

Chapter 4. Values in VISION

The examination of values related to sustainability lies at the centre of any VISION process.

Imagine placing a value inside a prism, where it is reflected from many different angles and perspectives, each adding new dimensions and understandings to how it can be perceived. This mirroring process can establish '*self-gravity*', and potentially provide inspiration, foresight, and a clear-sightedness regarding what is needed. In this chapter, we present our understanding of values within VISION, providing an overview and starting point for facilitators when initiating a VISION process. We close this chapter with a guide regarding how to choose or identify a value to examine.

As we described in Chapter 1, values are understood as core beliefs and principles guiding an individual, group, or society's behaviours, decisions, and actions, inspired by the new protreptic (Gørtz & Mejlhede, 2015; Kirkeby, 2009, 2016). These values represent what is considered important in life, and act as a moral compass influencing our choices and attitudes. Values are often deeply ingrained and shaped by culture, religion, family, and the society in which we are reared. Rather than innate, they are developed as we interact and share experiences with others. Moreover, values help us to determine right from wrong, and play a role in establishing our personal identity. Unlike moods or opinions, values tend to endure, remaining stable over time, whilst also being dynamic and potentially evolving as we experience various life events or are exposed to new ideas. Values are subjective and can vary between individuals and cultures, and they help us to navigate complex situations, make decisions, or solve problems.

To summarise what we discussed in Part One and contextualise moving forward, in VISION the core work revolves around exploring the values we adhere to by analysing the ways in which they take up residence within us and become stronger, forming the foundation for our belief systems. Borrowing from the protreptic framework, this allows us to become the master of our own house. Couched within protreptics, VISION has further adapted the idea that clarifying, exploring, analysing, and deepening values can help us to create '*self-gravity*' or a more solid foundation and a '*garland of values*' for ourselves. In addition, from advocacy, the VISION method has adopted the notion that advocating for a sustainable future requires a solid value base, a safe community, and the development of competencies required when speaking to power (Harington & Beddoe, 2013). As such, a more solid foundation to our values can serve as armour for this task and as 'the common third', potentially uniting a group or community, charting a direction, and sharpening our arguments, even if they are not heard by those who hold positions of power. The VISION approach also underscores growth-critical theories, such that specifying key values is needed, since it allows for a more precise formulation of the goals of degrowth resulting in a more concrete path to follow (Parrique, 2019, p. 252). Finally, as outlined in Chapter 2, drawing on eco-social work, VISION adopts the understanding that social workers carry an active responsibility to rethink their professional roles and practices in response to socio-ecological challenges (Boetto, 2019). Value clarification within VISION can serve as an initial step, shifting the focus towards sustainability. In professional settings, establishing a personal and collective value base provides a foundation for establishing a direction and building arguments that support a sustainable future.

Values for a sustainable future

In the new protreptic described by Kirkeby (2009; 2016), it is up to participants and the facilitator to decide which values to examine. Crucially, this choice must remain unrestricted. But because VISION is a method for social work students, professionals, and other agents of change, rooted in a normative viewpoint as described in the knowledge section (see p. 26), VISION argues for working with a specific set of values, all related to sustainability and social work.

VISION includes a catalogue of values from which to choose, which are of particular relevance to sustainability and sustainable cities derived from research completed within the URGE project, which we described in Chapter 2. These consist of *participation, inclusion, safety, protection, agency, power, community, self-determination, sustainability, belonging, diversity, and equity*. According to the URGE objective, the research more broadly focused on *sustainability, inclusiveness, vulnerable populations, and voices not usually heard within development processes*, despite the differing settings in each of the five cities. Moreover, the overarching objective of the research process focused on developing a digital map of the various conflicting values within the project materials (see <https://urbanurge.eu/research/>).

In addition to these research-based values, further values can be identified from the knowledge base of VISION, outlined in Part One of this handbook. These can also be used as the primary subject for a dialogue or as a backdrop for reflection, shifting to a focus on sustainability.

As we described in Chapter 1, in protreptic, the universal values of *freedom, beauty, justice, truth, and goodness* can be used in dialogues, helping to identify the core or the depth of a specific value.

In Chapter 2, we outlined growth-critical theories and eco-social work. Values such as *conviviality, autonomy, sufficiency, care, justice, wellbeing, sovereignty, community, holism, reciprocity, connectedness, and interdependence* can help sharpen the focus towards sustainability and a connection to the planet even further.

Finally, Chapter 3 focused on illustrating the relation between advocacy and collective social work practices, in which core values such as *social justice, human rights, freedom, diversity, equality, tolerance, understanding, and participation* can serve as inspiration when seeking to connect a dialogue to the practice of social work.

Choosing a value for a VISION process

During the planning stages for a VISION process, facilitators must choose how to decide upon a value. This choice depends upon how much time is available, how confident the facilitator feels in their role, and the purpose and setting of the process. Facilitators can select one of the following three ways to decide upon a value:

- 1) let the focus person or group collectively decide the value as the first step in the process,
- 2) decide beforehand which value is meaningful to explore, or
- 3) provide a short list of values from which participants can choose.

Option 1. Allowing individuals to choose their own value is a solid option if there is sufficient time available, if the group knows each other well, if the group has previously tried VISION, when the group is less diverse, or when the group or focus person(s) expresses a preference to choose for themselves after being presented the process method. Deciding upon a value can sometimes strengthen the sense of agency, which in groups requires solid facilitation skills helping

the group balance between time to think and reflect and the need to move forward in the process. Their choice of value can either remain completely free from control or related to a specific topic such as sustainability or advocacy. To facilitate the process of identifying a value, the facilitator can begin the dialogue by asking participants what currently puzzles or preoccupies them, and then help them identify and choose between key values from these inputs. Finding a value can sometimes take up to 15–30 minutes, requiring the facilitator to possess solid mediation skills since participants need to reach consensus, a challenging task at times.

Option 2. Deciding upon a meaningful value to explore beforehand represents a solid choice in situations requiring a better understanding of a specific topic, particularly when combined with having less time available for the dialogue or the process. If the group consists of diverse populations or hidden power dynamics exist, a good strategy may also rely on saving the collective reflections for the actual VISION process itself rather than spending valuable time reaching consensus on the specific value to address. This may be relevant, for example, in teaching situations, public debates, or public hearings. It also requires less experience from the facilitator; but, of course, the choice of value must still be well-argued so that participants align with the decision.

Option 3. Presenting a selection or list of values from which participants can choose combines the first two options. This provides participants with something from which to choose, setting the scene with relevant values for a specific process, whilst also granting a sense of agency to participants.

This chapter was about...

VISION can be used to clarify values, by:

- Examining values. The examination of values related to sustainability lies at the very centre of the VISION process. Within VISION, values are understood as core beliefs and guiding principles shaping how individuals, groups, and societies think, decide, and act. Working with values is, therefore, not a secondary activity, but the foundational starting point of VISION, allowing participants to articulate what they consider important, meaningful, and worth working for in relation to a sustainable future.
- Exploring values. Values are explored through a reflective process, focusing on their many dimensions and perspectives. VISION approaches values as complex and multifaceted, inviting participants to examine them from various angles, much like a value placed within a prism and reflected back through multiple viewpoints. This mirroring process enables deeper insight, whereby each perspective adds nuance and understanding to how a value is experienced, interpreted, and enacted in practice.
- Establishing ‘self-gravity’. Through the clarification and deepening of values, VISION aims to establish what is described as ‘self-gravity’. Drawing on protreptic philosophy, the process of analysing and verbalising values helps individuals and groups develop a more solid inner foundation—a steadiness from which one can stand, speak, and act. This grounding allows participants to become more fully ‘at home’ in their own value base, strengthening coherence between beliefs, identity, and action.
- Clarifying the value base. A clarified value base is essential for advocacy, sustainability, and social change. VISION integrates insights from advocacy, growth-critical theories, and eco-social work, emphasising that working toward a sustainable future requires clearly

expressed and shared values. Such a foundation can function as both armour and orientation, supporting collective action, sharpening arguments, and sustaining efforts to speak to power, even in contexts where voices may not be readily heard.

- Choosing values. The choice of value within a VISION process is itself a meaningful and contextual decision. This chapter emphasised that facilitators must carefully consider how a value is selected—whether by participants themselves, by the facilitator in advance, or from a curated list—based on time, group dynamics, diversity, and purpose. Regardless of the approach, the selection of values should support both a sense of agency and a focused exploration that aligns with the overall aims of the VISION process.

Chapter 4 references

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