PROBLEM STATEMENT

The fundamental problem that brings us to OTB lab is that the trends in emissions driven by fossil fuels and deforestation are diverging radically from where we need to go – well below 2 °C. We know that marginal changes will not be enough to address this challenge. Thinking within the box will not do. Particularly when we need to reduce emissions at the same time as eliminating poverty and increasing competitiveness.

Yet when we look at the work emerging from MAPS Chile, CLCDS, PlanCC and IES Brasil, we see big gaps remaining between our most ‘ambitious-but-realistic’ scenarios and what is ‘required by science / equity’. Our very best work – and it is great – does not add up to enough. We have to think out of the box.

Luckily I don’t have to give any answer, just state the problem. But here are some of the elements I think we will be working with in the next day-and-a-half. And I’m excited about what this great group of thinkers will add. So in no particular order:

1. We need to think in the long-term, in order to take urgent action.
2. We need to think about development and climate at the same time. Not in any sequence or any priority. Both / and, not either / or. Multiple objectives
3. We need to think beyond marginal changes, to deeper changes in the structure of economy, industry and society.
4. We need to let our minds explore as yet unimagined changes in behaviour.
5. We can safely predict that, by 2030 already, there will be technologies we have not yet dreamed of (and cannot possibly represent in a model), and that these technologies will have an impact on development
6. We know that the changes needed in development paths will have to exceed rates of change that we have seen in the past.
7. What processes are needed to imagine the future, to develop a sense of common purpose, and to chart path to get from our current reality – far removed from that desired future – to that future.
8. Back-casting, not projecting from our reality forward.
9. We need tools that aim at multiple objectives, and include development and climate, both among the objectives
10. We know that there is much more flexibility in economy in the long-term, compared to rigidities and constraints of the short-term. How do we treat the flexibility in the long-term, and the wide ranges of uncertainty that accompany it?
11. We have worked with scenarios as powerful tools for decision-making under uncertainty. How far into the future can they stretch?

“A scenario is a story, told in words and numbers, concerning the manner in which future events could unfold and offering lessons on how to direct the flow of events towards desirable pathways and away from undesirable ones.” (Gallopin, Hammond, Raskin & Swart 1997)

12. We need narratives and numbers. How do we construct narrative storylines that go out of the box and imagine the change we want, without undermining the rigour and credibility of work on the shorter-term?

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” (Albert Einstein)

*Harald Winkler, July 2014*