

Mapping Utopia

Purpose: This exercise aims to get people thinking about what a community living/being the constructive alternative would look like and to consider what they would like about utopia.

Time: about an hour and 15 minutes, depends on the size of the group

Preparation: Flip chart paper, pens and blue tack.

Facilitator's note: This activity is best done towards the end of a day's training about the constructive alternative. You can expand or shrink the categories for small group work as need be, but ideally each small group would have their own area of utopia to develop. We suggest

- political system
- economic system
- social/cultural rites and celebrations
- legal aspects
- technological aspects such as public services or property or education

Description of Exercise:

- Start off by telling participants that they are going to create their own social experiment -- a deliberate alternative community (like 'Freetown Christiania' for example, see Paths through Utopia Hand-out).
- You may find it useful to share some of these points from 'A Well-being Manifesto for a Flourishing Society' with participants to orient them to the task.

Popular thought and government policy centres upon the fact that growing the economy is considered good for society: employment means people are earning money, which supposedly means greater economic mobility and improvement in standards of living. Research by the 'new economics foundation' (nef) however challenges this assumption and shows that the quality of life in the UK peaked in 1976 and while GDP has nearly doubled over the last 30 years, measures of well-being have remained static. Growing the economy has only a small effect on well-being and may be achieved at the expense of other factors that have a greater effect on well-being: work-life balance, the environment in which we live, and the vibrancy of local communities.

The report shows that while genes and upbringing influence about 50% of the variation in our personal happiness, our circumstances – our income and living environment – only affects about 10%. After basic needs are met, extra material wealth has little or no effect on life satisfaction or happiness. The remaining 40% is accounted for by our outlook and activities: our relationships, friendships and jobs, our engagement in our community, and being involved in sport and hobbies – areas where government could have a real impact. Our task today is to think in terms of policies and practices, which would make the residents of our utopian community economically sustainable, happy and fulfilled.

- Ask them as a whole group to set the parameters of their utopia. Agree (use consensus if the group is familiar with the process) to 1. location (urban/rural/semi-urban/rural) 2. climate 3. number of residents 4. natural resources in the area. You

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might also ask the group if there are any other factors they'd like to add and agree to. Write all this information on a flip as it's agreed. Hang aside for everyone to see.

- Have in mind how many small groups you'd like to have and on a prepared flip have written the equivalent number of areas for each group to develop (political, economic, social/cultural, legal, technological: public services, property, education, etc).

Alternatively you could outline several categories, more than there are groups, and let the small groups choose.

- Each small group is responsible for developing one area of utopia; ask them to keep in mind the conditions they set for their community (as discussed in the first point) and to come up with a description of how their area of utopia will function. Allow about 20 minutes for small group discussion. Ask that someone(s) take responsibility for sharing the results of their discussion with the whole group afterwards. Suggest that small groups record the points of their discussion on a flip sheet.

- Ask participants to come back to whole group and each small group shares their discussions and allow for quick Q & A about each area. About 5 minutes per group. Put flip sheets on the wall

- After all groups have presented their areas, the facilitator then reviews each flip with the group to check that everyone is happy and agreeable with all the conditions/realities set by the small group work. Implement a system of representing levels of agreement, circle elements which everyone agrees are good; perhaps a star for elements acceptable to the majority; and a check mark for divisive elements.

- Evaluate – do you have a 'utopia' that is mostly acceptable to everyone? Then ask who would like to live there? Why? Why not?