

Additional detail from the Oxford Future of Cities Scenarios

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Gulliver's
World



Massive socio-
technical revolution



Triumph of the
Triads

The three scenarios for the future of cities were:

- *Gulliver's World*: A world of continued progress and innovation for a reduced number of elites, surrounded by a large, fragmented fringe of developing world power blocks.
- *Massive Sociotechnical Revolution*: A world where climate change and peak oil severely strain cities across the globe, but produce a revolution in more holistic values led by a generation of young leaders championing a new work-life-ecology balance.
- *Triumph of the Triads*: A world where global systemic risks exceed our capacity to manage them, producing state failure, economic stagnation and predatory warlordism

Each scenario also had its own detailed challenges and opportunities, some of which are presented below:

Scenario 1: Gulliver's World

- Profit remains an important social goal, albeit tempered by new ecological and social accounting mechanisms.
- GDP slows, there is greater financial regulation, and corporations have less freedom.
- Stringent security measures must be taken to maintain supply chain linkages and infrastructure security.
- Infrastructure protection represents a significant proportion of military expenditure.
- Fringe cities lack the fiscal resources to upgrade their systems, resulting in lower levels of hard infrastructure sophistication and increasing soft-system reliance (manual labour, subsistence farming, etc.)
- Centre cities become increasingly controlled in an effort to preserve border security, using a range of high tech CCTV-style monitoring systems.
- Social stratification becomes stronger in centre cities, bringing with it increased division and exclusion. Strategic marriages become more common.
- Increased “Grey Power”, with dedicated neighbourhoods and districts catering to wealth geriatrics.
- Health maintenance and life-extension will become an increasing priority.
- The market for elite and expensive life-extension services for the wealthy expands rapidly.
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Scenario 2: Massive Socio-technical Revolution

- Upgrading, improving and transforming technical and social infrastructure becomes the number one political agenda item.
- “Philanthro-Capitalism” is the new framework.
- GDP driven metrics give way to blended accounting techniques focused on building intellectual, ecological and social resilience.
- ICT enables a “participatory panopticon”, which encourages self-policing and near transparency.
- Social tensions are effectively funnelled into community works programmes and group reconstruction efforts.

- Decentralised but community / state sponsored services provide a significant proportion of health care.
- Skills and knowledge are decentralised, peer authorised, and communally sourced.
- Single disciplinary expertise is considered suspect.
- The rise of the “professional amateur” and “jack of all trades.”
- Participation, innovation, and “getting your hands dirty” are the new credentials for social respectability.
- Individual profit motive is considered suspect.

Scenario 3: Triumph of the Triads

- Integrated global economic growth becomes a thing of the past
- Highly successful cartels are able to turn enormous profits in local environments, often through violent means.
- Most governance structures lack the fiscal and political capital to invest in large scale infrastructure.
- Cheap, decentralised, and often low-tech infrastructure solutions are necessary to provide basic life support systems.
- The population carrying capacity of such systems is greatly reduced.
- Ethnic self-help groups provide security and safety, while inter-racial and inter-ethnic violence increases.
- Policing is selective, as per the political or ideological disposition of each community, with rights provided on a contingent basis for select members.
- Private security becomes a booming business.
- Health becomes a luxury.
- Workforce training becomes a matter of internships and guildsmanship.
- Knowledge is directly transmitted face to face, or harvested remotely via massively multiplayer gaming simulations.
- Multi-disciplinarity becomes a survival skill.
- Office work declines significantly.
- Post-traumatic stress and other similar psychological illnesses are widespread, but treatment is rare.
- Child soldiers and youth violence is common, necessitating strong community policing and innovative responses.

For more information please go to the official project website at: <http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/centres/insis/research/Pages/future-cities.aspx>