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## Future Search Workshop

***Bringing the “whole system in a room” for better decision making***

### 1. History

The Future Search Workshop (FSW) has historically two independent sources. The one was the German *Zukunftswerkstatt* (“Workshop of the Future”), originally created and engineered at the beginning of the 80’s in order to allow ordinary citizens to participate in urban planning to achieve a “democratization from below” from such processes. The other source is the North-American Future Search Conference, developed at the beginning of the 90’s and aiming at accompanying organization in the search of a common ground on which building a better future. By the beginning of the new century, the two models merged to give birth to the Future Search Workshop.

### 2. Conditions for success

FSW rests on four main conditions for success:

1. Get the “whole system” in the room. This means that all parties having a stake in the outcome should be invited and motivated enough to come so that the working group represents a significant cross-section of the stakeholders.
2. Act following the Funnel principle: start by exploring the larger context before seeking to fix any part. Get everyone talking about the same world. Think globally, act locally.
3. Be sure to put the common ground and the future in the focus of the work while treating problems and conflicts as information, not action items.
4. Encourage self-management and responsibility for action by participants before, during, and after the future search.

### 3. Process

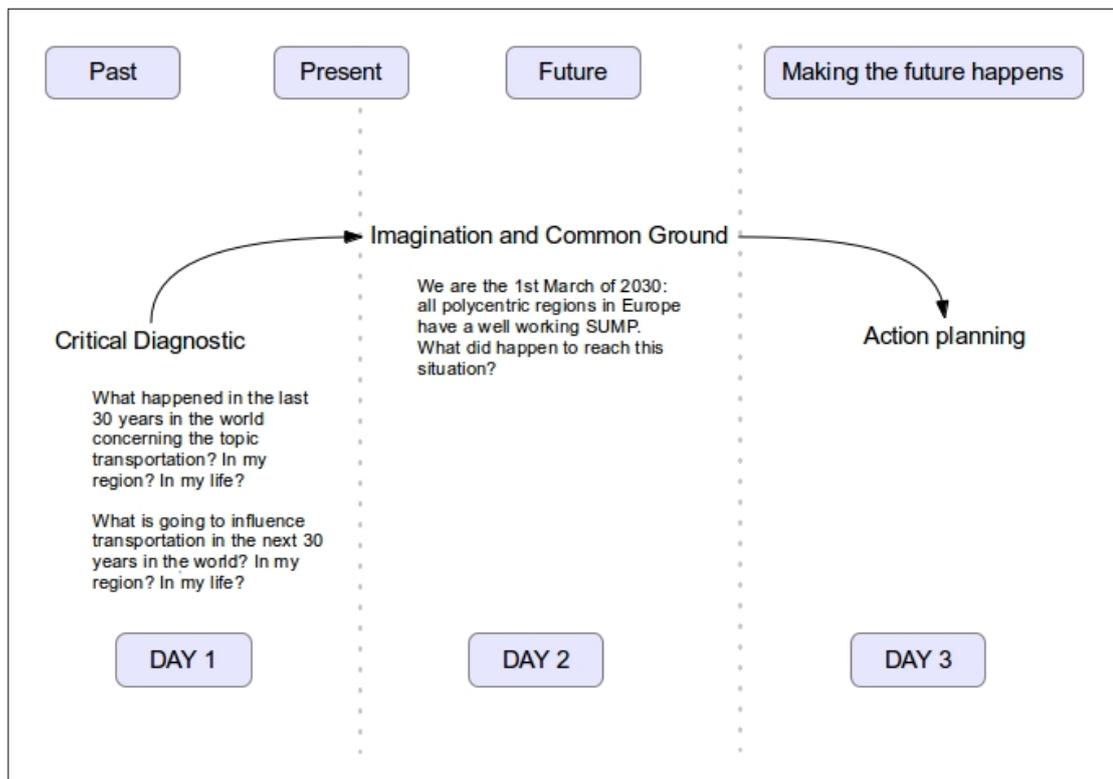
The FSW is typically articulated around three stages (see image):

1. **Critical diagnostic:** during this step, participants analyse the current situation of the topic of the conference (for POLYSUMP, transportation): they reflect on the past evolutions of their environment, trying to find out what they have in common and what makes them different.

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They then work on the same way on the present situation. They finally explore the structural trends that are going to influence their field of action in the future.

2. **Imagination and common ground:** during this step participants become the opportunity to develop visions of an utopian and perfect future, without any obligation to be realistic. They share this vision with the other participants and develop scenario i.e. stories depicting how this utopian situation was reached. All participants then define their common ground and shared principles of actions to reach this desired future. They also write their differences and dissensions down.



3. **Building an Action Plan:** during this third step, participants focus on the formulation of concrete projects and actions based on the visions previously developed. They work with the help of a structured guideline (Name of the action, stakeholders, goals, finances, needs, risks and chances, etc.)

## 4. After the Workshop

The result of the three days is a document with Actions (what we are going to do) and Task forces (who from the workshop is going to do it). The different task forces are autonomous and they have to

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organize themselves after the three days. That is the reason why it is highly recommendable to fix at the end of the 3-days event a date for a follow-up meeting in which participants will be able to report what they already done, what they plan and what help they need.

## Further readings

1. <http://www.futuresearch.net/index.cfm> (Network of Future Search Conference Organizers).
2. <http://www.futuresearch.net/method/applications/sectors-11047.cfm> (Example of a process on transportation in Utah).
3. Weisbord, Marvin et al. (1992): *Discovering Common Ground*, Berrett-Koehler. (the basis book on FS conference).