The Future of National Identity & Sovereignty

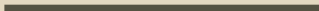# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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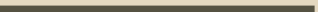
01. Introduction

National identity is defined as a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, represented by distinctive culture, language, and traditions. But what happens when identity and culture are no longer tied to territorial boundaries? How does one identify? What matters most when ancestral lands and borders are no longer considered important? This research project explores the future of national identity and sovereignty through the lens of mass migration. Since the mid-1990s, a third wave of mass human relocation based on a combination of voluntary and forced migration began as individuals moved for new opportunity and to newly developing regions. General migration has increased by 10%, fueled by internal conflict, climate change, and economic crises. As migration was on the rise so too were global populist movements calling for political and social reforms designed not reduce immigration but also to select who was "fit" to be a citizen.

While politicians in the US and abroad wrestled with immigration policies and crises of their own making, transformation was taking shape online. The development of online communities, the increased visibility of social media, and digital citizenship practices were bringing people from different demographics together in the virtual world. Here, nationality was not the first or main identifying factor. Other social attributes and interests were more important in bringing people together and fostering a sense of belonging; creating distinctive cultures and traditions that spanned borders. When digital communities moved from online to real life, borders slowly dissolved as people sought common purpose. When coupled with new technologies that afford the opportunity to conduct business and maintain a presence entirely online, this raised a core question- will the ways in which we identify ourselves continue to be tied to sovereign lands, or will identity be more fluidly constructed to achieve certain ends (personal, professional, political)?

02. Context

This project was a second attempt at an effort previously commissioned by an interdisciplinary impact group focused on global strategic competition embedded in one of the DC area's many consulting firms. A previous effort to understand the impacts and implications of future national identity on the US global competitive position and sovereignty, while thought provoking, did not trigger necessary strategic action, or achieve the desired results. As such, this project attempts to demonstrate to the impact group that foresight can provide unique perspectives in the global arena by employing an experiential futures approach to explore alternative futures that challenge the US' competitive position. Using artifacts from the future is a novel way of exploring what has become a "wicked problem" for the US and many western nations- mass migration.

03. Approach

This project begins with the Houston Foresight Framework, employing the method through the scanning phase to define the domain, the current state, and explore key trends and drivers
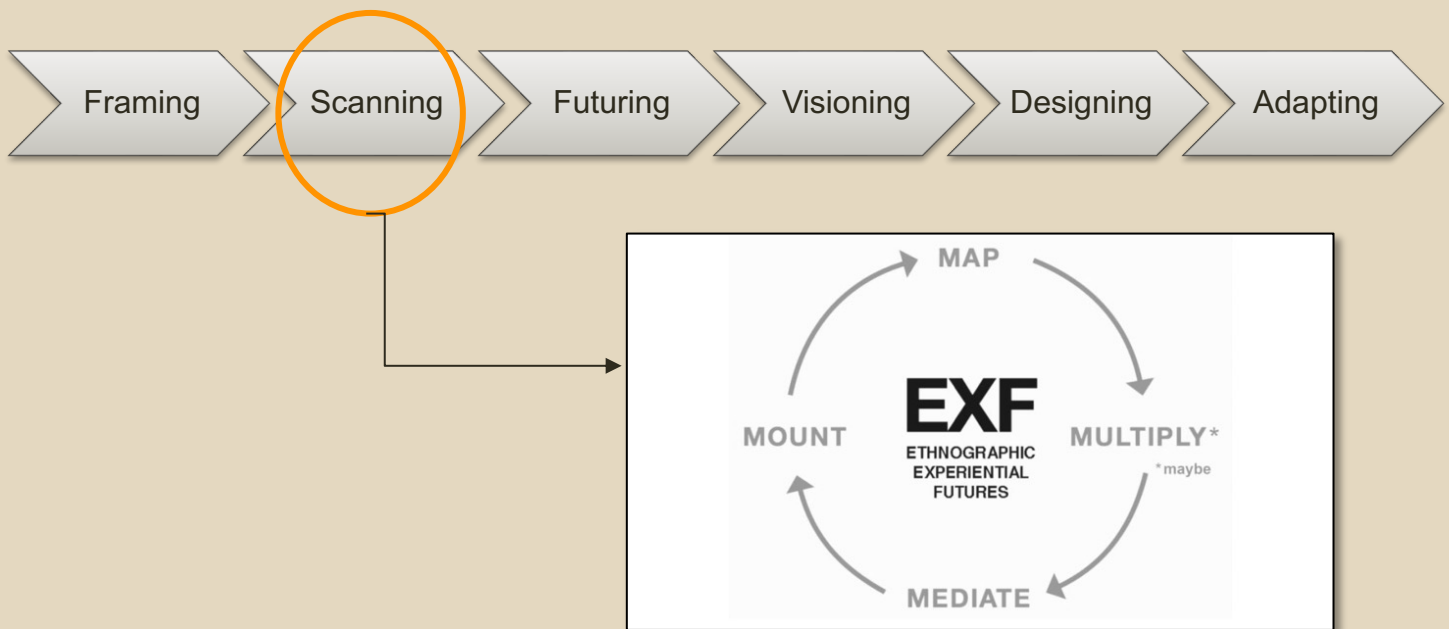
before pivoting to experiential futures design techniques to complete the exploration of the future of national identity and sovereignty by teasing out the implications of the future state through the development of tangible artifacts. The project uses the Ethnographic Experiential Framework (EXF) by Candy and Kornet to Map, Multiply, Mediate, and Mount a future by rendering it in ways that make the future(s) more accessible and discussible.

Approach (cont'd)

In addition to the EXF process, Candy and Dunagan's Experiential Futures Ladder was also employed to build out the scenario and the artifacts (aka "stuff").

This was accomplished by walking down each rung of the ladder to determine the kind of future being visualized, the specific lens and perspective being presented, the time and place being described by the scenario, and finally the tangible artifacts which served as a physical representation of this future from which participants could derive meaning and act.
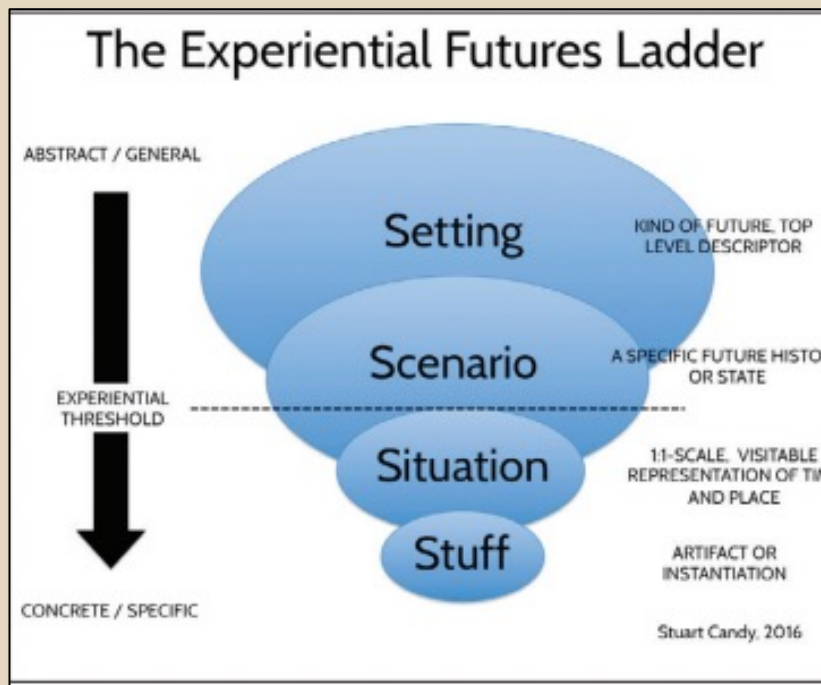

The artifacts specifically help participants engaging with this project understand the implications and impacts of this future and the actions the interdisciplinary impact group might take in supporting the government's decisions regarding migration policies.

Domain
Time Horizon: 2022-2065 (H1-H2)

The featured domain map explores the impact of society, geopolitical dynamics, enabling and disruptive technologies, inhibiting systems (i.e., barriers), policy, and international economy on the shared perceptions and behaviors associated with national identity and sovereignty based on 53 scan hits. Scan hits identified several themes, including:
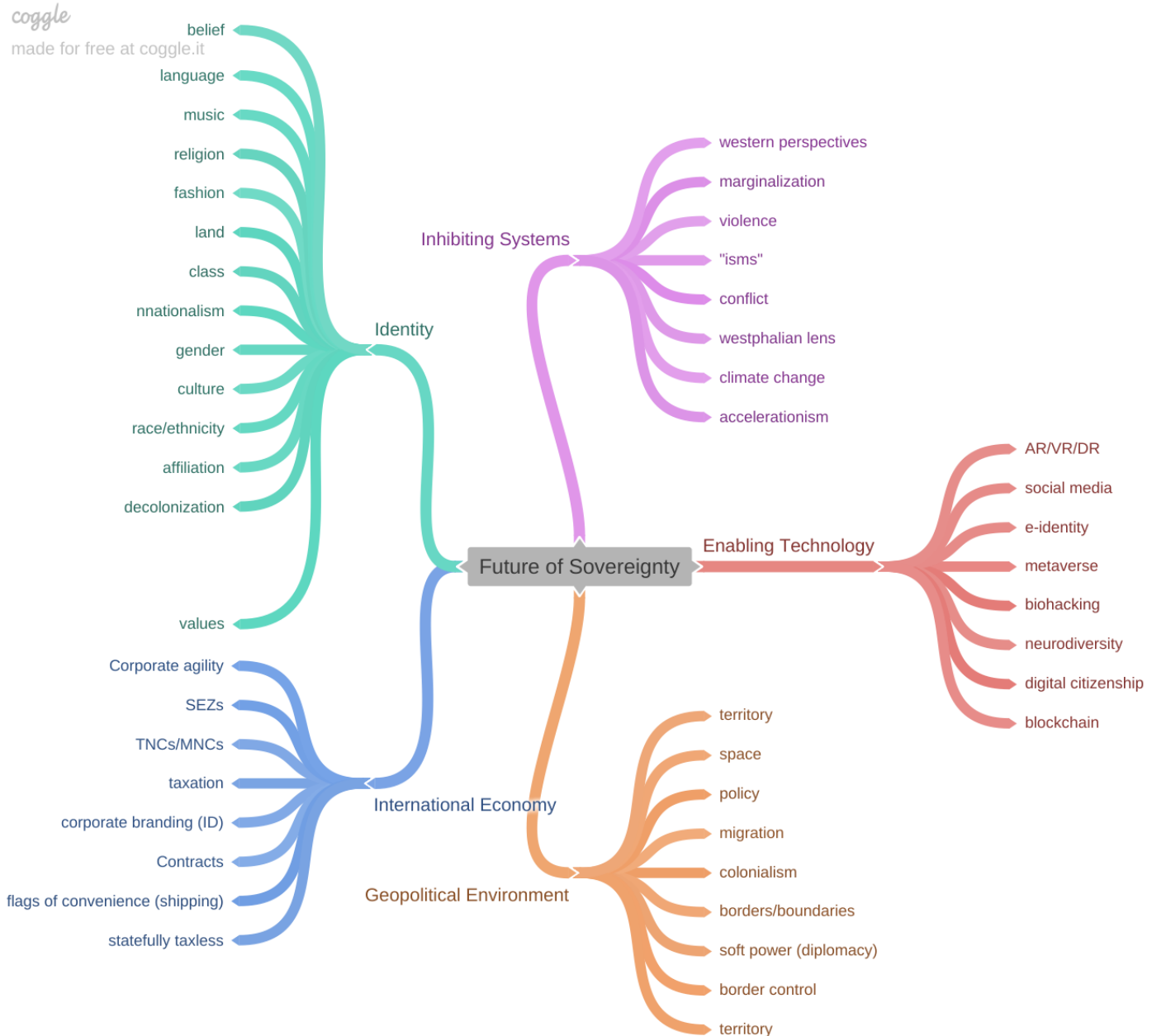
- Increasing visibility among historically marginalized communities through communal acts of protest and social justice movements
- 'Trespass' and right to roam laws
- Biometric identity systems and web3
- Increasing data portability and centralizing personal data ownership controls
- Enhancing protections against threats to digital data and digital ID using Blockchain and crypto currencies.
- Shifting from national identity to cultural identities and attitudes predicated on choice and need.

Current Conditions

Political and social responses to what is widely viewed as a crisis have varied, but in general, mass migration has been opposed in the US and abroad. A rise in populist movements and nativist policies, particularly in migrant-receiving countries are on the rise. In the US more specifically, increased extremist group activity, using a variety of methods, has been used against new and long-standing immigrant communities. Across western Europe new policies designed to preserve national "purity" have been proposed, denying immigrants access to basic rights as potential citizens. As citizens fight to maintain their cultural cohesion, countries are fighting to maintain their hegemony in the face of several influencing factors- transnational corporations gaining state-like powers which challenge the sovereignty of nation-states, and an increase in national book bans and educational policies (aka mint julep history) which have a chilling effect on what educators can and cannot teach in the classrooms, this not only weaponizes education, but prescribes a pedagogy which seeks to erase historical context that does not align with the country's worldview or "core values."

Stakeholder Analysis

In assessing the current conditions as part of this project's domain identification and scanning phases, several stakeholder groups become important to the discussion regarding national identity and sovereignty. See table below for stakeholder examples and definitions:

Stakeholder	Example	Implications
Students	Alpha generation; public school (K-12) students; US geographic south	This vulnerable population is currently subjected to book bans which prohibit access to diverse points of view, depending on their geographic location. This has a chilling effect on learning and development which could make it difficult for students to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds once this group hits college age. Schools could also see behavioral changes as students are denied access to educational materials
Teachers	K-12 public schools; US geographic south	"Mint julep history" narratives and prescriptive curriculum have a chilling effect on education in general. More teachers leave the system, putting students at a greater disadvantage. This could open the door for NGOs and TNCs to take over where an air-gap in vital services exists.
Policy Makers	Local government officials (mayors, governors); Federal government representatives (Congress, Senate); Members of international governance and policy groups	Maintenance of national identity narratives remain hegemonic, bolstered by policies that reinforce a specific "historical subjecthood" through the use of book bans, prescriptive teaching curricula, and constraining immigration policies which seek to "otherize" migrants while restricting immigration across borders.
Corporations	Trans and multi-national organizations. This may include major technology firms, financial companies and retail corporations.	Reorientation of national and international law to favor transnational and multinational corporations has a compounding effect on power asymmetries. This could potentially undermine the rule of law as TNCs gain greater access to state-like authorities, making them equally or more legitimate to migrating & marginalized individuals seeking assistance and freedom.
Immigrants	Any migrating individual moving within a country or across country borders seeking social and/or economic freedom	TNCs with state-like powers could be seen as an enticement if countries are unable or unwilling to provide support and assistance.

Key Drivers

Information from scanning was used to construct the following key drivers, the thematic clusters of inputs which coalesced in novel ways and served as the basis for scenario development.

Almansratten for Living
- Applying Scottish and Swedish "right to roam" policies and freedom to move unencumbered on a global scale.
- A way to bring different demographic groups together facilitate awareness and understanding by exposing people to each- others' livelihoods

This Land is Mine
- A return to isolationist policies fueled by extreme nationalist views; roll-back of civic education and rights

The State is a Lie
- Building sovereign networks of individuals on digital platforms; platforms with enough state-like rights and authority to provide services and effect change, but not owned by the state.

The Moral Citizen

The state is **accountable** to its citizens and citizens are **accountable** to each-other in achieving common good; includes mutual agreement that sovereign will is driven by the polis towards an **equitable** vision

L'etat C'est Moi

Turning Louis, the XIV's statement on its head. Personalizing the concept of "state" and nation. Coming together in new ways based on shared identities not tied to the nation; further supported by emerging and disruptive design.

Watchers & Gatekeepers

Digital management of identity for migration and surveillance; for good or ill.

04. Scenario Development Methodology

In scenario development is where the methodology departs from the standard Houston Foresight Framework. This project leveraged experiential futures methodology in the form of Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) to explore a future of national identity and sovereignty in which the crafting of identity is no longer predicated on one's origin of birth. This future is addressed through the lens of mass migration, viewed from a transformational perspective. In the EXF approach:

- Current state and existing visions of the future are examined (e.g., sovereignty remains hegemonic) and new futures are generated by working with individual cultures and perspectives.
- Images of the future are rendered in tangible, performative ways that enable discussion and accessibility to that future.

EXF was a logical framework to use after drivers were identified as EXF focuses on re-examining a future and then generating new images of it by working with individuals and cultures. Once those images are solidified, they can be rendered in ways that make them more readily accessible and discussable through tangible means.

As a methodology, EXF is comprised of a family of approaches for making futures visible, tangible, interactive, and explorable across a range of modes. While the approach itself is dynamic- continuing to change based on growing theoretical base of design and futures knowledge-the process is grounded in foresight's capacity to contribute to social change. As with foresight in general, scenario development in EXF is not about predicting the future. Rather, the goal is to extend participatory and critical thinking elements to effectively and deeply explore futures thinking of diverse communities. From an Integral approach, this method links the interior to the exterior (integrating individual with collective ways of knowing). **11**

EXF Process Steps

The image below depicts how EXF was used to interrogate alternative images of the future regarding national identity and sovereignty. Beginning with previous work on the topic as a start-point, new images of the future-multiplied and mediated through the lens of mass migration, social justice, and novel technology- mounted a tangible exploration of the free, fluid movement of individuals on a global scale.

Map: Previous work with SMEs looked at the dissolution of the nation-state due to flexible identities and explored the possibility of Transnational or Multinational Corporations having state-like powers.

Re-Map: The revised future vision looked at current events, as well as non-western and non-white perspectives of identity and sovereignty which shifted the perspective to one focused on social justice, cultural perceptions, and worldview.

Mounting the future for participants to experience as a migrant themselves, traveling overland to a specific destination was staged and photographed (see section 4.2). The experience (aka "The Situation" in Futures ladder parlance) was envisioned as a migrant rest break. Participants would have an opportunity to see the migrant's personal effects and come away with a better understanding of what drives mass migration, why your place of origin should not matter, how culture can be a disruptor to territorial boundaries, and how policy must reflect regenerative, equitable, and inclusive relationships with the people as well as the environment through which people move.

A translation of the new cultural society, predicated on social justice, common worldview and purpose, and a regenerative relationship with the land was devised through three artifacts: a pair of boots, a rendering of a pin, and a copy of a "oath of the Rover."
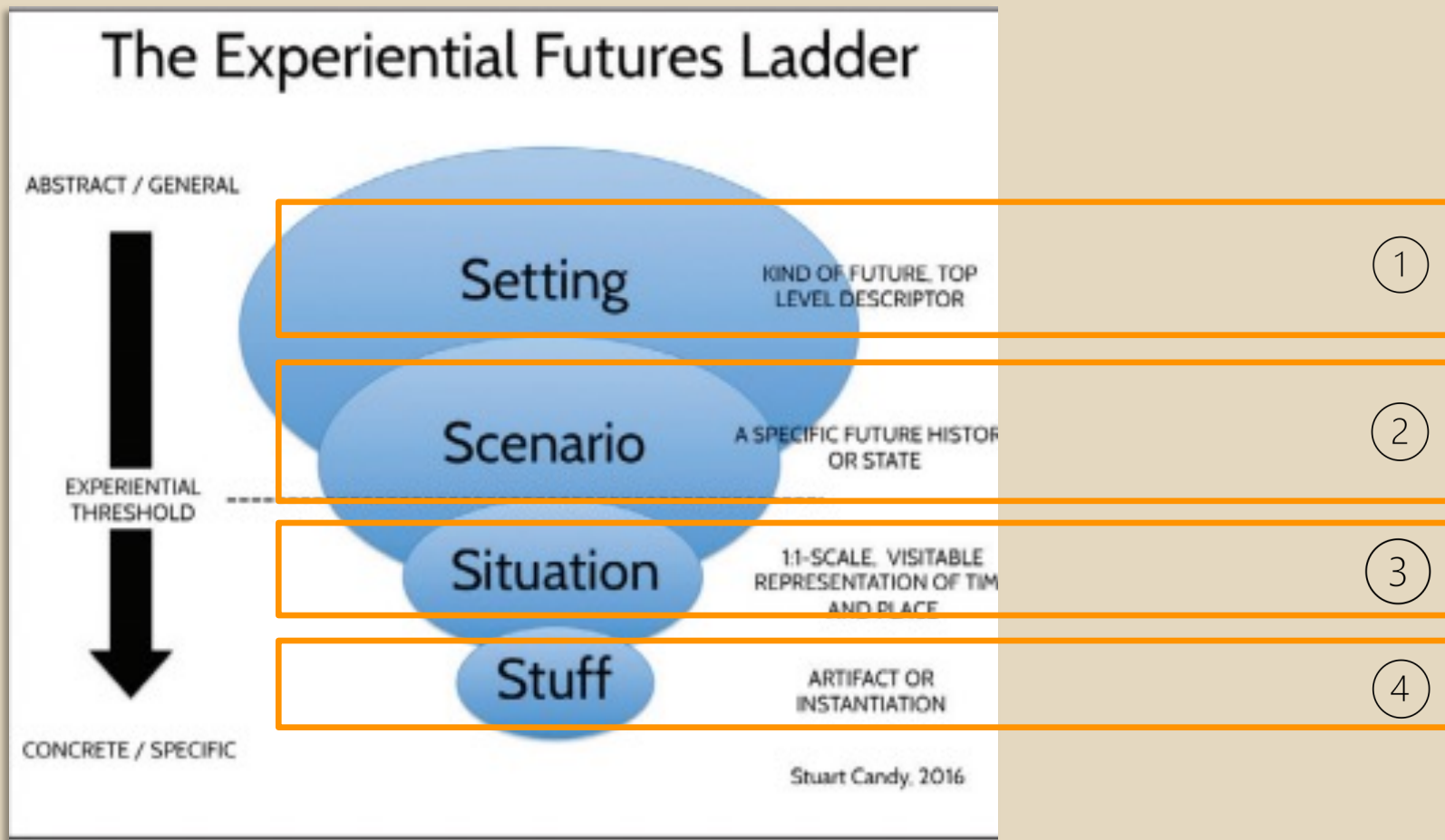These artifacts (aka "the stuff") depicted in section 4.2 bring elements from the larger scenario together, making it real and tangible to participants. They could be this Rover, traveling across the country to freedom or looking for new opportunity.

SMEs originally devised an alternative future in which groups and corporations came together to function like a nation-state, providing individuals with similar rights and benefits, requiring commitment/investment in areas of common interest (i.e., beyond national ties). It was possible that this future could yield greater uncertainty and fractionalization, with greater corporate competition for "brand" loyalty.
However, looking at the meaning of culture as it related to identity and from an historical perspective, we find it is usually used in opposition to civilization. Civilization rationalizes and homogenizes (US "melting pot," British Imperialism), but culture does not. Culture was used as the mechanism for defining ways of being as a migrant, regardless of reason. As such the scenario focused on the emergence of a new cultural society (The Rovers); the customs and guiding principles associated with being part of this global group for security, service, pleasure, and/or opportunity (see section 4.1)

*It should be noted that Candy's framework states that more than one image **may be generated.** Depending on the images of the future and the ideas uncovered in mediation, one new image may be sufficient. For this project, only one alternative image was developed.*

Experiential Futures Ladder

The Experiential Futures Ladder

ABSTRACT / GENERAL

EXPERIENTIAL THRESHOLD

CONCRETE / SPECIFIC

Setting — KIND OF FUTURE, TOP LEVEL DESCRIPTOR ①

Scenario — A SPECIFIC FUTURE HISTORY OR STATE ②

Situation — 1:1-SCALE, VISITABLE REPRESENTATION OF TIME AND PLACE ③

Stuff — ARTIFACT OR INSTANTIATION ④

Stuart Candy, 2016

Overlaid onto the EXF framework was the Experiential Futures Ladder. Using the ladder facilitated build-out of the alternative future initially identified by the EXF process as well as the artifacts (aka stuff). Scenario and artifact development were accomplished by walking down each rung of the ladder (steps 1-4, see graphic, left) to determine the kind of future being visualized (setting), the specific lens and perspective being presented (scenario), the time and place being described by the scenario (setting), and then the tangible artifacts (stuff) that serve as a physical representation of this future from which participants may derive meaning and act.

Setting

As mass migration is difficult concept to understand and address, it is considered a "wicked problem" with broad sweeping implications for national sovereignty and identity. As such, storytelling is a key method for influencing people's beliefs and values regarding a far future. For this project, representing that future through narrative AND design breaks through barriers created by the worldview and myths we tell ourselves about migrants and migration ("bad hombres," not like us; "dirty ____", etc.). Materializing this alternative future and its artifacts make the conceptual real. By mapping the hopes, fears, and perspectives of the individuals populating that future, it brings others into the experience and helps the future resonate in ways it might not otherwise.

Mounting the artifacts then sets the stage for finding solutions, thinking critically about the bigger picture the future represents, or shifting worldviews. On the Futures ladder, the situation and the stuff create a baseline for individual engagement and action.

Pulling the thread on alternative future being devised, three drivers of change serve as the foundation for identifying the general **setting** and informing the immersive scenario which tells a story about a future in which the "right to roam" is transformed from a localized mandate into a global movement that gives anyone permission to migrate freely and unencumbered. Those involved in this movement create their own unique identity facilitated by novel technologies that cross borders and nationalities. Identity becomes an **act** of intention. Further, these drivers:

- *Allemansratten* for living
- The state is a lie
- L'etat c'est moi

 serve as the basis for creating representational visuals of this future in the form of tangible artifacts which engage the reader to derive further meaning and action.

Scenario

The world experienced a dynamic shift in social and political perspectives. It hadn't always been like this. In the mid-2020s, states across the globe were experiencing **increasing** cases of **intense nationalism**, exacerbated by **mass migration** from the global south as people escaped the effects of **climate change** and **political and ethnic conflict**. However, the countries migrants were running towards were less than welcoming. This created a host of social and political issues, including a **tightening of borders** and **aggressive political rhetoric** which served to divide those with strong national ties to land from those with weak or no ties at all. This **fragmentation** was further exacerbated by the spread of **disinformation** on **social media** about those migrating for political, economic, or social asylum, exacerbating fragmentation and mistrust. But then, the notion of **intentional identities** coupled with the rise of new **country branding campaigns** occurred. People came together based on shared interest and for mutual beneficence. Aspects of **personal identity** mattered more than ties to sovereign land. Slowly, hardened borders began to become more **fluid** and as such the need for passports and papers in an era of pure **data portability** was no longer a requirement.

It wasn't until the 4th Unified Global Government in 2045 passed the *right to roam act* that all these events converged to create a community-based global movement and society of "Rovers."   What had started as a localized political and environmental effort in Sweden and England- lobbying for the freedom to roam across any property in search of fresh air and sunshine- had transformed into an international movement. Individuals join the society for pleasure or purpose, are protected by the Rovers' Cooperative Programme- which provides rights and protections to all who roam. Regardless of an individual's motivation for engaging with the society, the goal is the same; to move freely across the earth without restriction, suspicion, or harm. Rovers see *allemansratten* as a way of life, as a means of migrating to achieve a better one or to experience the pleasures of the world on foot. Rovers therefore take the Oath as a means of citizenship. The Oath is not only a pledge of mutual support to others, but also a regenerative compact with the land on which the Rovers depend. Walking, therefore, becomes an intentional and communal act. The passage of the Equitable Migration Act of 2045 at Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania- historic global legislation established at the place where "man" quite literally walked out onto the plains- meant that all people have the right to roam freely and unencumbered. Additional protections have been established by the Committee for Migratory and Equitable Affairs under the 6th Unified Global Government to ensure Rovers' rights are protected wherever they go.

Allemansratten- Swedish word for *right to roam*. Applies to laws across Nordic states that afford individuals the right to freely travel across public and privately owned lands for their own purposes and follow a basic set of rules to protect themselves and the environment from harm.

Situation & Stuff

Walking further down the ladder we move from the scenario to the situation and the stuff. The situation- a visitable representation of a time and place described in the scenario- is depicted in figure at right, which also features our first artifact. Here, the situation is visualized as a rest break on a Rover's migration to their intended destination. They have stopped, having removed their boots to rest their feet, perhaps taking in some water and nourishment before continuing their journey. Other travel essentials are seen on the ground such as a jacket and a backpack full of necessities. The Rover's boots contain embedded technology which holds a Rover's information and may indicate when and where the wearer has passed through digital stiles as they travel overland.

Implementation of new technologies negates the need for "papers" and passports The boots themselves also serve as a visual record of the Rover's travels, in the style of an old-fashioned steamer trunk with stickers from various ports of call.
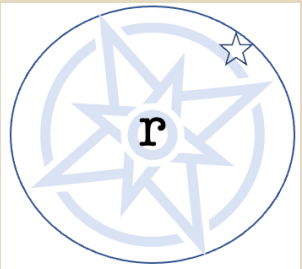
Migration can be a lonely and scary experience, especially for those fleeing conflict. Members of the Society of Rovers wear pins, the R for rover is centered within a compass rose with a star centered due north on the compass. This pin is a visual representation of the words a Rover says when they take their oath to join the society. The pin serves as cultural shorthand and a symbol of safety and security for those seeking help.

Lastly, anyone entering the society of Rovers must take the oath. like an oath of citizenship, these words welcome an individual into a like-minded community founded on intentionally constructed identities that are not tied to land.

The Rover's Oath

I am a Rover, this is my solemn oath
As two roads diverge in a wood, I take the one less traveled.
Whether by chance or circumstance, I move through this land of my own free will.
My mind is as open as the roads and fields before me
My heart sings as true as the arrow points due North on the compass
My footsteps are light and wherever I may tarry,
I may be a good steward of the land that gives back to me.
I pledge to help those I meet along my way, as I may be in need one day myself.
In this community of like-mindedness,
the people I meet and the places I stay become my family, my friends, my home.
I walk this earth to be truly free.
Though I wander, I am found.
This I pledge unto thee.

05. Recommendations

Experiential Futures Application

Overlaying the Frameworks allows for the perturbation of complex social and geopolitical issues like national identity and sovereignty with the artifacts (i.e., "stuff") as the enabler. As noted above, the social issues and inputs identified in the drivers, and which unfold in the scenario are further manifested by the artifacts; an unlikely result if one method alone was used.

Addressing Presentism

Experiential futures work can help address the conflict that exists between the interests of the current generation and the welfare of future generations. Futures design serves as an intervention to "break" the biases associated with presentism, allowing for more flexible and equitable thought processes

Technology Enables Portable ID

Personal information is wholly portable allowing an individual to physically and virtually transit to where they can contribute most to society.

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05. Recommendations

No Passports

In looking at this alternative future and the ways in which culture and technology play important roles, the need for passports or other identifying papers is negated, while still meeting security needs
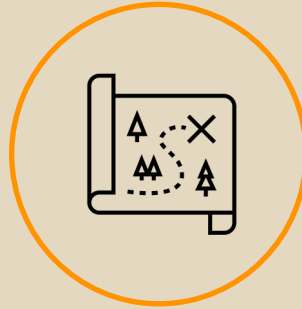
Borders as Social Construct

Borders at a minimum become more porous (e.g., the US-Mexico border pre-1965) or could be completely erased so that an individual's identity is based on holistic and individualized markers, not tied to a geospatial or geopolitical box on a map.

Fluid Migration

This future allows for the fluid movement of people and goods and fewer constraints regarding commerce, society, and culture.

06. Conclusion

Experiencing a future helps to evaluate its alternatives. While the future presented looks nothing like today, it does contain elements of today, while also referencing the past. The future of national identity has the potential to grow and change in different ways based on the choices we make (or don't). Experiencing a future by experiencing it helps an organization understand the future not only in relation to the issue at hand, but also their role in shaping the future in new, powerful ways. In looking at national identity in the context of mass migration, we must recognize that simple policy reform is not sufficient to address this wicked problem. If we look at Ackoff's argument regarding transformation, experiential futures approaches facilitate not only the critical shift in mindset, but also the required "recognition of recognition of the difference between what is practiced and what is preached- it also requires a trans- formation in the way we think." Decoupling identity from territorial boundaries widens the scope of possibility by shifting the focus away from the myth and worldviews that shape national identity to the shared skills and common interests people bring that form the basis of new culture. Finding those commonalities- of interest, of purpose- becomes more potent and meaningful than one's country of origin. This shift then begins to change those foundational perspectives and the stories people have about migrants. It becomes not about what they lack, but what they have: hope, optimism, new perspectives, ways of being, and new ideas. As such this future about a society of Rovers can enable useful, creative thought around the future of identity, how people will experience it and how it can lead to transformational change regarding sovereign boundaries and territory, while avoiding assumptions predicated on history and the present.

To be truly free we must think freely and embrace wild ideas.

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