

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & SACRED PRACTISES

Exploring how sacred practises may create pathways towards equitable futures

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Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2024

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[abstract]

In this paper, I explore whether and how strategic foresight could play a more significant role in shaping equitable, just, and sustainable futures. I critique and challenge the mainstream approach to strategic foresight by highlighting its limitations towards exploring and envisioning futures centering equity, justice, and shared well-being. Secondly, I delve into how sacred practices may help to create pathways toward these futures. I am looking to explore how individual and collective efforts for building our desired futures be strengthened by honouring the sacred and reclaiming different ways of knowing and being through practises we individually and collectively deem sacred. Data for this study was collected via a literature review and expert interviews. Expert interviews were analyzed via a thematic analysis. My findings suggest that due to various limitations embedded the field of strategic foresight, there is both an urgency and need for its ability to centre equity and diversity in many ways. As such honouring the sacred and sacred practises could have a role to play within this. Sacred practises also offer a different way for strategic foresight to contend with how it can play a larger role in building equitable, just, and sustainable futures. In conclusion, I argue that radical imagination needs to continue to exist unobstructed in the hands of people and communities. I strongly believe, that one of the gateways to harness the power of radical imagination is through sacred practices.

[land acknowledgement]

This research was conducted in Tkaronto, on the traditional territory of many First Nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

I humbly respect and honour the Indigenous peoples whose land I occupy as settler. I am committed to ongoing journey of learning, unlearning, relearning the histories of the lands I currently reside on. I am dedicated towards continually learning how to be right relationship with Indigenous peoples to be able to imagine and co-create equitable futures. May we work to repair, to heal, to create respectful and harmonious paths forward.

[acknowledgements]

I want to acknowledge and recognize that this research offers only a perspective on the sacred and sacred practices. It has been a deeply personal endeavour for me to have embarked on this journey.

It is deeply important to keep in mind that honouring and communing with the sacred has long been part of Indigenous communities and knowledge systems for millennia. The exploration of futures and the sacred has already been happening and is not new. These conversations are deeply important. However, due to my positionality as a settler and person who identifies as South Asian descent, I believe that this material needs to be humbly respected and not misappropriated. I am proceeding mindfully with care. Recognizing this and given my position, I want to explore the concept of the sacred that exists adjacent to these conversations whilst also recognizing locating myself with the ancestors of these ideas. The exploration of the sacred below leverages material that aligns best with the trajectory of my research question.

I deeply grateful for family and friends whose encouragement and support has nourished me on this journey.

To my parents, thank you for your love and care that continually inspires me to pursue my biggest dreams including taking this a leap of faith to embark on this graduate school journey whilst balancing motherhood.

To my many family members, thank you for your endless support and belief in me.

To my friends, thank you for wonderful and beautiful conversations and believing in the questions I was pursuing right from the start!

To my all teachers this past year, thank you for holding magical space to dream, to reflect and to write.

I am also deeply grateful to Emmy Chahal, Jennifer Chan, Panthea Lee, Prateeksha Singh for deep and moving conversations.

To Dr. Alia Weston, my advisor, thank you for encouraging me always to explore and write about what I deeply cared.

I also want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the many special places in nature, community parks and libraries that hosted me and provided a nurturing space for me to think, to reflect, to write and to appreciate and marvel at life in the grandest sense.

Finally, to my daughter, thank you for inspiring me with your wonder, endless curiosity, and love. Thank you for continually showing me along this journey what matters most.

[dedication]

For my grandmother, Rasamma, thank you for all that you did to believe, to imagine and to seed beautiful possibilities for me

And for my all my ancestors and my descendants

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[preface]

The global poly-crisis, intertwined with my journey, has ignited a profound reflection on the intricate and intimate connection between our interior landscapes and our communal bonds, and how these connections shape our capacity to envision and create pathways for desired futures. The inquiry has been at the forefront of my thoughts and explorations, spurred by the convergence of my ongoing personal journey of becoming, evolving and alongside social movements for global solidarity and collective liberation. This journey has propelled and required me to examine and re-examine my relationship with myself, and my conditionings whilst also locating myself within global systems marked by structural and systemic injustice and inequities. It is an ongoing journey of transformation and involution. It has also been marked by navigating discomfort, and uncertainty coupled with grief and rage and yet it has also been deeply revelatory, joyful, and healing.

As I navigated this path and continued my graduate studies, my research journey naturally pivoted back to the exploration of futures. I am drawn to strategic foresight as an approach to creating and exploring future possibilities and its potential to catalyze transformative change on both personal and collective levels. However, this exploration for me is not merely an academic pursuit, it is a deeply personal endeavour that converged with what I had been actively learning, studying, and practicing on my own and with communities before embarking on graduate studies. Some of these areas of profound interest for me include yoga social justice mindfulness neuroscience and ancient wisdom traditions and philosophies. I also reflected on what brings me joy what has made me feel socially connected and what makes me feel connected to something bigger than myself. I did not intend for my personal and professional pursuits to converge for my MRP in this very particular way, yet it did and I am happy and grateful for it.

Furthermore, I am deeply curious to explore what I regard as the profound relationship between inner transformation and collective transformation. I do not think this interplay is linear nor clearly defined however I do believe it underscores the importance of exploring and attuning to our internal landscapes while remaining deeply connected to the broader tapestry of humanity. As I continue to delve into the realms of future studies and strategic foresight, I am thinking deeply about where our

ideas for the future come from. I am thinking about what we each individually and collectively hold sacred in our lives and how those shape and motivate our desired futures. Finally, I am thinking about creating safe spaces for healing from both personal and collective trauma as an integral part of worldbuilding. As I embark on this research journey, I do so with open-heartedness and dedication to co-create harmonious and healing pathways toward building just, equitable and sustainable futures.

I deeply believe that how we future matters, where our ideas for the future come from matters and what we hold sacred while imagining future possibilities matters.

[introduction]

Over the last few years, the term ‘polycrisis’ became a popularized way of describing the current state of the world (World Economic Forum, 2023; Homer-Dixon 2023).

A global poly-crisis has been defined as:

“When crises in multiple global systems become causally entangled in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects. These interacting crises produce harms greater than the sum of those the crises would produce in isolation, were their host systems not so deeply interconnected” (Lawrence, Janzwood & Homer-Dixon, 2022)

The critical concern behind this concept is that when a crisis occurs in one global system, its repercussions extend to other global systems and the consequences of that are even more dire (Lawrence, Janzwood & Homer-Dixon, 2022; Tooze 2022). Global crises are no longer isolated events and the way these crises continue to exacerbate one another represents a “growing danger to humanity” (Lawrence, Janzwood & Homer-Dixon, 2022).

Our understanding of this concept has been reinforced by our individual and collective experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, global humanitarian crises and, climate change, affording living crisis (Ipsos, 2022) youth mental health crisis (Katwak et al., 2024) and loneliness epidemic (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2023) (Toronto Foundation, 2023)

With so much change and break down in our global systems and its reverberating effects on all living beings on Earth, I was deeply compelled to explore how might we build and design structures and systems that centre the flourishing of all life on Earth. Amidst this multicity of crises, we face and because of it, how might we design systems embedded in serving the well-being of present and future generations? How then, might we build a well-being economy?

According to the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, a *well-being economy* “is an economy designed to serve the well-being of people and planet first and foremost” and it employs solutions that centre people, environmental protection, and regeneration” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022). I was drawn to how this alternative approach could enable fundamental shifts to our current economic model and drive shared well-being.

However, as I began to explore different perspectives on moving beyond the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the dominant indicator of economic and social progress, I was keenly stuck by barriers that have prevented these systemic shifts. While there is extensive literature around the well-being economy and its benefits as well as extensive literature (Hayden, Gaudet, & Wilson, *Towards Sustainable Well-being: Moving beyond GDP in Canada and the World*, 2022) around measurement indices such as the *Waterloo Well-being Index* (University of Waterloo, n.d.) there still appear to be great blocks towards re-imagining the current economic paradigm. Despite the years of progress that has been made, the scale and adoption of metrics such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), have been constrained due to political and economic structures resisting change and reinforcing the status quo (Colman, 2022).

This was a pivotal shift for me, as it brought me back to my explorations and questions about how then we can re-imagine and imagine futures that enable shared well-being. How can we be able to imagine and transcend the limitations of our current dominant systems and paradigms? How do you have hope for the future during turbulent times? How do you hope whilst also trying to acknowledge past and on-going harms?

While I felt there was growing and promising discourse around post-growth capitalism (Hayden & Anders, 2022), a conversation beyond the scope of this research project, I could not help but think about whether the complex challenges are symptoms of different kinds of root problems. This is also where I started to become curious about the profound relationship between inner transformation and collective transformation. I wanted to explore whether addressing the root of

these vast and complex problems could begin with exploring and attuning to our internal landscapes while remaining deeply connected to the broader tapestry of humanity. As such, my research journey shifted. I wanted to explore what are the practices that support, enable and/or guide a process of inner transformation. Could these practices be seen as sacred? As I looked at this mapping of inner transformation, I was also thinking of giving space for and allowing for healing. From my perspective, I feel that inner transformation is connected to healing from both personal traumas and structural injustices.

What are the practices, as individuals and collectives, that sustain us during massive moments of change or throughout transitions, when that which we have known is no longer and the future is uncertain? (Reid, 2019)

To accompany that question Reid's (2019) *Eco-cycle* maps a cycle of inner transformation. The four main areas of that cycle are creative destruction, conversation, germination, and growth. The cycle also has four questions which are:

- What am I letting go of?
- What systems am I maintaining?
- What new seeds am I planting?
- Which roots am I growing deeper?

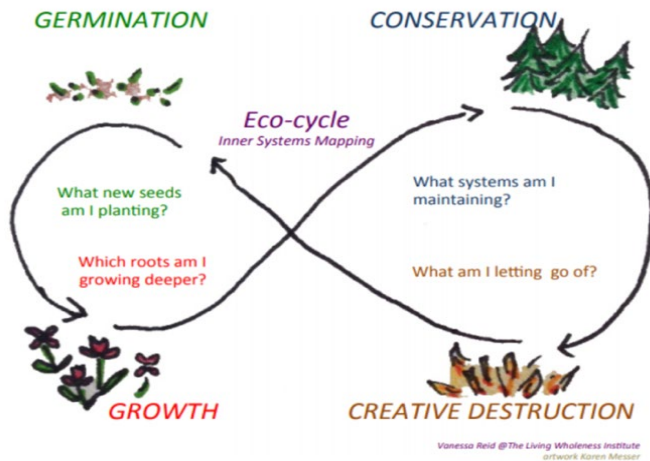


Figure 1: Eco-system Inner Systems Mapping by V. Reid (2019)

Before delving into this topic further, I want to humbly respect and recognize that honouring and communing with the sacred has long been part of cultures and communities for millennia (Paradies, 2020). The sacred has been and is deeply rooted in Indigenous communities, worldviews, and knowledge systems (University of Alberta, 2024; Engle et al., 2022; Nelson, 2008). The sacred is explicitly and implicitly explored and intricately part of both Indigenous Futurism (Fricke, 2019) and Afrofuturism (Black Culture Group, 2024). Thus, the exploration of futures and the sacred has already been happening and is not new. These conversations are deeply important. However, due to my position as a settler and person who identifies as South Asian descent, I am respectfully not working with this literature because it is not my place to do so. I believe that this material needs to be humbly respected and not misappropriated and thus I am proceeding mindfully with care. Recognizing this and given my position, I want to explore the concept of the sacred that exists adjacent to these conversations whilst also recognizing locating myself with the ancestors of these ideas. The exploration of the sacred below leverages material that aligns best with the trajectory of my research question.

[research question]

This led me to my central research question. How might sacred practices create pathways towards just, equitable and sustainable futures?

What are Sacred Practices?

For the purposes of my research project, I see sacred practices as any practices, rituals, daily mindful activities that you feel attune to the wisdom of your heart, mind, body, ancestors and/or wisdom embedded nature. It is the intention and mindfulness that one brings while doing these practices that makes them sacred. Some examples can include but not limited to yoga, meditation, writing, dance, prayers, rest, journaling, affirmations, intentional living and more. These practices may also be healing and nourishing spiritually, mentally and/or physically. Currently this is my working view of sacred practices for the purposes of my research project however I am open to its evolution as I continue my work and through discussions.

As such I wanted to explore whether our individual and collective efforts for building our desired futures be strengthened by honouring the sacred and by reclaiming different ways of knowing and being through practises, we deem sacred. Amidst the change we are experiencing, I think it important we ask this question. I wanted to explore whether and how practices be seen as part of the world-building process or essential to the world-building process.

The hypothesis is that now more than ever, communities need tools and practises to reclaim, to radically imagine, to heal and to honour different ways of knowing and being to shape equitable futures. Sacred practises, embedded in cultures around the world and everyday contemporary lives, may offer gateways to transcend the limitations of our current dominant systems and paradigms. To that extent, I believe that sacred practices can be supportive in creating pathways towards co-creating equitable, just, and sustainable futures in two possible ways. One, I think it is

part of our individual and collective capacities to imagine different worlds (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). Secondly, I think sacred practises offers a process of embodying the futures we seek in the present.

My exploration and research journey has been twofold. Firstly, I have sought to understand if and how strategic foresight could play a more significant role in shaping equitable futures. Given that I was studying strategic foresight, it was important to me to explore its value and relevance to imagining just, equitable and sustainable futures. Secondly, I delved into how sacred practices might create pathways toward these futures. In times of great rapid change, transition and uncertainty (Tooze 2022; Lawrence, Janzwood & Homer-Dixon, 2022), I think it felt important to me to ask what the practices that resource us and propel us forward both individually and collectively (Reid, 2019) This dual exploration has become the cornerstone of my research project and I look forward to unfolding my research journey with you.

[literature review]

This review will focus on two major areas which are strategic foresight and sacred practices. The literature review will focus on weaving in their application towards imagining and building equitable and just futures. I will explore review will explore gaps and opportunities around each subject area and what each may offer for building futures centring on equity, justice, and shared well-being.

Before delving into strategic foresight and sacred practises, I wanted to return to the concept of the well-being economy which I explored earlier. I believe it is relevant to grounding this research project on a central idea that has been widely discussed and researched as a gateway towards reimagining our economic system to support the flourishing of all life on Earth.

Well-being Economy

A well-being economy is an economic system intentionally designed to help all life thrive. This economic model's purpose is to serve the well-being of people and the planet. This model is focused on employing mechanisms that are long-term focused that centre people, environmental protection, and regeneration. Proponents of a well-being economy argue that our current capitalistic economic system is not working for both people and the planet because it is focused on "growth at all costs" and neglects justice and equity (David Suzuki Foundation, n.d.). In addition, the well-being economy is challenging the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a metric to measure economic success and is focused on new ways of measuring and enabling shared wellness including the Gross National Happiness Index (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2022) and the Quality of Life Framework for Canada (Department of Finance Canada, 2021).

However, despite the years of progress that has been made, the scale and adoption of metrics such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), have been constrained due in large part to our political and economic structures that resist change and reinforce the status quo (Colman, 2022)

Colman asserts that we need to have hard conversations around capitalism because after more than 20 years of progress and research, the capitalist system will prevent any systemic changes that threaten its long-term survival and new measures will ultimately take shape to reinforce the status quo (Colman, 2022).

While the discourse around well-being economies has enabled many advancements across the world towards embedding collective well-being within policy-making and economic structures, there remain many challenges to systemic changes. One of the barriers is there is a need for government leaders to be able to open to new ways of thinking and being and be vested in systems innovation. The fundamental principles of well-being economies can continue to help them along the way (Chrysopoulou, 2020).

One of the criticisms of the well-being economy is that simply replacing economic growth as the end goal of an economic model with well-being without entangling the model's dependence on growth for survival (Hayden & Dasilva, 2022). This is why some consider a well-being economy a "weak post-growth" approach (Hayden & Dasilva, 2022). Despite what could be considered limits to this idea, the principles of well-being economies have enabled discourse and action stemming from questioning the underpinnings of our current economic system and shifting the conversation towards how we can build an economic model that enables the flourishing of all.

Another important consideration and critique are that well-being and wellness, in of itself, is not for everyone because not everyone can access this due to many deeply embedded social injustices and due to trauma from lived and on-going experiences including but not limited to racism, the impact of colonialism, ableism, fatphobia and trauma (Róisín 2022; Chan-Malik 2022).

Furthermore, Bessel van der Kolk (2015) has substantiated how traumatic experiences, both those experienced on a larger scale and those that are more personal and familial in nature, leave imprints on our minds, emotions, bodies ultimately affecting our wellness on an on-going basis and can also be passed down generationally.

The Sacred as a Concept

In the following section, I will be exploring the concept of the sacred and share my working definition of sacred practises within the scope of this research project.

The term “sacred” can invoke many different meanings and connotations for people and communities depending on the context. (Evans, 2003) (Engle, Agyeman, & Chung-Tiam-Fook, 2022) In Evan’s view, because the concept of the sacred has often been confined to conversations about religion, it has not been so widely explored or applied to other phenomena across society (Evans, 2003). Evans introduces the concept of a particular type of sacred, which exists outside of a religious context and can encompass the sacred that is personal, spiritual and/or civil. To distinguish this concept outside of a religious context Evans argues that “set-apart sacred”

motivates, shapes, constrains, and justifies both individual and collective behaviour and organization, and like gender, ethnicity, and other widely used schemas, it orients human behaviour across contexts. (Evans, 2003, p.39)

In the book *Sacred Civics*, Engle, Agyeman & Chung-Tiam-Fook recognize the sacred within the context of city building and societal transformation as:

as a divine or mystical force within all living beings. By sacred we mean unique, intrinsically worthy of respect and dignity, relational, life-giving, sustaining, and defiant of commodification. Practically, sacred relates to a sense of connection between people and nature, a shared sense of purpose and meaning that flows from that, and which translates to a shared sense of how to coexist: living better together. (Engle, Agyeman & Chung-Tiam Fook, 2022, p. 3-4)

While Evans (2003) has highlighted how the sacred actively shapes human behaviour in different contexts, I value how Engle, Agyeman & Chung-Tiam-Fook (2022) have centred the sacred as fundamental to the process of societal transformation and the futures of city-building that centres equity, justice, and intergenerational wellness. Honouring the sacred is also being considered in other conversations such as the development of well-being of economies as well (David Suzuki Foundation, n.d.).

In addition, Morley (2019) highlights that “the word sacred is etymologically derived from the Latin *sacrare*—to devote or dedicate” and as such she argues that to be part of the future, as a species, we need to decide what we devote or dedicate ourselves to. Furthermore, Morley (2019) asserts that sacredness is a vital premise for multispecies world-building and needs to be a serious consideration in our current reality.

Sacred Practises and Strategic Foresight

How does Strategic Foresight perceive the concept of the sacred? Does Strategic Foresight consider the sacred? This was a question I was curious to explore further. It appeared to me that discovering and comprehending what individuals and communities consider sacred is not only valuable but also crucial in the process of worldbuilding. I explored the view of the sacred within two widely used tools within Strategic Foresight. These tools are the Casual Layered Analysis and the Three Horizons Method. I chose these two tools because of my pre-existing familiarity with the tools and because of the ongoing discourse about how these tools can be leveraged to co-creating a wide range of preferable futures that centre different types of employing different ways of knowing and being.

The Casual Layered Analysis (CLA), developed by Sohail Inayatullah (Inayatullah, 2003b, is both a research theory and a method of foresight (Inayatullah, 2019) to help guide and envision alternative

and preferred futures. As a method, it can be applied to explore both the external material world and our inner psychological worlds which Inayatullah (2019) refers to as the *CLA of the Self*.

I would like to explore two possible linkages between CLA and sacred practices. The first link is through the applicability of the CLA process to the individual, which Inayatullah (2019) describes as *CLA of the Self*. The second link is via CLA's fourth level called the myth/metaphor level which informs all other layers of the tool (MacGill 2015).

Firstly, the concept of the *CLA of the Self* involves applying the CLA process to individuals, guiding them to discover transformative narratives for themselves (Inayatullah, 2019). Inayatullah notes that he has seen how leveraging the *CLA of the Self* has led to garnering insights and has empowered many participants to reclaim their agency and develop new narratives for themselves. For practitioners, the *CLA of the Self* helps with the ongoing process of deep learning and self-discovery.

Secondly, the myth/metaphor layer of the Casual Layered Analysis (CLA) could be linked to the concept of the sacred due to its role in orienting human behaviour similar to the concept of the sacred that Evans (2003) describes. The sacred, like the myth/metaphor level plays a critical role in both individual and societal transformation. The CLA process recognizes that there are multiple layers in any given situation (MacGill, 2015) consisting of the litany, social/systemic causes, discourse/worldview, and myth/metaphor (Inayatullah, 2019). The deepest and fourth layer of the CLA is the myth/metaphor level which explores the unconscious dimension of the problem through exploring deep stories held by participants and organizations. Inayatullah asserts that inner transformation is required at this level. Furthermore, MacGill (2005) highlights the importance of the myth/metaphor because of the critical role "it plays in how we construct and make sense of the world and the power it has to bring about preferred futures. MacGill (2005) asserts that this is the layer we are least familiar with because it arises in human consciousness and thus the furthest from our everyday consciousness. MacGill (2015) argues myths/metaphors "spring deep within our being and have a pervasive influence on everything we do" and argues how we can better work with

this layer to bring out better futures. Lipsett (2020) argues when working with layers of complexity and intersectional issues, is at the myth/metaphor level where a narrative shift can occur and where equity can begin to be embedded from the start.

“By tapping into the depths of the myth/metaphor layer we tap the core of what it is to be human. By gaining insight at the myth/metaphor layer we can restructure our worldview and thus redefine our alternatives to enable the creation of better futures.” (MacGill 2015).

Sacred practises could serve as a gateway and complement to help further tap into the depths of the myth/metaphor level.

Another widely used tool in strategic foresight is Three Horizons. It is a framework and a method for thinking about the future (Sharpe, 2013). Three Horizons facilitates a conversation about futures by exploring three different horizons concurrently (Sharpe, 2013). I wanted to explore the linkage between Three Horizons and sacred practices. The Three Horizons framework speaks to building conversations about “future consciousness” and highlighting individual roles in the process of shaping futures. The philosophy between the tool is that the “personal is part of the transformation process”.

Sharpe (2013) highlights that:

“Developing future consciousness highlights that effective transformational practice needs to engage people in developing their own role in shaping the future in a reflexive and reflective way, so that they can take responsibility for the process of making transformation happen” (Sharpe, 2013)

Here I see a possible linkage between building future consciousness and sacred practices. How can sacred practices enable people to develop their role in shaping futures whilst also developing

their reflexive capacity? Furthermore, Sharpe (2013) argues that “building a shared capacity for future consciousness is essential for engendering hopes for transformation and moving toward a just and equitable world”.

These are two widely used future tools that I wanted to explore to help build a case on the connection between the sacred and how it may manifest itself in widely used strategic foresight tools. Due to research time constraints, I was not able to do a more extension search of tools however there could certainly be more tools that centre and explore the sacred.

Futures and Foresight Studies

In this section, I will explore a key development of the futures field as well as the limitations of strategic foresight in exploring alternate and preferred futures that centre on equity and justice. I will first explore Integral Futures and explore its goals when it was first introduced over 25 years ago. I will then explore the neutrality of foresight, the reflexive capacity of foresight and finally the worldview that foresight is embedded within. I will conclude by sharing the type of foresight I seek to practise and how that is connected to my exploration of sacred practises.

Strategic foresight offers a structured and systematic way to help us sense, anticipate, and shape future possibilities (Slaughter, 1997) provide a “coherent forward view’ (Slaughter, 1997). It opens gateways to explore the worlds we want to live in and offers space for leaders to explore the legacies they want to leave for tomorrow (Scoblic, 2020). Strategic Foresight is a branch of Futures Studies (Slaughter, 1997)

Strategic Foresight encompasses a range of tools and methodologies including Casual Layered Analysis, Three Horizons method, and Scenario Planning to explore plausible futures (Slaughter, 2008). Strategic Foresight is also explored as a cognitive process (Rhemann, 2018) (Conway, 2022). In futurist Maree Conway’s view, foresight is “the capacity to imagine the future and to

locate ourselves in those futures is as innate and subconscious as remembering the past” (Conway, 2022).

The Promise of Integral Futures

Slaughter (1998) first introduced Integral Futures (IF) which brought the futures field to a new stage of development (Riedy, 2021) (Slaughter 2008). Integral Futures is a theoretical framework for futures/foresight research and practice to help futurists better understand and improve futures methodologies (Slaughter 2008). Slaughter employed adapted the four-quadrant model from Ken Wilber’s Integral Theory (see image) to illustrate Integral Theory. The four-quadrant model represents a map or a theoretical window for understanding reality (Morgan 2012). Slaughter (1998) argued that Future Studies has overly focused on solutions from the Exterior Collective (bottom right quadrant). Further, he asserts that “A central task of FS could be to map the parameters of a more subtle world and to assist others into an active engagement with their potentials in a vastly expanded and infinitely more benign universe.” He argues that the four-quadrant model provides a critical link between Futures Studies and social movements and that “the keys to livable futures” lie in human and cultural development” (Slaughter 1998) and this is something the field of futures studies needs “to learn and learn fast”.

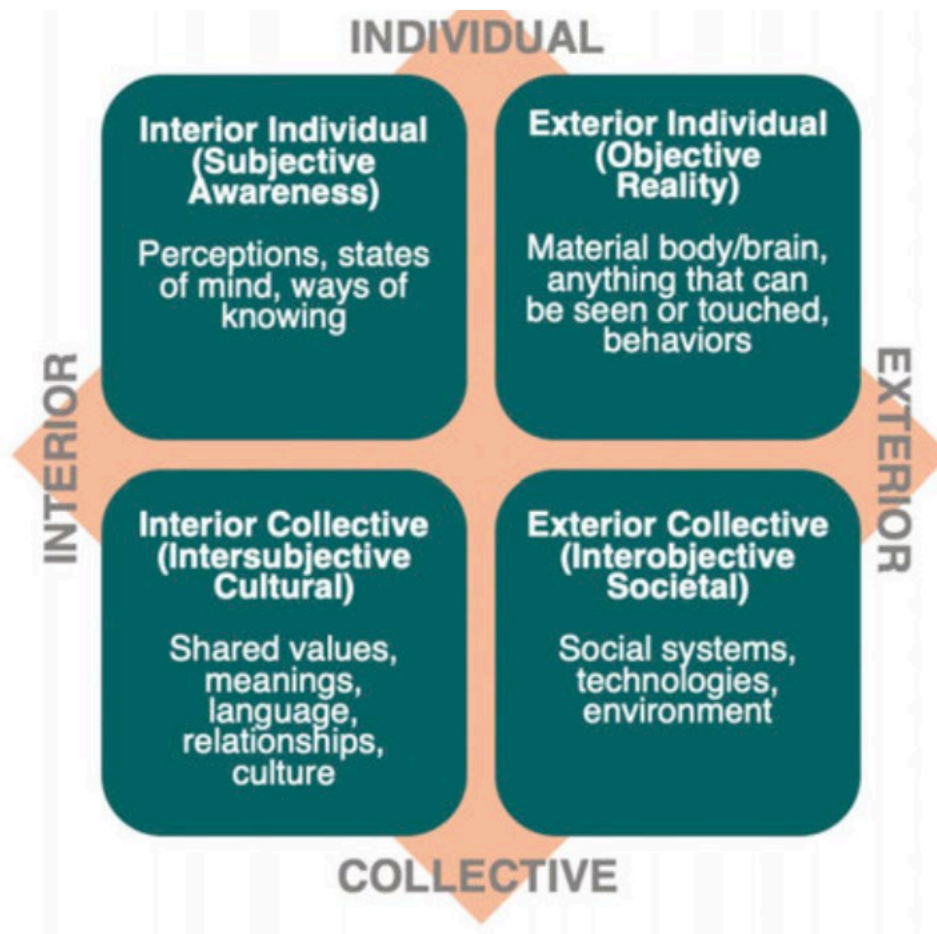


Figure 2. Four Quadrant Model, From “Yoga Futures,” by K. Weber & B. Sculthorp, 2022, *Yoga Therapy Today*, p32-36

The following year after *Integral Futures* was published, in 1999 the Millennium Project at the American Council for the United Nations University published a report of their findings from interviewing over 250 futurists, scholars, business planners and policymakers from over 50 countries on the barriers to the successful implementation of futures research in decision making. They reported impediments that affect the use of futures research in a timely manner including a list of moral impediments (Gordon & Glenn, 1999). In response, Hayward (2003) argued that “ultimately, the resolution to the moral impediments to foresight action lies within each individual.” He argues that for foresight research to lead to successful implementation relies on an individual’s ongoing psychological development.

Here we see that the field attempting to evolve to the next level whilst also recognizing and illuminating the influence an individual plays in futures and foresight research.

How do we deal with both moral impediments and recognize the need for human and cultural development? I believe the answer to Slaughter's answer also lines in a few other gaps in strategic foresight methodologies.

Like other tools and methodologies, strategic foresight is not without critique. I would like to explore a few of these criticisms which explore the neutrality of strategic foresight, its limited capacity for reflexivity, the worldviews it is embedded within and finally whether it is a tool that is re-patterning the status quo.

Krishnan (2022) argues that strategic foresight is not neutral and that it has been shaped and constructed primarily by individuals and communities that hold privilege, and power and are deeply embedded in capitalism and monopolies. In Krishnan's view, strategic foresight is deeply influenced by factors such as positionality, cultural values, economic systems, and our collective capacity for imagination. Thus, we need to reckon with the truth behind the tools being employed to explore future possibilities. Krishnan highlights that while both foresight practitioners may work with the best of their intentions to transform, such work seldom challenges that status quo. Part of the reason Krishnan (2022) says is that such work does not challenge linear and historical ideas of what it takes for change to happen and how risk and harm might evolve.

In taking into consideration Krishnan's (2022) assertions, with Hayword's (2003) view that strategic foresight relies on individual development and Slaughter's (2008)' view that the methods are only as good as the practitioner leading them, seems to indicate there could be multiple levels of bias at play. One there is the inherent bias of foresight tools and the ideologies and worldview it was

birthed from and then there is the influence of the practitioners and organizations employing them. Thus, the neutrality of foresight tools is questionable.

How then can strategic foresight work to make the implicit (assumptions, bias, positionality etc.) explicit? These are questions I wanted to explore further.

This act of reflexivity involves reflecting on who we are as researchers recognizing how our worldviews and biases shape and inform the research process and understanding that our worldview also shapes the research we conduct. (Wilkinson, 1988) There has been some discourse around reflexivity and Strategic Foresight with reflexive capacity even being named as both fundamental prerequisites across the Futures Studies (beFORE Project Alliance, 2019)

Across futures studies, both Casual Layered Analysis (CLA) and Anticipatory Action Learning (AAL) are centred on employing a reflexive process of questioning to create transformative change across organizations and society. (Inayatullah, Anticipatory action learning: Theory and practise, 2006)

However, Conway (2022) asserts that while Futures and Foresight Studies include discourse around challenging assumptions which is important considering that it is these assumptions that shape the images we construct, the issues lie in how exactly assumptions are challenged and are not well-documented.

To support strategic foresight's reflective capacity, Krishnan (2019) listed a series of questions that need to be continually unpacked and centred during strategic foresight which relies heavily on the practitioners having the intention and commitment to continually question themselves and the process.

In his book, *Web of Meaning*, Lent (2022) argues that worldviews are important because they influence the way people think, what they value, and how they act - often in ways that they may not even realize. Lent (2022) asserts that worldviews dictate how cultures respond to their realities in different ways. For instance, Lent (2022) argues if you think that all living beings are family, then you are going to treat them in a very different way than if you look at the natural world as something to be exploited for your benefit.

Lent (2022) asserts an integrated worldview that blends spirituality and science. He highlights that an alternative worldview already exists, one that has been constructed by wisdom traditions around the world and shaped over millennia. The underpinnings of this worldview recognize our interconnectedness with each other and with aspects of the universe and all life. Lent (2022) asks the question of what it would look like if a society were constructed on this worldview, one that affirms life itself and takes in the principles of life itself.

Lent (2022) asserts that our current worldview is obsolete and to tackle the challenges that plague our society, we must fundamentally reconsider its foundation. The foundation must prioritize the significance of life over the accumulation of material possessions. Nevertheless, it is unclear how we can break free from the conditioning imposed on us by our surroundings. The author acknowledges that everyone's journey is distinct and there are multiple ways to achieve this goal. Some individuals may find solace in nature, while others may seek enlightenment through psychedelics. Moreover, some may turn to Indigenous knowledge, practice meditation or physical exercises, or strive to comprehend our interconnectedness with the world.

Krishnan's (2022) views suggest that we need to understand that the practice of Foresight was itself birthed from an ideology of a dominant Western perspective. Furthermore, Hames (2012) argues that one of the most challenging aspects of the evolution of strategic foresight to become a tool that enables transformation is transcending the 'civilizational worldview' that he believes most of humanity subscribes to. Nonetheless, Hames (2012) argues that because the worldview was shaped by us, it can be changed if we desire to.

While strategic foresight is providing immense value for exploring, anticipating, and planning for futures, like other tools and methodologies, it is not without its limitations and critiques. The concept of foresight is not neutral; it is shaped through the positionalities of both foresight practitioners and participants. Furthermore, strategic foresight is limited in its reflexive capacity potentially hindering its ability to draw out unconscious bias and assumptions. These gaps and limitations raise important questions about whether strategic foresight by design leads to simply re-patterning the status quo rather than envisioning alternative futures. It is evident that a shift is needed in how we approach foresight and the emphasis placed on it as a dominant way to explore futures. We need to shift towards more and more practices, tools and methodologies that embrace different ways of knowing and being, diverse perspectives and worldviews and whose outcomes are centered in truly envisioning futures centering equity, justice and sharing well-being.

The Foresight I Seek to Practise

Sardar (2010) argues that “We will have to imagine our way out of the post-normal times [...] given that our imagination is embedded and limited to our own culture, we will have to unleash a broad spectrum of imaginations from the rich diversity of human cultures and multiple ways of imagining alternatives to conventional, orthodox ways of being and doing. If we cannot learn the lessons of history, we need another source for the imagination to conceive of more sustainable and attainable futures.

The foresight I seek to practise needs to take into consideration peoples and communities as whole beings. Part of this is healing from the past and present to envision future possibilities. I also care to practise foresight that honours different ways of being and knowing. I seek foresight that honours embodied wisdom – wisdom that is attuning to our hearts, our bodies, our ancestors, and wisdom embedded in nature.

While honouring the sacred is being considered in other areas such as building the future of cities (Engle, Agyeman, & Chung-Tiam-Fook, 2022) there have been limited conversations about how strategic foresight might honour the sacred and sacred practises especially as other gateways to collectively imagine future possibilities for worlds centring equity and well-being. While Strategic Foresight allows us to think outside of the box, we need more and more ways to think about the system that created the box and continually come back to what it means to be human, to allow for the process of inner transformation to continually take place which includes seeing ourselves as part of nature and not separate from it.

[research design]

For this study, qualitative data was obtained and analyzed as described below.

Semi- Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014) were conducted with four subject matter experts (SMEs) (Kumar, 2012) selected based on their expertise, experience and/or research around their foresight, decolonizing futures, shaping sustainable futures, yoga, and social justice and/or connection leadership work safeguarding people and planetary well-being. Eligibility of participants was based on publicly available information which will include reviews of professional backgrounds, published research and articles relevant to this study. It was important to engage subject matter experts in this process to bring new perspectives around whether and how sacred practises could create gateways towards building just, equitable and sustainable futures. It also offered guidance on where to look for additional information relating to the research question and adjacent areas (Kumar, 2012).

The selection of several participants considered various factors, including the research objectives, sampling methods and resource constraints such as time. Considering these factors, four subject matter interviews were conducted aiming for a balance between manageable sample size and the ability to draw meaningful conclusions.

Of the four participants, two participants were within the field of futures and foresight and two participants were outside the field of foresight.

Data from these conversations was analyzed using thematic analysis (Ritchie et al., 2018) to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. The insights derived from the qualitative study will be further explored in the analysis section of this report.

Incentive

A cash incentive was offered for study participation to acknowledge the importance of reciprocity during the research process. The incentive aimed to express gratitude for participants and recognize their vital contributions of research participants. In many sacred spaces and communities including those embedded in yoga and social justice, intentional practises of reciprocity are common and deeply valued. Cash incentives can facilitate an energetic exchange that aligns with the values and practices in this field. The cash incentive was structured and offered to be grounded in reciprocity while also preventing undue influence.

Thematic analysis

In my research project, I employed a thematic analysis (Ritchie et al., 2018) to distill key insights from in-depth interviews with four subject matter experts. This method allowed me to analyze the data thoroughly and identify key themes within the data revealing insights directly relating to my central research question.

Limitations of Project

My positionality as a first-generation South Asian woman and as both a colonized person and settler on Indigenous lands is the lens through which this research has been shaped. I would recognize that because of my personality, the depth and breadth of both the sacred and sacred practises are limited by this. Furthermore, this research project was conducted during a short timeframe which put constraints on both the scope and depth of the study. As such, the scope and

depth of the research project was constrained by the timeframe. Additionally, as this research project held four subject matter interviews, the analysis was derived from a smaller pool which impacts the depth and breadth of the study.

Despite the limitations as described above, the scope, the timeframe and the small number of interviews did create the conditions and the space for this research project to be a deeply personal endeavour. It also created space to be able to process, digest, work through this project with utmost care for research process, research participants and for myself as a researcher.

[analysis]

In this section, I will integrate insights from interviews with four subject matter experts delving into strategic foresight and sacred practices. I focused on exploring the opportunities and limitations of strategic foresight as tool and whether and how honouring the sacred and sacred practises might offer gateways to imagining equitable futures.

The subject matter expert interviews (Kumar, 2012) provided valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for exploring and creating equitable, just, and sustainable futures as well as insights into the current gaps in strategic foresight. Furthermore, the role, if any, of sacred practices toward creating the futures we desire was explored. These insights are particularly relevant in the context of the world which many have described as a “poly-crisis” (Homer & Dixon, 2022; Tooze 2022). The interviews were conducted with subject matter experts who brought diversity in lived experience as well as expertise grounded in building equitable futures and working to advance collective liberation. Some experts brought with them a background in strategic foresight while others were outside of the field of strategic foresight.

This discussion aims to distill insights from the subject matter expert interviews and deepen our understanding of how sacred practices might enable the imagining of equitable futures. Through the discussion, key themes and insights that emerged from the expert interviews will be explored. I will also examine how these insights align with or diverge from existing research I explored earlier. By integrating these perspectives, I hope to contribute meaningfully to discourse on how sacred practices might support and enable the imagining and building of equitable futures.

In exploring how might sacred practices create pathways toward just, equitable and sustainable futures, there are key themes that emerged which were collective liberation, healing, ancestral connections, and disembodiment. The following section will explore these themes further.

Strategic Foresight & Envisioning Equitable Futures

The disconnect between foresight's applicability and relevance towards advancing the goals of the corporate sector versus advancing goals of the communities and collective well-being was highlighted.

Firstly, the interviews provided valuable insights into the divide between what some may consider "corporate foresight" and "community-focused foresight". They raised important questions about the relevance of strategic foresight to community leaders who are on the front lines of change-making. This prompted a deeper inquiry into who strategic foresight is really for and to what extent does the tools and processes centre equity and justice. The discussions led to critical discourse around who and what benefits from the outputs of strategic foresight practises and what systems and structures foresight practises might continue to uphold both knowingly and unknowingly.

"Having learned foresight and futures work and then also being embedded in like community development and community engagement world, there is a mass divide between the way in which it's being used in corporate america versus like when I go and bring something to community leaders."

"We're in a moment of crisis and there are so many things happening around us that are indicating breakdowns and systems or flaws in which these systems originally made. Where does the field of foresight have to fit in or where does it fit in?"

What emerged as central was to understand how then to adapt either, shape and complement strategic foresight to serve better building worlds that centre equity, justice and well-being and (Sharpe, Three Horizons: The Patterning of Hope, 2013)illuminate the practises, tools, and

methods that exist outside of the field of strategic foresight that are also critical towards building equitable futures. As Krishnan (2019) highlights ultimately “any future for social good has to allow people to see themselves in it”.

Reflexive Capacity as Necessary for Building Better Worlds

While futures tools like Casual Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998) and Three Horizons Framework (Sharpe, Hodgson, Leicester, Lyon, & Fazey, 2016) have been working to access individual and consciousness and ignite inner and societal transformation in different ways, there continues to be a need for more tools that strengthen strategic foresight’s reflexive capacity.

“In order to do equitable futures, work you have to be willing to on earth your own conditioning including the stories you're holding, the mindsets, the patterns of behaviors that are like your personal code of conduct.”

As one participant aptly put it,

“Right now, if you don’t want to consider patriarchy, all the isms, there’s nothing that is going to push you out of your comfort zone, unless you intentionally do it”.

This brings into question that strategic foresight does not inherently centre equity, justice and/or anti-racism by design. Both foresight practitioners and participants need to consciously bring in the lens of equity, justice, and anti-racism as it is not embedded and built into the tool(s). This led to further discourse on the implications of this. Concerns that were raised what that without this intentionality and/or lens, foresight tool(s) being used are not likely to produce and/or promote equity, justice, and anti-racism in themselves. Thus, there is a critical need to bring an equity, justice, and anti-racism lens to the use of these tools.

The concerns raised very much echo what Krishnan (2022) asserts that foresight is not neutral and is deeply influenced by a practitioner's positionality and thus its outputs can be biased. It also points to the limited capacity for foresight to be reflexive and ensure that is not merely repatterning the status quo and/or replicating the inequalities of the past (Krishnan 2019). Considering what both Slaughter (2008) and Morgan (2012) have highlighted, that the methods are only as good as the practitioner if foresight practitioners are not actively bringing the lens of equity, justice, and anti-racism, that the strategic foresight tools they employ are not likely to identify and bring that to the forefront.

What is promising start is that Krishan's (2019) seven fundamental dimensions to further build a reflexive capacity for strategic foresight remain highly relevant and urgently needed. These questions can guide both practitioners and participants to unpack power structures, promote more diversity of thought and provide more agency to people and communities from all backgrounds to design and lead the change they seek. Furthermore, while Lent (2021) argues for a more integrated worldview, one that integrates both spiritual and scientific dimensions, and while it may be a worthy pursuit, it may be not necessary to be about shifting from one worldview to another but rather about allowing for the plurality of worldviews to co-exist and hope connection of similar values of centring shared well-being and flourishing of life on Earth. Perhaps, the fundamental principles driving well-being economies may have relevance in facilitating the imagining and building of equitable futures.

The Need for Embodiment

Another theme that emerged was the ideas around embodiment and disembodiment. Disembodiment came up as a state of being and particularly how it reinforces the status quo and upholds current systems and structures of power and privilege. Interviewees provided anecdotal evidence to illustrate that many of the individuals who hold a disproportionate amount of power and privilege in world leaders and individuals holding power and privilege in the dominant system

they directly worked with struggled with disembodiment. As such, it serves to be a barrier to building equitable futures. It was also noted that embodied work is deeply important.

Additionally, the significance of centring embodiment and embodiment practice was highlighted. This includes being a gateway to allow people to feel and experience their emotions and all parts of themselves as critical parts of building better worlds. Interviews highlighted that while these embodiment practises could be seen as sacred for some, for others they serve to process feelings and emotions so that individuals and communities can heal, let go and get to a place that can have the capacity to think and imagine future possibilities. One interviewee noted that “The heart of colonization is disconnection” and thus to practice and be embodied is an antidote and a reclamation towards being whole.

One interviewee pondered how different it would be if world leaders meditated on their decisions or operated from a place of embodiment and how different a world we live in.



“Embodiment and sensory experiences are an entry point into a different type of engagement with participants”

This is because embodiment practises can be seen to be a way to harness individual and collective creativity when imagining future possibilities. While approaches to embodiment may be different depending on the subject matter expert, the value, the utility, and the essential nature of embodiment were emphasized as being needed that we need more of it particularly when many dominant systems incentivize knowledge from the mind.

The interviews also noted that as humans, we all have ancestors. Whether connected or disconnected from them, every community with ancestors has some form of embodiment

practice. Thus, there is value to re-connect with these practices in ways that are both relevant and nourishing for current times.

Collectively, there seemed to be urgency around calling for different ways of thinking, one that embodies a different frequency. This shift is deemed necessary to cultivate worlds that prioritize the care and well-being of humans and the planet. The question came up around how we hold the energy of the future in the present. Could liberating our embodiment lead to a positive future? There is an understanding that what affects the collective also impacts our bodies. It was noted that decisions made in a disembodied state often lack wisdom.

The critical role of the body in social movements was highlighted, especially in actions like protesting. It is crucial to remember that our mind and body are interconnected, and our body possesses the innate ability to heal itself. This remembrance of our wholeness was seen as vital to world-building and thus such practices are seen as more necessary than ever.

“The heart of colonization is disconnection”

When Slaughter (1998) introduced Integral Futures over 25 years ago, his framework opened pathways for futurists to bring focus to the interior landscapes of humans when exploring the future (Riedy, 2021). This exploration was intended to include our subjective awareness, perceptions, states of mind, and ways of knowing. However, it seems that more emphasis is required on what it means to heal from past and ongoing trauma caused by inequitable systems and structures. Considering both insights from the literature and expert interviews, there is a growing recognition of the need to consider how we embody our futures. The emphasis on embodiment as integral to world-building is particularly interesting. Krishnan (2022) points out the coloniality of foresight, suggesting that it was shaped by individuals holding a disproportionate amount of power and privilege in economic and political structures. This perspective sheds light on why different ways of knowing and being, including those that would attune to the body, may not have been considered in mainstream future thinking.

Additionally, another compelling theme that emerged from the expert interviews is the value of accessing wisdom to build better builds. The experts validated that sacred practices, such as yoga, movement and creative writing serve as powerful gateways to connect with our ancestors and the wisdom that they may offer for the present times. They highlighted how these practices provide a deep connection with our ancestors and a way to center embodied wisdom as a valid source of information. Connecting to ancestral wisdom also seems to offer another window into understanding ourselves better.

While Integral Futures (Slaughter 1998) sought to bring other perspectives, and worldviews and help spur alternative futures methods to contribute to solutions that would better enable 'livable futures', there was not an explicit focus on accessing ancestral wisdom and that being part of understanding oneself better. While Integral Futures were asserted to improve a practitioner's practice, building connections with our ancestors was not explicitly explored. Experts also highlighted that our connections to our ancestors could help to build bridges between communities and enable enhanced cross-cultural relationships.

[conclusion]

This research project set out to explore the following question: How might sacred practices guide the imagining of futures that have equity, justice, and shared well-being? The project asked how sacred practices may offer gateways toward these futures.

To foreground the discussion, the paper explored the state of the world as in a polycrisis and how the well-being economy's potential and constraints to date as a way of reimagining our economies (Hayden & Dasilva, 2022).

This then led to a literature review around exploring, critiquing, and illuminating some limitations of strategic foresight towards envisioning and exploring futures that centre equity, justice, and shared well-being. The limitations of the strategic foresight that were explored included that it is not neutral, there is opportunity to strengthen its reflexive capacity and that it is embedded in Western and colonial mindsets and values.

To overcome the dangers of its being a tool of repatterning the status quo, the research question opened different realm to transcend these limitations and being able to broaden and deepen our capacities for collective imagination.

The fundamental contribution of this research is an exploration of how honouring the sacred and sacred practises can both broaden and deepen our collective capacities to imagine future possibilities. It also offers a new perspective for strategic foresight to recognize that sacred practises offer another gateway to imagining and building equitable futures and in many ways are needed more than ever as we navigate the myriad of crises our world faces.

An analysis of some of the limitations of strategic foresight demonstrated there is a need for the field to continue to adapt and evolve whilst contending with its very nature. What is the role of strategic foresight in building equitable futures? How will it centre different ways of knowing and being? How will it contend with healing? Sacred practises offer another gateway to contend with some of these limitations.

Sacred practices can play an important role in co-creating equitable futures. It is also vital to acknowledge that many sacred practices such as yoga have existed and have been shaped over thousands of years. Could a worldwide network and or weaving of these practices weave together to support the emergence of equitable futures? These are questions, I believe are worth further exploration but are beyond the scope of this research project.

Some may argue that if these sacred practices have existed for millennia, then why have these practices not been harnessed to create better worlds? As Krishnan (2022) argues, our dominant systems and structures today have been constructed by certain sets of values and ideals with many voices and communities left out. While a more extended analysis of the question is beyond the scope of this project, I would argue we need to do more to centre different ways of knowing and being in the process of futures and foresight and that itself needs to be an ongoing process.

I think this is why the rein of radical imagination needs to continue to exist unobstructed in the hands of people and communities. I strongly believe, that one of the gateways to harness the power of radical imagination is through sacred practices.

What's Next

As the field of strategic foresight continues to expand with many more practitioners bringing a diversity of worldviews and approaches to future work, the field has an opportunity to continue to broaden and deepen its approaches towards centring different ways of knowing and being and

different approaches for world-building while remaining accountable towards building worlds that enable shared well-being and centre equity and justice.

I hope that exploring this question about honouring the sacred offers a different perspective and lens to creating, exploring, and shaping futures that centre on equity, justice, and sustainability.

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