

Futurology and Futurizing:

A research agenda on the practice and politics of global environmental scenarios

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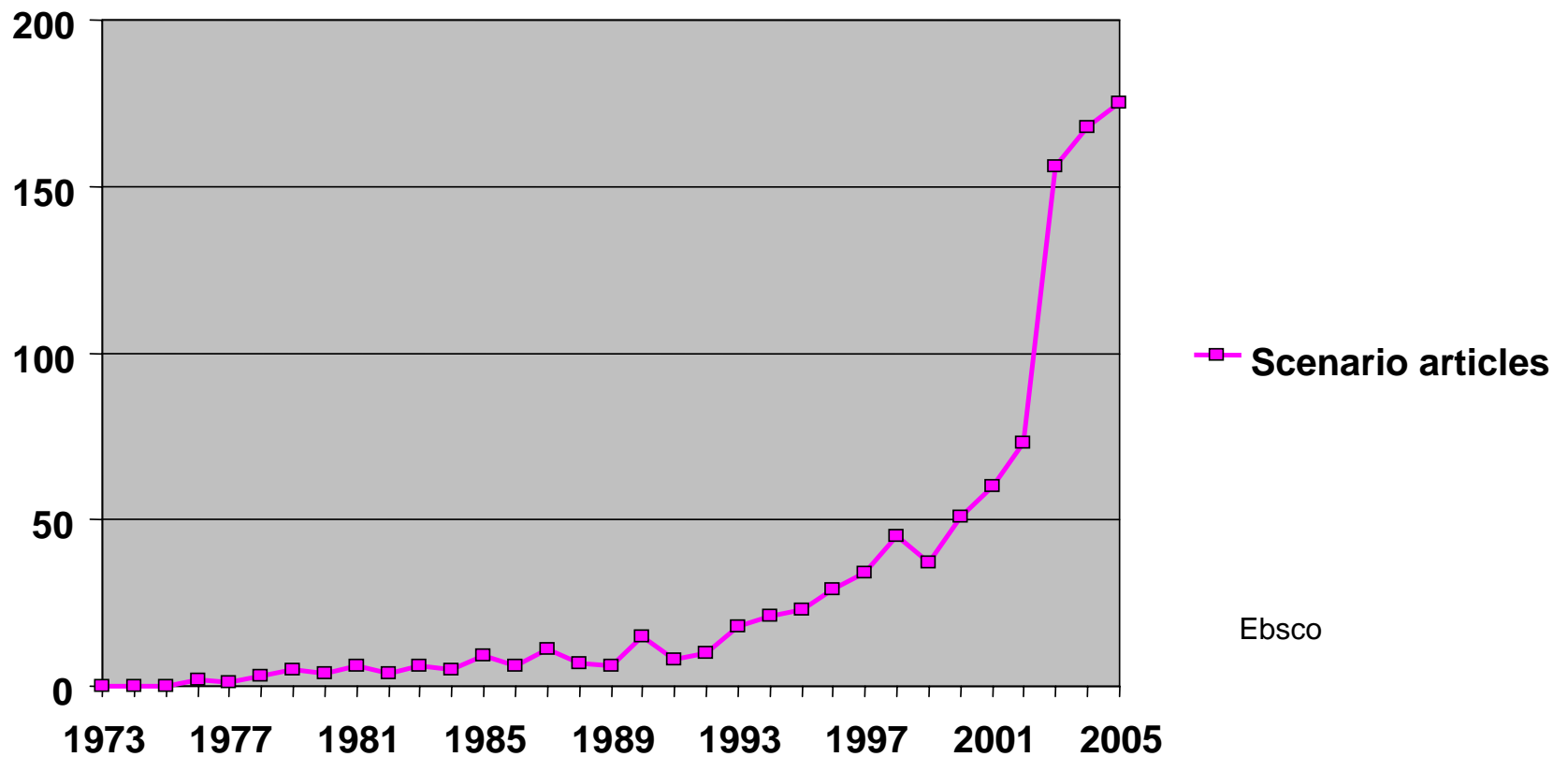


THE WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Science, Politics and Scenarios

- Growth in Science in international environmental politics & policymaking
- Growth in analytical interests on relationship between expertise (of various kinds) and policymaking
- What to make of scenarios?

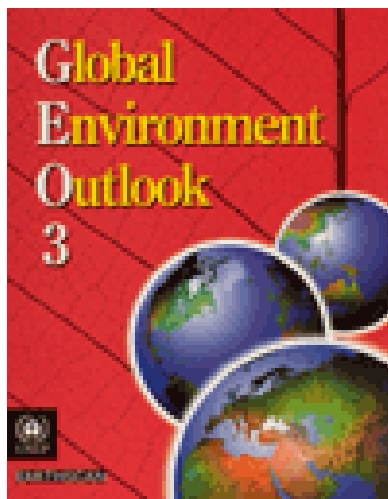
A steep rise in articles....



Ref: Wilkinson, A. (2007) "Scenario Development: Connecting Goals and Audiences"

Global environmental scenarios

- Common and growing in global environmental science and global environmental politics & policy
- Examples: IPCC/SRES; MEA; UNEP GEO III & IV; CLRTAP RAINS inputs; RGGI



Some History

- 1950s-1960s: security and human pollution (Kahn & Weiner's 1967 "Toward the Year 2000")
- 1970s: systems models (Meadows "Limits to Growth") and private sector use ("Shell method" and oil shocks)
- 1990s: Millennialism & climate change

Complex and contested field

“few techniques in futures studies have given rise to so much confusion as scenarios” Khakee (1991)

“the term scenarios is increasingly misused and abused” Godet and Roublet (1996)

“the literature reveals a large number of different and at times conflicting definitions, characteristics, principles and methodological ideas about scenarios” Bradfield et. al. (2005)

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What are scenarios?

- Predictive models
- Scenarios: “Plausible, challenging and relevant stories about how the future might unfold;” integrate qualitative and quantitative data” (Raskin, 2005)
- Narratives

What we don't know

- What accounts for the rise of scenarios?
- Are scenarios “good science”?
- Do scenarios teach us things we don't already know?
- Are changes in methodology improving the utility of scenarios?
- How are scenarios used by various audiences?
- What kinds of knowledge do scenarios produce?
- What are “best practices” in scenario production?
- How do scenarios structure relations between and across scientific and policy domains?
- How do scenarios frame debate?
- What evidence can be marshaled to answer these questions?

Brown University Scenarios Workshop

- Global Environmental Futures:
Interrogating the practice and politics of scenarios
Brown University, March 23-24, 2007
<http://www.watsoninstitute.org/ge/scenarios/>
- Workshop themes
 1. Current scenario practice in global env. governance
 2. Scenario experience in other issue areas
 3. Dialogue between practitioners (producers and users) and social scientists

A scenarios research agenda

1. Scenarios as **PRODUCTS**

➡ Are scenarios used and policy useful?

2. Scenarios as **PRODUCT/PROCESS**

➡ How do scenarios produce meaning?

1. Scenarios as PRODUCTS

- Decision-support tools
- 3 types of decisions
 - Forecasting: most likely future
 - Hedging: full range of futures
 - Backcasting: preferred future
- Are scenarios used and policy useful?

Use and policy usefulness

- Defining utility
 - User driven
 - Limits of scenario knowledge
- Clear and close connection between productions of scenarios and intended users
- Scale of scenario matches scale of concern to decision-makers

2. Scenarios as PRODUCT/PROCESS

- Creating meaning through scenarios
- What is the NIC?
- NIC scenario production: how?
- NIC scenario products: what?

Drivers and storylines

- Drivers/Key Trends
- 4 “fictional scenarios”
 - Davos World
 - Pax Americana
 - A New Caliphate
 - Cycle of Fear

Concluding Thoughts

- Scenario-Politics & Policy Connections
- Discourse Analysis
- Images & Communication
- Windows into Communities