

Conclusions

James Paskins and Sarah Bell

Some questions are very easy to ask, but turn out to be very difficult to answer. Asking questions about the distant future of an entire city, home to over 8 million people, is a good example. It is relatively straightforward to ask how the city will change over the five decades between London 2012 and London 2062, but practically impossible to provide a definitive answer.

Some might even consider that it is foolhardy to try, and there is much fun to be had in holding up predictions from the past to scrutiny in the present. However, rather than offering up hostages to fortune, the aim of this book was to open up debate about the choices we can make now in support of the futures we wish to see. The preceding chapters are based on serious debate about the future of London, informed both by academic enquiry and professional experience. We feel that this book has taken an exciting approach by combining serious, structured, deliberation with more creative pieces. This combination reveals a range of visions of the future that are, at turns, fun, fascinating and unsettling. Allowing clever, engaged and well-informed people the chance to follow their intuitions has proved to be a valuable and illuminating exercise.

One of the most challenging aspects of this exercise is the question of scope. London is a fantastically complicated entity. A city, especially a city as large and diverse as London, cannot be subdivided into neat, distinct categories. It certainly does not conform to the disciplinary structure of a university. So, what aspects of London are we interested in, and what level of detail should we cover? In large part this was answered by the contributors themselves, who have applied their knowledge to the question of the future of London, following their interests without overstepping the bounds of their expertise.

The choice of timeframe is another aspect of the scope. How long is fifty years? It is long enough to free people from thinking about the annual budgets and election cycles, long enough to expect to see a different world. However, much of the city, its buildings, its layout and its traditional institutions, may be left relatively untouched by the passage of five decades. This is one reason why retrofit might become such an important aspect in delivering a sustainable future for the city. Barring revolution, war and disaster, there is little reason to expect the tourist's view of London to change. The visitor's snapshots of St Paul's Cathedral, The Palace of Westminster and the Lord

How to cite this book chapter:

Paskins, J and Bell, S. 2013. Conclusions. In: Bell, S and Paskins, J. (eds.) *Imagining the Future City: London 2062*. Pp. 173-175. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bag.ab>

Mayor's Show, might be in glorious immersive 3D by 2062, but we might expect that the scenes they capture will be largely indistinguishable from today.

However, as we stare into the cloudy crystal ball of the future, we should not discount the possibility of radical change. Within the space of a week the inferno of 1666 reduced many of the capital's landmarks to ashes, it is not impossible that another 'Great' event will radically alter the city between now and 2062. While fire seems less likely, the resilience of the city may well be tested by the effects of climate change, and future history could record a 'Great Flood' or 'Great Swelter'. Nor should we ignore the spectre of terrorism. An increasing reliance on an expanding technology infrastructure exposes the city to another risk. If our future smart cities are underpinned by a tightly linked system, with inadequate protection or fail-safes, we could see critical systems drastically affected by a malicious act, or an accident of nature.

The development of smart cities infrastructure provides more than just one more vulnerability for the city, it also introduces the prospect that new technologies will change our relationships with, and understanding of, the city. It is likely that as the city gets smarter it will transform commerce, working practices and decision-making.

Cities exist for, and because of, people, and there is no doubt that fifty years is a significant amount of time for the people who live and work in the city. The years leading up to 2062 will see everyone involved in this book past retirement into old age, unless of course retirement becomes a relic of an earlier, more secure, time. In the opening chapter of this book we are told that London is 'defined by its population'. If we accept this, it follows that much of what makes London a global leader in areas as diverse as art, business and innovation, is its population, the flow of people, their energy and their ideas. London is a young, vibrant city, drawing on a talent from the rest of the UK, Europe and the world. It is clear that in some of our possible futures this population profile, and London's ability to act as a magnet for talent, is under threat. This is not to suggest that the capital should exclude its older members; like much of Western Europe, London needs to seriously consider how it can be more inclusive across the age spectrum. The size and structure of London's population in 2062 will be a fundamental driver of decision-making and a major influence on quality of life.

We should not take for granted the factors that attract the people who make the capital successful. There is no simple formula for what makes a city attractive, but the factors must surely include opportunities for employment, education and entertainment, and a city that accommodates and becomes enriched by different cultures and lifestyles. An intolerant city, or one that fails to provide affordable housing, rewarding jobs, or loses sight of the people at the bottom of society runs the risk of becoming sterile and moribund.

Another strength is the diversity of opportunity and endeavour within London. Finance is often held up as London's defining industry, and it is of vital importance to the prosperity of the city, as well as its place on the world stage. But London also hosts a remarkable breadth of other industries that add to the attractiveness of the city for doing business. While it is important to support the interests of business in London, the interests of one sector should not be allowed to overwhelm other needs. Climate change, poverty reduction and wellbeing are all considerations that should be balanced against maintaining London's status as a global city.

It is clear that London's leaders must face up to some bold decisions in the coming decades. It seems clear that the next fifty years will bring different priorities into conflict. We face decisions on long-term infrastructure, including rail links, airports and tunnels under the Thames that will have direct impacts on our ability to meet targets on air quality, water pollution and carbon emissions. In many cases, such as transport, planning and energy policy, the need to maintain business as usual is in direct opposition to measures required to address human induced climate change. If we are to deliver a sustainable future, there is a pressing need for well-targeted investment, strong legislation and good ideas.

We have not, nor could we, cover every facet of London, neither were we able consider every possible future. However, the areas that receive coverage are not only important in themselves, but also for the questions they raise. And it is pressing questions, rather than answers, that we are left with. How will London provide for its citizens in the future? How many of them should we expect to see in 2062, and who will they be? It is clear that these people will still require shelter, water and energy. It also seems clear that London will rely on its connections to provide not only these staples, but also the flows of energy and resources required to meet the aspirations of its citizens. There are questions of governance and representation, finance and fairness, business and society. All of these questions, and many more will benefit from cross-disciplinary and cross-sector approaches, bringing together diverse expertise to generate new insights and future directions.

So, what will the future hold for London 2062? We may be the citizens of football clubs, perhaps we will spend our leisure time singing instead of shopping, and maybe a smart city running on big data will have changed our lifestyles beyond recognition. It is likely that London 2062 will be a different, and perhaps more dangerous, place. In *Dreams* we are warned to take sensible precautions before we consider travelling on the tube of 2062. We should be just as careful as we begin our journey towards the future; the decisions we make, the areas we research and the causes we support over the next fifty years will shape the London we see in 2062.