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Creative Communities: an Application of the Visioning Method for the Development of Community Indicators in Ballymun (Ireland)

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Creative Communities:
An application of the visioning method for the development of community indicators in Ballymun (Ireland)

1. Introduction

The "Visioning Project" presented in this paper has been chosen from many activities conducted within the regeneration programme in Ballymun in Dublin, Ireland. The Project is an example of application of the visioning process, one of the methods developed within the Futures Studies and Research field. The Futures Studies and Research field is concerned with exploration of the future in order to provide information on what might happen in the future and to assist decision-making and planning processes. Presented project is an example of an application of the futures methods in the context of urban regeneration and shows the role of the futures methods in participatory planning and community development. The project aims at developing a set of community indicators that will be used to monitor progress of Ballymun towards sustainability. The process of visioning was used to identify wishes and fears regarding the future of Ballymun, to create a shared vision of the future and to engage local citizens in the process of change.

Ballymun, which is Irish for Town of Shrubs, was built between 1966 and 1974 as a response to the housing crisis in Dublin. The development consists of a mix of 2.814 flats in 4-, 8- and 15-storey blocks and 2400 houses concentrated in an area of 1,5 square miles (Community Action Programme Ballymun 2000).

The original plan was to move people away from the crowded inner city to a more open and convivial environment. Only three decades after the first blocks were built, the area was designated for the regeneration programme, the biggest in Ireland. It was felt that a lack of appropriate amenities and facilities over the years has resulted in a complex array of socio-economic problems. An announcement of Ballymun regeneration programme in March 1997 by Irish Government was a response to the intensity and variety of social, economic, infrastructural and environmental problems cumulated in the area. The project involves demolition of high-rise buildings and building a new town in Ballymun (Scully 2002).

Dublin Corporation (now Dublin City Council) set up a special agency, Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL) to carry out the regeneration project. The first step was preparation of the Masterplan for Ballymun regeneration, which was published in March 1998. The Plan was formulated as an "Integrated Area Plan" and submitted for approval under the 1999 Urban Renewal Scheme (ibid.).

The renewal of Ballymun is based on the principles of sustainable development (ibid.), that "meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 8). The project aims at overall regeneration of the area with an extensive participation of local residents. Their involvement and support was recognised as crucial for the success of the programme. The Master Plan was developed in close consultation and in partnership with Ballymun residents (Ballymun Regeneration 1998). It addresses social, economic, infrastructural and environmental problems at once. The wide range of social, economic and environmental projects conducted within the

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regeneration programme is hoped to create linkages in the area and to build a healthy, viable community in the new town of Ballymun. A wide and active participation of Ballymun residents in the regeneration programme should help to create a feeling of the ownership and good sense of place.

2. A brief history of Ballymun

The original plan prepared for the new town in Ballymun in 1960s stated development of a new integrated community. The plan declared provision of all facilities demanded for a new town, among with new housing. It was felt that many of the planned components, such as shopping facilities, schools, health services, entertainment and leisure amenities, e.g. meeting halls, dance hall, clinic, library, swimming pool, bowling alley, cinema etc., were essential for the proper community functioning, however many of them were never built (Community Action Programme Ballymun 2000).

The mixture of factors, such as gaps in planning, deficiency in basic services, lack of the sense of ownership and also a combination of policies and practices adopted by Dublin Corporation and Central Government reduced perspectives for healthy and viable growth of the area and led to degeneration. Some of decisions made to improve the situation in Ballymun turned out to have opposite results. A good example of 'a not thought through' decision was the introduction of a 'surrender grant' to encourage people to move out from the local authority housing to private homes. The £5000 grant made it possible for people with steady jobs to secure a mortgage and leave the area. The practice, helping single families, led to further deprivation of the area, leaving socially and economically disadvantaged citizens in the same place (Community Action Programme Ballymun 2000). The socio-economic situation of Ballymun is well shown in the housing ownership structure - 80% of housing stock belongs to the local authorities and only 20% is privately owned. Such a strong concentration of socially and economically disadvantaged citizens was one of the main factors contributing to the decline of the area.

The problems and needs existing in the area led to emergence of many voluntary and community groups, which were established to address the demands and look for solutions to the most severe problems. For example, protests and extensive campaigns of local residents resulted in establishment of some basic services, even if most of them were closed down soon after, because of the deterioration of the town. Struggles with variety of social, economic and infrastructural problems resulted in development of strong community spirit and active participation of the local community in civic life.

Active actions taken by local community and pressure put on government led to announcement of two regeneration programmes:
1. comprehensive refurbishment announced by Dublin Corporation in 1988 that aimed at physical refurbishment of tower blocks and development of structures for tenant participation - a form of public involvement,
2. Regeneration Programme proclaimed by Central Government in 1997 that aimed at demolition of old and building new housing stock parallel with conducting a range of socio-economic programmes addressed at the disadvantaged social groups.

An evaluation of the first project completed after the accomplishment of its first phase established that the costs of the refurbishment were higher than the option of demolition and building new structures. The evaluation recommended that further phases should involve a mixture of demolition and rebuilding of selected parts of the

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town in order to create an identifiable town centre (Community Action Programme Ballymun 2000).

3. 'Visioning project'[1]

Development of community indicators in Ballymun is a part of the European Project "It-Takes-Two". The activity is conducted by BRL in association with Global Action Plan (GAP Ballymun).

"It-Takes-Two" is a project co-ordinated by the International Institute for the Urban Environment (IIUE) with financial support from the European Commission. It aims at reducing barriers for technological innovation in sustainable urban environment. It concentrates on five post-war high-rise districts in the cities of Antwerp, Dublin, Gothenburg, Leipzig and Naples. A combination of futures related methods such as SWOT-analysis (i.e. Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) Technology Assessment, European Awareness Scenario Workshops, Visioning was brought together and incorporated into an integrated approach (http://www.urban.nl/projects/ItTakesTwo/ittakest.htm searched on 12.03.2002).

3.1.The origins and aims of the project

The 'Visioning project' is one of many activities and undertakings carried out within the regeneration scheme. It assists in encouraging community to participate in the regeneration programme and in building the sense of ownership of the place and its future.

It is a stated objective of the regeneration programme to engage the local community into the renewal process. It is recognised that active participation of indigenous residents is critical to the success of the regeneration process (Community Action Programme Ballymun 2000). Usually the areas designed for rejuvenation struggle with a whole range of problems. Addressing increasing social and economic exclusion of deprived areas is one of the most important issues.

Decline of an area usually has many different causes. The accurate recognition and understanding of the causes and factors underlying the situation is crucial for successful accomplishment of the regeneration programme. Problems usually have a complex character and are interrelated. It is recognised that exclusion and degeneration of urban areas need to be dealt with in multifaceted way, addressing the causes of problems, not only the symptoms. Understanding of systems, theirs relations and interactions is essential for providing successful solutions. The efforts should be directed towards reasons of exclusion in the first place. Recognition and understanding of community's needs and priorities, its values and aspirations is extremely important in the whole regeneration process.

Development of community indicators by using the visioning method was chosen in Ballymun from many types of themes, methods and techniques recommended by "It-Takes-Two" project. This choice arose from the need to asses community's values and preferences, to encourage and involve residents of Ballymun in building sustainable society, and to create a feeling of responsibility for change towards better future, based on residents' wishes and values. Visioning was a tool, applied to identify the most severe areas of concern and value systems characteristic for this community, and further, to develop a set of community indicators that would reflect residents'

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[1] 'Visioning project' is an informal name used by team members working on the project.

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concerns. The indicators would be used to monitor the progress of the town towards sustainability.

3.2. Visioning and indicators

Visioning is one of the methods used to create images of futures. It is based on the hypothesis that images of the future lead our present behaviours, steer our choices and effect decisions (Puglisi 2000). The visioning method aims at development and consideration of desirable futures. A great importance is given to values, which are important components of the visions.

Visioning is widely used for the construction of shared images for groups, organisations, and communities. In the visioning process communities envision the future they desire, consider possible actions, define strategies and plans for implementation. The visions are transformed into manageable and a feasible set of community goals and an action plan. Wide public involvement enables to identify communal aims, core values and wishes for the future.

Indicators are important tools to measure the present state, the change and the distance from the point we want to achieve. The role of indicator is to provide information and to alert about problems before they reach a severe stage.

Sustainability indicators are definable, measurable features of the world, whose levels or rates and directions of change demonstrate the distance from achieving a sustainable state, and help us to asses if the changes lead us in the required direction (Scully 2002).

Indicators have been increasingly used over last years. They help to evaluate implementation of governments' policies, completion of national objectives and international commitments (ibid.). They are important response to the need of information highlighted by decision-makers providing a feedback mechanism on current trends and underlining relations between factors and elements. Indicators are important source of feedback on policy performance.

Involvement of the local communities in the process of indicators' selection helps the decision-makers to assess the local value systems. And thus it helps to build the feeling of responsibility for a change among residents and it enables to create a platform for discussion between the policy makers and the local residents. It could be argued that most successful outcomes are achieved when based on the partnership approach including the public sector, private representatives and citizens.

3.3. 'Visioning Project'

Developing community indicators in Ballymun took the form of two workshops with participation of local residents. As stated before, the main aim of the exercise was development of a set of indicators, which would monitor Ballymun's progress towards sustainable society. Developed indicators shall be addressed to the stakeholders responsible for change.

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3.3.1. First Workshop

The first workshop was held under the name "Visioning Day". Participants of the event came from: GAP Action Teams[2], Dublin City Council, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. and local community groups and organisations.

The purpose of the Visioning Day was to build a shared, common vision of the future for Ballymun arising from individual wishes and fears. The vision would contain goals and targets for the future that should be worked on.

The participants were asked to write their ideas about how Ballymun would be like in twenty years time. Each thought was written on a single piece of paper. Then the ideas were collected and grouped resulting in emergence of five themes. During the next stage the 'idea clusters' were developed into five future scenarios[3]:

1. "Characterless Suburb"
2. "Learning Centre"
3. "Successful Small-business Centre"
4. "Great Community Spirit"
5. "Common Goals, Safe Place"

Four out of five visions were positive, only one - "Characterless Suburb" was negative. This scenario was a reaction to the fear that the strong community spirit existing today in Ballymun might be lost during the regeneration process (Scully 2002). The remaining four scenarios presented positive visions of the town, where people would like to live and work. Common goals how to avoid an unwanted future and to build desirable one arose out of the scenarios. The use of the visioning process enabled to create the images of the area's future, helped to identify the goals, which community was willing to work on in regard to create the most desired future.

Identification of key benchmarks within scenarios that could indicate whether Ballymun was heading towards imagined future, was a next step in the process. These benchmarks became a foundation for establishment of the list of initial community indicators (Scully 2002).

3.3.2. Second Workshop

The second workshop took place on 12th March 2002. As in the case of first meeting, invited to the workshop were: GAP Action Teams, Dublin City Council, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. and local community groups and organisations.

The purpose of the event was to formulate a list of 12 indicators, one for each theme/area (Tab. 2) that were important to the residents and should be measured by them.

First of all, the continuity of the project was emphasised by presenting scenarios developed on the first workshop in the form of the future local newspaper, which was developed from the scenarios showing the visions of the Ballymun future. The articles in the "Local paper" illustrated the trends that emerged in scenarios and showed how Ballymun could be like in the year 2017.

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[2] Action Teams form groups of local residents interested in environmental issues as well as sustainability, with the purpose to decrease the negative impact on the environment on their own individual level
[3] The scenarios are presented in the tables in the original form, which was developed during the workshop.

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Scenario 1: Characterless Suburb

Ballymun has become a commuter town where people live in routines, doing chores when they come home from work and then closing their door. People rarely know each other; there is no interest in the neighbours. Newcomers find it especially hard to integrate. The houses are empty all day and at night the only sign of life are televisions flickering in each house.
The only shops in the area are "Extra vision" video shops, take-aways and off licences. There are no flower shops, cafés, launderettes hairdressers, post offices and no neighbourhood centres. The neighbourhood centres have failed through lack of local interest. There is life, vibrancy and shopping on the main street due to the student population but this is transient. They are not there over the summer and other major holidays. Student population even decreases at weekends.
The group did not have a clear vision when it came to green spaces and graffiti.
It was described as the American dream – lawn, car, 2.5 children. You buy books to learn to love yourself because no one has time to love you. Once a year the community gets together for a cheesy family fun BBQ

How did we get here?
Increased aspiration to own property has become a common goal despite increasing house prices. Wages and jobs are a main focus therefore less time spent on domestic/community issues.
Car use was seen as a major reason for people's lack of connection with one another. Too much time is spent in cars commuting to and from work, doing shopping, taking kids to and from school. Less time spent on the street where it could be possible to stop and chat with neighbours. The use of the car exemplified the insular focus on the nuclear family.
Architects were hampered in their creativity by tenants' demands for a perceived normality. There is no room for low income tenants which could include desirable and undesirable elements within the community such as single parent families, artists, drug users and ethnic minorities.

It was agreed some **common goals** to *avoid* the characterless suburb
1. Communication
2. Increased mobility without a car
3. Amenities that connect people within walking distance
4. Local enterprises employing local people
5. Supervised kids' amenities/activities

Indicators for these goals
1. How many neighbours do residents know – immediate and local
2. Occupancy rate of neighbourhood centre premises
3. What is the balance between services and commerce in the neighbourhood areas
4. How many locals are employed locally
5. How many kids use local clubs/ How many new members sign up every year
6. What is the distance travelled to work
7. Number of after school activities offered
8. How many adults are part of a club or after work activity in the local area
9. How many hours of TV are watched per day per family
10. How many homes are rented in the area (percentage)
11. How many funerals are well attended
12. No. of people attending funerals

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Scenario 2: Learning Centre

Our education is a partnership. Parents – Pupils – Community – Business
We learn through actions and through involvement with each other. There is a local involvement in decision making and funding for education, thereby creating a sense of ownership and a strong responsibility to educate each other with respect.
There has been a change in the system and curriculum that promotes life long learning for everyone. There are now lots of choices and options; education is the norm for everyone. It is creative, open minded, vibrant and fun. All education is free which also includes transport, books and cheap accommodation. Funding has also been provided for workshops and modern premises. There are tax incentives provided for areas of research. Many institutions of education come into the area and there is a high teacher/student ratio

How did we get here? **Common goals**
1. Lots of Community/Parental involvement in the local education system
2. Working with a Village concept
3. High motivation/personal responsibility for self education

Indicators Target
1. Percentage of pupil completion of Post Primary Cycle   10%-15%
2. Amount of community projects with children/youth involvement
3. Anti social behaviour

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Scenario 3: Successful Small-business Centre

Ballymun now has an interesting atmosphere, attention on music, arts and Axis (community arts centre). There is an open-air stage on the main street. Irish food take away (? – well, cabbage and potato). A wide range of food is available. A food fair happens every so often along with a flea market selling 2nd hand stuff. There is a vegetarian restaurant in the area along with an easy-going small café where you can sit and read the papers.

There is a focus on crafts. You can see crafts people at work making things from recycled materials. Products created are a focal point of the area such as sculptures made from recycled materials. Benches for the area are made from recycled plastic and water (i.e. water-bed benches!) To aid participation there is a material exchange and an equipment shop for the rental of all tools such as lawn mower, ladders, benches, sports equipment and bikes.

Shopping facilities have improved. There is a local food Coop plus interesting shops stocking different products such as a bakery, bookshop, flower-plant shop, butcher and bike shop. The shopping centre is fully tenanted along with the neighbourhood shopping streets. The main street is dynamic with a range of experiences, which meet the needs of a changing population including both residents and visitors.

The Rediscovery Centre collects and processes household waste and sells recycled products. This creates local employment but also draws on a wider population for waste materials.

Electronic Equipment Recycling – people are trained at the Rediscovery Centre to create a workforce to do the electronic equipment.

Soft stripping of the flats creates work for people in repairing broken products and recycling obsolete objects.

A successful technology park – innovative and sustainable, which meets the needs of residents and the wider population.

How did we get here? **Common Goals**
1. Residents insisted on better shopping facilities
2. There was greater demand
3. Subsidies which didn't favour organic food production ended
4. There are recycling Drop points for everyone to use easily
5. Plastic is more biodegradable and there is a change in toys designed and made from plastic. They are more durable and less quick to break

Indicators
1. Number of Households participating in a recycling scheme
2. Amount of material being recycled
3. Number of people working in Ballymun
4. Number of people who are working in the environmental industry within Ballymun
5. "Wellbeing" of the work force
6. Number of people who use the shopping centre
Number of outlets that sell organic/eco-friendly produce within Ballymun

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Scenario 4: Great Community Spirit

There is a history of our own place, a positive identity with a sense of achievement and pride within the community. There are celebrations and festivals, which raise the profile for Ballymun nation-wide. A flag is created to fly over the new Town Hall in Ballymun which houses an accessible local authority offering 24 hour customer care.

Ballymun has its own Town Council making decisions at a local level regarding traffic, parks etc. People of Ballymun want to be a part of the decision making process, they have the knowledge, control over spending and power to change things.

Ballymun is friendly and harmonious with good neighbourliness being practised by the washing of each others' cars and the watching of other peoples' children. There is a mobile family support unit and a doctor at the end of the road. I can knock on the door of my neighbour to ask for help as I know my neighbour and people are eager to look after one another and especially the elderly within the community. People with problems get the help they need. There is a tolerant atmosphere and a respect for one another. A return to the Celtic values of close-knit communities.

The environment is tidy and clean without it being stuffy and it has won many competitions for "Tidy Town" district. There is a large community involvement throughout the area, with neighbourhood meeting places provided to ensure good communications. The relationship with the Garda is positive.

People work in the area for the good of all. When work is finished people stay and enjoy Ballymun. Kids of Ballymun attend our own university. People really enjoy being here.

The business park flourishes especially with computer-related businesses and many tourists visit the area.

Indicators
Indicators should be easy to communicate and measure, and reflect real change.
Increased participation measured by numbers attending
Forums
Planning workshops
Members in community groups
Trust
Decisions/Influence
Activity
Number of activists in the area
Number of kids hanging around doing little or nothing
Access to information
Interviews
Knowledge about how to influence what's going on
Local Shopping
Percentage spent locally
People wanting to
Come to Ballymun
Stay in Ballymun
Move to Ballymun
Litter
Local history

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Scenario 5: Common Goals, Safe Place

This group had difficulty imagining Ballymun as a safe place. Fears revolved around the behaviour of children at present, both in relation to safety issues, issues of vandalism and respect for people and their property.

In the new Ballymun people are leaving their homes and walking along safe streets. People of all ages are moving about. Traffic is calmed so that it is safe for pedestrians. There are numerous facilities and services in the area which means that people have places to go to spend their spare time and to get essential needs such as shopping. Children have been involved for many years in programmes run in the schools with considerable parent involvement dealing with issues such as traffic safety and the prevention of drug abuse. People are committed to their community.

Common Goals
1. Flats not to be left empty

Indicators
1. Number of crimes reported (including description of crime type)
2. Number of crimes solved (percentage)
3. Neighbourhood survey of perception of safety
4. Number of Neighbourhood Watch groups
5. Number of Guardi on the streets
6. Number of road traffic accidents

Further the idea of indicator was presented as a next step, with its definition, roles and uses, and the criteria for choosing indicators were explained to the participants. Then each participant chose to join one of three groups working on the list of indicators under three headings: Social, Economic and Environmental. It is important to emphasise that giving a free choice of the group to participants indicated which heading was the most interesting for them to discuss. From 29 participants 15 have chosen 'Social' Group, 9 'Environmental' and 5 'Economic'. This indicates the main area of concern - the social issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL	ECONOMIC
Water	*Participation & Local Democracy*	*Building*
Waste	*Community Safety*	*Local Jobs*
Transport	*Health*	*Social Economy*
Energy	*Education*	*Housing*

Tab. 2. Headings under which indicators were discussed

Each group had to nominate three indicators for each heading (every group had 4 different subheadings, (Tab. 2)) from indicators shown in grids[4]. People working in-groups were allowed to propose their own indicators, if they thought about better ones than the indicators presented on the day. Each group had a facilitator, who guided the

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[4] The grids with indicators were prepared in advance. Indicators in grids came from three different sources: Ballymun Masterplan, residents' indicators and experts' indicators.

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discussion upon the choice. At the end each group presented three indicators they have chosen for each subheading and the justification for the selection.

Furthermore one indicator ought to be chosen from previously selected three for each subheading. Each participant had a chance to award his or her favourite indicators with preferable number of points. The indicators with the highest number of points were the ones to be measured in the future once it was established that each indicator met the relevant criteria for indicators (Tab.3).

ECONOMIC
▪ Number of childcare places and jobs with liveable wage
▪ Development of improved management and maintenance arrangements and the role of residents and local organisations
▪ Number of jobs (with liveable wages) available in the area
▪ Number of sites available for economic/social use and take up of that
SOCIAL
▪ Increase in school attendance
▪ % of pupils completing Post Primary Cycle
▪ Reduction in anti social behaviour measured by:
- No. of broken trees
- No. of broken street lamps
- No. of fires started
- No. of dumped furniture/appliances
- No. of incidents of graffiti
- N. of animals abandoned
No. of voting in local and national elections
ENVIRONMENTAL
▪ Number of people buying eco-products
▪ Number of facilities available for recycling, including composting, in Ballymun
▪ Number of homes with better insulation features
▪ Improved energy conservation awareness
▪ Ease of access to key services, e.g. number of public transport routes that run in Ballymun and link Ballymun to the rest of the city.

Tab. 3 Indicators chosen at the second workshop

The range of indicators selected by participants clearly shows what the important issues to Ballymun residents are and in which areas they look for the improvement in the first place. Observation of the discussions around the choice of indicators allowed capturing the emotional weight put on the concerns. For example, very important issue was the provision of sufficient number of miscellaneous childcare places, what was a necessary requirement to allow mothers to go back to work and education.

4. Future work on the project

The project presented here has on-going character and further steps are being undertaken. Next stage in the project is planning the actions that need to be undertaken to direct Ballymun on the path to sustainability. The next workshops are being prepared to target all bodies responsible for change, to choose the ways of monitoring and communicating the progress, and to set up the goals, which should be achieved in the

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future. At the moment the stakeholders responsible for change in the areas, covered by chosen indicators, are being identified. The next workshops that would bring together local residents and stakeholders are planned for the spring/summer of 2003.

Parallel to the identification of the stakeholders responsible for a change, the work on the ways of measuring the progress towards sustainability has been conducted. GAP Ballymun has been developing a questionnaire that will allow measuring some of the indicators chosen during the Second Workshop.

6. Conclusions

It has been widely recognised that the partnership of local authorities, private sector and citizens is crucial for the successful accomplishment of any regeneration programme. An encouragement of an active participation of different players, especially citizens and building a platform for a dialogue between different actors enables to understand better the grounds of existing situation and to address causes rather than symptoms.

A range of various tools and methods can be used to raise public involvement into planning and decision-making processes. Projects carried out within regeneration programme in Ballymun demonstrate different examples of co-operation between local authorities and community conducted in order to build a sustainable town.

An example presented in this paper shows how the futures method - visioning can be applied in order to build a shared vision for the future of town and its society based on the local values, fears and wishes.

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