

Introduction

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London is one of the world's great cities, hosting an extraordinary colocation and concentration of people, industries, political power, religions, finance, ideas and creativity. It is a city where you will find eight million people and more than 100 spoken languages. A city that is both ancient and modern: at the forefront of innovation in fields such as art, technology, finance and education, while reflecting nearly 2,000 years of history in its layout, institutions and buildings.

The next fifty years are likely to see the global population swell to nine billion people, who will be living under conditions of continuing economic, political, climatic, cultural and technological change. What will London be like in 2062? It is impossible to know. Trying to predict the future of such a dynamic city, in such uncertain times, would be foolhardy. And yet, many of the decisions taken by London's leaders and citizens now will have consequences far into the future. London will face significant challenges in the next half century and it is wise to be prepared.

This book is the outcome of the London 2062 Project, commissioned under the auspices of UCL's Research Grand Challenge of Sustainable Cities. The Grand Challenges¹ are an expression of UCL's commitment to bring our collective knowledge and wisdom to bear on some of the most complex problems facing the world. As international leaders in urban research, drawing together the trends shaping the future of our own city over the next fifty years seemed like an obvious contribution to inform public debate and decision making. It also presented a significant risk. Academic reputations are not built on bold speculation, but on careful, thorough analysis of data and thoughtful development of theory. A project addressing the future of London poses some serious academic problems.

The academic problem with the future is that we just do not have the data. We have some theories, but the most reliable of these deal with the things that we are least concerned about. Newto-

¹ The UCL Grand Challenges build on the university's accomplishment, expertise and commitment by encouraging researchers to think about how their work can impact upon global issues, bringing specialist expertise to bear on some of the world's key problems: Global Health, Sustainable Cities, Intercultural Interaction and Human Wellbeing. Find out more at www.ucl.ac.uk/grand-challenges.

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nian theory allows us to be effectively certain that acceleration due to gravity in London in 2062 will be approximately 9.8ms^{-2} , but micro-economic theory is less reliable in predicting how affordable housing will be. We have some numerical models of the how the world works, but these are either based in theory, or on statistical analysis of past events. They can help to identify possible futures and assign probabilities to various outcomes, but they work best when applied to biophysical phenomena, which is useful, but inadequate, when dealing with a complex and contested entity such as London.

The academic problem with London is that it does not conform to our disciplinary structures. Universities were not designed to deal with interdisciplinary challenges such as the future of a world city with 2,000 years of legacy. Research about London is spread across departments ranging from Engineering to English. While our disciplinary perspectives are necessarily incomplete, bringing them together to deliver a coherent set of meaningful forecasts is impossible. Engineering data and literary criticism cannot simply be merged. We must respect the frames of reference and levels of explanation offered by different schools, and take care not to lose the power of specific disciplinary analysis in our efforts to bridge the gaps between different systems of knowledge.

Academics are not alone in admitting difficulty in addressing the question of what London will be like in 2062. Our partners from professional, government and community organisations across London face a different set of challenges in dealing with the future. The people who make decisions, formulate policies, create plans, design systems and advocate for particular interests in the city are all working for a future they barely have time to contemplate. Faced with the everyday pressures of professional and political life, annual budgetary negotiations and five year election cycles, opportunities for long term thinking are rare. Opportunities to think about the future outside the particular details of a specific sector are practically unheard of.

Despite academic reticence and professional constraints, the future of our city and what it means for the choices currently facing leaders and citizens presents us with a series of questions we cannot hide from. How many people will live here? What will we eat? Will we have enough water? How will we achieve a low emissions transport system? Who will be in charge? Who will own our housing? The final answers to these and other questions are less important than the choices that emerge in thinking through the problems. Working through these issues across disciplines, professions and sectors is most valuable in provoking new thinking about decisions in the present, not in making specific predictions about the future.

Uncertainty aside, practitioners and policy-makers rely on projections as best guesses of future data to inform their decisions. The precariousness of this is highlighted in London's population projections: a recent upward revision has estimated London's population in 2030 at ten million people, up significantly from a previous prediction of nine million, which will now be reached in 2020. This translates to an additional 3.9 million households in the Capital, a third of which will be single occupancy households.

Housing, moving, employing, and providing public services for two million additional people within two decades will be no small feat. The pressure of demographic change is already being felt with a substantial increase in the number of school-age children and a corresponding shortfall of 118,000 primary and secondary school places as soon as 2016. The transport network is also feeling the strain as these ten million people could mean an extra 2.1 million daily trips – a key reason Crossrail 2 has already gone to public consultation. And perhaps nowhere is the pressure felt more than in the housing sector, where predictions suggest that the number of households will grow by around 36,000 per annum to 2033, in a context where new housing supply in London has averaged 24,582 per year in 2007-2012.

Amidst meeting demands such as these, there are also ambitions to improve quality of life in the city. Environmental sustainability now cuts across all sectors, as the Mayor of London strives to achieve a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2025 and is proactive in growing the green economy. Affordability, community engagement, segregation, and accessibility are also on the agenda.

The real challenge is not in fulfilling these ambitions, nor only in providing the infrastructure and services to underpin a burgeoning population. The careful balance of growth and quality, often in seeming competition with each other, present the real challenge for London to 2062 and beyond.

The timeframe of the London 2062 project provided a unique vehicle for opening up discussion and debate about the city and the forces that shape its future. Fifty years is far enough in the future that no-one could reasonably be held accountable for a false prediction, but it is less than a lifetime, fitting within the normal capacity of personal and professional memory and imagination. Some participants in the project had close to fifty years of professional experience working in London and urban research, others had nearly fifty years ahead of them. Fifty years is uncertain enough to free participants from the fear of being proved wrong, but firm enough to be certain that some of the decisions and actions taken now will still be remembered and their impacts still felt.

The project began in 2010 with a series of seminars with UCL staff and selected partners addressing the themes of London as a global city, a healthy city, a sustainable city and a thriving city. Participants were asked to consider ‘where are we now?’, ‘how did we get here?’, ‘what might happen?’, ‘what can we do about it?’ and ‘what would London look like?’. Topics covered included population, energy, health, security, culture, heritage, housing, water, transport, governance, air quality, waste management, finance, food and flooding. The outcomes of the seminars were synthesised into a pamphlet which addressed the current state of London, and the forces shaping its resilience, sustainability and wellbeing².

The second phase of the project centred on a series of workshops co-convened with policy network Future of London³. These events linked more strongly to urban practitioners and policy makers in London, drawing on Future of London’s members and networks involving local government, the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and other organisations. The Future of London workshops covered energy, housing, the economy and transport. We also held a competition for UCL students to present their ideas and visions in writing or images.

This book is an outcome of the project. The contributors were participants in the seminars, workshops and competition, and other members of the UCL community with important or unique perspectives on London. Core issues such as demography, transport, water and governance are addressed in longer chapters conforming to the conventions of academic writing. Shorter chapters provide key contributors with the opportunity to speculate about possible futures or key issues in a freer style, ranging from the polemical to the fictional. Images are an important feature of the book, illustrating points addressed in the text and making their own statements about London’s future.

The book is structured into four sections – *Connections*, *Things*, *Power* and *Dreams*. *Connections* addresses London’s role as a global and capital city, and the inter-relationships between different elements of the city itself in shaping its future. *Things* addresses the material aspects of London, including infrastructures, food and waste. *Power* covers issues of governance, the economy and housing. *Dreams* covers more speculative contributions, including formal scenario approaches to the future of London and individual imaginations of London in 2062.

The London 2062 process of enquiry resulted in a diverse, but inevitably incomplete, set of perspectives on London’s future, opening new ideas and ways of thinking about the city. The project did not follow a formal scenarios based approach, but several authors develop their own scenarios for the future of London and one chapter specifically addresses well established scenarios and

² Background information related to the London 2062, including the pamphlet and videos of seminar presentations is available at: www.ucl.ac.uk/london-2062

³ Future of London is an independent, not-for-profit policy network focused on the challenges facing urban regeneration, housing and economic development practitioners across the Capital. More information is available at: www.futureoflondon.org.uk

what they might mean for London. Climate change is not addressed as a separate issue, but is embedded in analysis of infrastructure, the built environment and governance, and is a feature of most of the personal and creative contributions. Several of the chapters review current government, industry and scientific forecasts, including those for demographics, transport, energy and water. A number of other issues of current concern to London's politicians, businesses and residents are dealt with by scattered references throughout several chapters, but are not specifically analysed in detail. These include airports, finance, religion, manufacturing and the influence of the US, Europe, China and other emerging economies. Some of the chapters contradict each other, as individual visions and opinions sit alongside more conventionally structured analysis and synthesis. The chapters are written in different styles, reflecting the multiplicity of voices, disciplines and positions.

Imagining the Future City is not a blueprint, nor is it a prophecy. It is a provocation to continuing dialogue and a prompt for Londoners to consider what is at stake. London's future cannot be predicted, foretold or decided in a book, however expert its authors. This book presents the visions and analysis of authors from a range of academic and professional disciplines, with the aim of opening up deliberation and debate about what London might be like in fifty years, and what that might mean for the choices we make now.