, their experiences, and their stories about living the future now. We debated and discussed long term futures and concrete initiatives – and we did also spend time in the mysterious city of Acorn Falls.

On the second day of the seminar a smaller group of participants continued with workshops unfolding sustainability from two perspectives: 1. On the premises of man and 2. On the premises of nature, and we had a plenum discussion about the draft scenarios for sustainable societies in the long run.

SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES

The third In100Y-seminar was held in the element of air. Not only 'as in the winds of Autumn' making the acorns fall to the ground, but also as 'in the minds of the participants' eager to know how nature, science and technology can contribute in the creation of more sustainable societies. With the title of the seminar – "No fixes, pal!" – we at House of Futures wanted to indicate, that we do not believe in business as usual. There's nothing wrong with fixing things, but it's not at all enough in the long run. The 'what and the 'why' are as important to discuss as the 'how' – perhaps even more important?

The natural (or technology) sciences and the social sciences or the humanistic sciences, must (re)gain common ground. They'll have to co-operate in order for us to deal with the challenges that are ahead. It's pretty wild out there! That's why we did not only go for the 'how' and the fixes, pal, but also for the 'why' and the 'what' regarding the issues of the third In100Y-seminar.

The long run seems to have a much larger role to play today that it did only a few years back. And everything is actually in the air talking about the long term future. At the first In100Y-seminar I quoted Alvin Toffler. Allow me to do it again as he is the grandfather of Futures Studies. I quoted him for this conversation: He was asked by a

Chinese business man how the Chinese people could stay Chinese in the future, and his answer was that nobody stay anything in the future. A better question would have been: How can we become Chinese of the future?

We know so little about the future, and as Professor in Biology Carsten Rahbek, University of Copenhagen, said in the video interview shown at the seminar, we need to learn 'to move the unknown'. He also said that humans are at war with the micro organisms, and that humans are on the losing side. Not all would agree, and nobody has to. Most people are well aware that something is happening with what we call 'nature', and most agree that the changes are man made. None of us knows what the biggest challenges of the future hold. What we seem to know is that a whole bunch of things, institutions, doings and thinking are going to be re-defined and re-architected. We need to experiment, and as Vaughan Lindsay, CEO of Dartington Hall Trust in the UK, underscored in his presentation, but most organizations and businesses are not willing to do so. They are at Dartington – but they are also well aware that sustainable projects have to develop to be self financed during a couple of years. Dartington is a pioneering charity or a social enterprise – a place of experiment and education where the arts, social justice and sustainability come together. Vaughan Lindsay shared their doings and visions for the 1200 acre estate, where they welcome over one million visitors every year. Perhaps sustainability really is all about people and places?

I'm sure we need old and new technologies to advance sustainable societies, and as you read this many are invented. At the island of Samsøe they've succeeded not only in becoming self sufficient with renewable wind energy in less than 10 years, they even export wind power to the mainland. When I visited Samsøe Energy Academy last year, where Søren Hermansen told the story – as he did on this seminar as well – about how he and a few others got the green energy going at Samsøe. I was kind of surprised to learn that it had only little to do with sustainability or taking care of the environment in the first place. Instead it was about good business and cool cash, about building social relationships and community, and about education and mind shift – and perhaps it still is? To me Samsøe is



a great example of user-driven innovation that actually works. If you have a goal and a vision and add hard work you can succeed.

THE IN100Y-SEMINARS

“We don’t have to agree”, as Dominic Balmforth, now partner in House of Futures, said at the last seminar. And Steen Svendsen and I share the project management of the In100Y-seminars – even though we don’t always agree. Mostly we find common ground, not as a compromise but more as a promise. And I think that one of our aims gathering cross disciplinary participants for these seminars.

How do we make a seminar like this a real and honest meeting between people, organizations and institutions, a meeting of promise to do good and stop fixing stuff the way we used to think that we could fix things.?

I think we need to open up the categories such as democracy, welfare, sustainability, growth, developments, business, politics, natural and social sciences, nature etc. We need to merge perspectives, and we hope these seminars contribute to this process.

Let us just begin to live the future right now! We can decide today and get going. Hey, hey, you might think: Get going to where? That’s what the project ‘In 100 Years – starting now is about: Where do you want to go? What you need, and what do we need? What is needed?

The first seminar was held in the element of water. Sailing through the streets of Copenhagen in the year 2112. The second seminar was held in the element of ground, soil, of earth. Getting your hands dirty when we

invited you to experience two dimensions of distant and yet nearby futures. The fourth and final seminar in January 2012 will be held in the element of fire. It’s our future, love! The inner and the outer sustainability might count equal, as with the top-down and bottom up processes. The short term as well as the long term.

The four elements are universal, no one would doubt them – neither their strengths nor weaknesses. We might be ONE with planet Earth as in the second mind set scenario? Water is the symbol of our emotions, the earth is our body, the air is our thoughts and the fire is our spirit. It not a religion, it’s just the 4 elements. All of them need your concern and attention, I believe, and that is why House of Futures makes performance installations part of the In100Y-seminars. To open our eyes and senses, to let us re-bring the poetic, aesthetic and somatic experience into the present being.

Every In100Y-seminar is something special not least due to the people who chose to take part. All of them are truly concerned about the future of the planet – and many of them are doing something about it. Many of the participants at the third seminar are spending their whole (working) life trying to make the world more sustainable. And it is a mystery and a puzzle why so many are aware of the problems and challenges we face and still too few are actually doing something about it. We hoped that the participants at this third seminar would help us with this mystery by telling us their stories, so we can learn from those and get more people involved in creating a sustainable 2112 – and so we did. Starting now!

SPEAKERS AT THE THIRD IN100Y-SEMINAR

VAUGHAN LINDSAY, CEO DARTINGTON TRUST HALL (UK)
Resume: Concrete examples of how centre of experiment are a key in proving that problems can be solved in new ingenious ways by individuals who feel empowerment and can cooperate with other people. Dartington has a unique focus on generating money to be able to continue experimenting. And they focus on empowering people and providing the frameworks to make concrete initiatives possible. To create change on a large scale the following is needed: 1. Social acceptance, 2. Economic returns, and 3. Political will.

SØREN HERMANSEN, SAMSOE ENERGY ACADEMY (DK)
Resume: The Energy Academy at Samsøe was initially a hippie project, now a million dollar business project that generates interest worldwide. It is an example of how ambitious local visionaries who were backed-up from the political level succeeded in convincing local business to play an active part. It is also a very illustrative example of the challenges we have to face to obtain sustainability: People and organization. Once those two parameters are in place technology becomes an efficient tool.

CARSTEN RAHBEK, PROFESSOR AT DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, COPENHAGEN UNIVERSITY AND DIRECTOR OF CENTRE FOR MACROECOLOGY (DK) (VIDEO INTERVIEW).
Resume: How can we deal with the unknown? In Denmark my generation has lost contact with nature in comparison with my parents' generation. His recent research focus has been on the issue of climate change and biodiversity, and he does not think that the main problem for the Danish and European species is climate change. Already there is hardly any space left, where nature exists on its own terms. Climate change "just" amplify the negative effects that we humans have imposed on the habitats. And for 99% of the world's species we do not know how they will be affected by rising temperatures.

KATHERINE RICHARDSON, PROFESSOR IN BIOLOGICAL OCEANOGRAPHY AT THE FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN (DK)
 Before the presentation, this text was read to the participants: "Welcome to the Global Virtual University providing education free of charge for all global citizens. Lectures are given in the language in which the lecturer feels most competent and can be translated via the recipient's computer to all other languages. However, the Global Virtual University accepts no responsibility for errors that may occur during the translation process. You are tuned in to the course, understanding how we got here, which addresses the history

of humankind, and the lecture you are about to hear deals with the development of the Human-Earth Relationship since the beginning of recorded human history. The lecture was made available on-line from November 2nd 2111."

Resume: Going from evolution on the very very long run to changing the conditions as quickly as we do presently challenges many areas of the system. We have to give the ecosystems a chance to recalibrate. Looking back the years around 2011 were a turning point. For years there was far too much focus on finding one solution. But once we started the deep cooperation between all academic disciplines changes began to set in.

WES JACKSON, THE LAND INSTITUTE (US)

Wes Jackson, founder and president of The Land Institute, shares his recommendations for the next 100 years, and he thinks we need to go beyond the industrial mind and instead look to nature's economy in order to create a sustainable society.

MARTIN FLURI, DIRECTOR, CRADLE-TO-CRADLE DENMARK (DK)

Resume: Martin Fluri presented the principles of the Cradle to Cradle design process and explained how it is a design and redesign process that never stops. You can all the time improve a product in terms of sustainability, efficiency and preservation. Two areas of present focus is an effort to build according to the C2C principles, and an analysis of how to produce large container ships according to the C2C principles. "Dare to dream!" was the message on the first slide.

MARTIN LIDEGAARD, MINISTER FOR CLIMATE, ENERGY AND BUILDINGS (DK).

Resume: Martin Lidegaard talked about his visions for a green future – including the 100 years' perspective – and about the role of politics in creating sustainable societies. The minister aims to mobilize all areas of society to focus the efforts to exploit the big muscle power that the climate challenge holds. By making all parties cooperate, by making people aware of the challenges we face and the many possible solutions on local, national and global level, we will be able to change our way of thinking and living to meet the challenges.

Find the speakers' presentations and blogs about them and the discussion, and watch the whole video interview with Carsten Rahbek and Wes Jackson at www.in100y.dk