Model(led) Citizens:
Scenarios and design in the era of 'behaviour change'

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> "An interventionist is a man struggling to make his model of man come true."
> (Argyris and Schön, 1974)

Scenarios, like anything designed, each "encode a hypothesis about human behaviour" (Greenfield, 2013). Assumptions are inscribed into these visions: how 'the public' thinks and decides, cultural and social values and norms, and—perhaps most significantly in the era of the political 'behaviour change' intervention—how people will react to measures designed to influence them.

A scenario, or any design fiction, is a *frame*, a bounded treatment of the nature of a 'problem', but the underlying model is often neither explicitly recognised, nor questioned. This weakens scenarios' utility in terms of iterative discovery, and can establish largely uncritical narratives, treading similar paths. Two current examples: Greenfield (2013) notes the extreme homogeneity of 'smart city' proposals, in terms of the models of human behaviour assumed; and Hazas et al (2012) criticise the pervasive model of individual householders' "constant and active choices" inherent in most 'sustainable design' proposals for energy feedback.

Unexamined models raise at least three areas of concern:

1) The degree of *variety* (in the cybernetic sense: Dubberly & Pangaro, 2007) assumed within human societies—the heterogeneity of culture, motivations, attitudes, beliefs, priorities and decision heuristics.
2) Attribution errors (Ross & Nisbett, 1991): despite scenarios being visions of *contexts*, many models encode assumptions of individual decision-making driven primarily by *internal* factors. Segmentation by participants' assumed values (e.g. DEFRA, 2008) is often taken as a proxy for predicting behaviour along these lines.
3) Reflexivity: the assumed participants in scenarios would of course themselves bring their own values, models and framings of the situation to their 'role', and these might not align with those assumed by the scenarios' creators. How many scenario processes explicitly consider the differences in public understanding of these potentially large, complex systems?

So, to ensure that we use scenarios and design fiction in ways which help us understand and debate the future(s) we might want, we need to be much more explicit about our models, and willing to surface our assumptions. We must 'show our working'.

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