



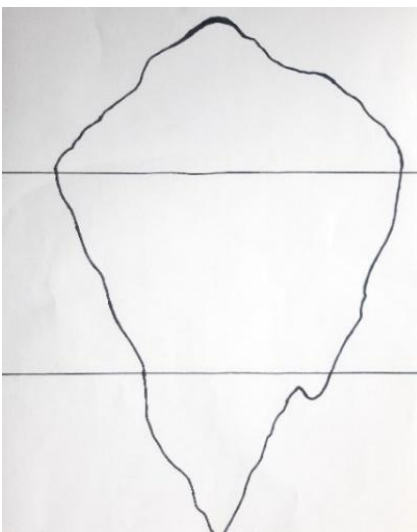
**UNESCO Chair
on Visual Anticipation
and Futures Literacy
towards Visual Literacy**



THE VISUALITY ICEBERG

The iceberg metaphor serves as a powerful tool for deconstructing social phenomena. Just as the shape and size of an iceberg's submerged portion can significantly affect its behavior and stability, the hidden dynamics of social phenomena (and individual traits) determine the outcomes. The process of uncovering these hidden dynamics sheds light on the underlying causes, structures, and systems that drive the visible part, and highlights their depth and complexity. The nuanced analysis and exploration it supports, prompts a deeper understanding beyond superficial observations.

In 1998, Sohail Inayatullah introduced the application of the Casual Layered Analysis' (CLA) research method in the field of foresight. The CLA method used the image of an iceberg layered in 4 levels (litany, social causes, discourse/worldview and metaphor/myth). Inayatullah's aim was to explore "how an issue has been constructed as an event or trend in the first place as well as the 'cost' of that particular social construction" (Inayatullah, 1998, 817). The visuality iceberg derives from the CLA and is simplified (has only 3 levels).



The tool **aims** to:

- Decompose and examine the underlying factors of what seems to be solid and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic under examination.
- Encourage learners to consider multiple perspectives and layers of analysis when examining social phenomena, or events in their private lives.
- Support understanding on how worldviews and values (deepest level) have very concrete consequences (visible level), as well as how social structures, institutions and systems (middle level) function as bridges facilitating the values, worldviews and ideologies to enact as tangible realities.
- Make apparent the different perceptions among the learners, their deriving assumptions and the different ensuing possibilities they introduce into – or exclude from – their lives and communities.
- Co-create understanding and knowledge among the learners.

How to apply it

The form of an iceberg divided in three horizontal zones corresponds to the visible reality, where our conscious memory and experience exists, and to its invisible parts – the domain of tacit and subconscious memory materials, thought patterns and dispositions. The middle part corresponds to the concepts that support structures, institutions and systems of our societies. The deeper part describes the values, worldviews and ideologies, as well as the generated emotions that motivate us as individuals and members of our collectives, molding our thoughts and actions. Although we might think all these make part of the visible reality, their interconnections are subtle and mostly tacit.

Discussing any topic, e.g. an event, a concept, an ideology etc., the facilitator asks the learners to write on different post-its the various components, involving parts, and consequences they think of. Most probably, most responses will involve the tangible reality (upper, visible level), but there will be thoughts and notes regarding structures, institutions, systems, values, ideologies, and emotions as well.

Learners will stick the post-its on the iceberg (drawn on a whiteboard or printed and stuck on a wall). The facilitator will help learners to specify vague thoughts or break down others into their constituent elements and appropriately position them on the iceberg.

Next step is to ask learners to observe and figure out a couple (max three) different story lines that derive from the post-its horizontally and vertically. Learners can move similar post-its in groups (e.g. a positive and a negative narrative/outcome, or a third, not so extreme, perhaps neutral) and create visible storylines. The facilitator should group learners into 2 or 3 groups. Each group will decide what the respective narrative will be, and one representative from each group will share with all peers.

The post-its and the ensuing narratives will provide much material for discussion, analysis, reflection and new questions. This activity will make them understand the delicate dynamics among the events; their interconnection; their complex nature; as well as us the different existing possibilities.

Suggested combination with other Visual Literacy tools

The “Visuality Iceberg” combines effectively with the “Stage”, the “Wall”, the “Barcoded Baby”, the “Role-playing”, the “Five Mirrors”, the “Frame”, the “Alternative Futures”, the “White T-shirt”, the “Letter to an unborn child”, and the “Identity triangle” tools.

Inayatullah, S. (1998). Causal layered analysis. *Futures*, 30(8), 815–829. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(98\)00086-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(98)00086-X)