



# Future generations: Widespread changes in our living-together

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## ABSTRACT

When highlighting the needs of the future and of the present, sustainable development concepts often neglect how these needs are born: that is, by the relationship between future and present generations. This special issue contributes to this discussion with linking papers on futures generations in different interpretations and dimensions: these are emerging generations of futures theories and organisations, youth surveys, education and views of new generations in non-Western societies.

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## 1. Introduction

In the modern futures studies there are several emerging issues and areas of interests related to different generations. Forward-looking has often been linked with the coming generations. We talk about young generations, new generations, next generations...

The image of tomorrow we have in mind is that we actually are preparing our thinking, decisions and work for the ones who come after us. Futures are the only era we all shall spend our time to come. There is no way to return back to yesterday from now, our only paths are the future options. How to find and how to form the preferred futures are the key questions in these discussions.

New generations can be regarded as the target group of our efforts. But how it is often understood is that they themselves should be the ones to perceive the coming decades and it is not us to decide for them. At its best view these intergenerational discussions are opened in a dialogue.

However, a generation does not simply or only refer to a certain age of people. Generations are created by similar sets of values and hence time and values determine generations at the same time.<sup>1</sup> Generations characterize societies like paradigms do. This approach has encouraged us to put generations in a wider perspective and to focus on transitions between sets of values in different fields. These fields appear as a variety of dimensions concerning generations:

Dimension I. New generations of futures studies in an overall aspect, where emerging paradigms of futures theories, their relations and organizations receive focus.

Dimension II. Generations in time. This is the classical approach to generations where social layers by age and values create the basis of discussion. Studies on the future images of the young generation as well as historical comparisons of youth surveys contribute to the generation issue.

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<sup>1</sup> See more on this in T. Gáspár, J. Ramos, Youth and the WFSF – a generational approach, *Futures* 37 (2005) 417–428.

Dimension III. Relations in time. Intergenerational relations, interactions between ages and values are core issues of a historic era and the transition out of it. The experience in education is one field where the direct intergenerational relations can be tested and improved.

Dimension IV. Generations in space. Generational changes characterize not only societies but also their worldwide spatial development. Different world systems are labelled by global powers and their relations to each other as well as to the other parts of the world. Nowadays good deal of talk is about emerging powers and the world faces a new restructuring of the economic order. Visions and views of new generations from non-dominant societies are welcomed.

In this special issue we tried to collect experience and give examples to all of the mentioned dimensions of generations as follows.

## 2. Dimension I

Integral future is discussed by Éva Hideg from the viewpoint of paradigms and their advancement possibilities. To her integral futures are manifestations of the rationality of the 21st century as they are combining the theoretical and practical. The researcher defines integral futures by reconstructing futures paradigm history through a dynamic and comparative analysis. Her argument is that integral futures are entering a new phase of development by reacting to new challenges; cooperating with theoretical and practical futures; developing complementarily co-evolutionary and participatory paradigms; and completing with paradigms that lead to the evolvement of sustainability, participation and continuous knowledge integration. All this is in response to social demands for production of new knowledge.

Hideg elaborates the fragmentation of the futures field in the beginning of the 21st century and her suggestion is that the community of futurists should practice in agreement with each other, and further seek to contribute and enrich the academic achievement, knowledge and tools for futures. Her “matrixising” illustration carries out a complex meta-analysis of futures paradigms with an exploration and a systemic introduction. By using a dynamic matrix model of futures paradigm, this comparative approach allows insights into the characteristics of the futures as a scientific field and an overview of the competing current paradigms.

In the evolution of the futures paradigms there have been three major types so far: the positivistic, the evolutionary and the critical paradigms. Hideg follows the paradigmatic change history over time with reference to Kuhn's pattern of scientific evolution (1962), and consequently shows the reader these periods for futures studies: the 1970s and the 1980s as the beginning; the end of the 1980s and the 1990s as the paradigm crises; the 1990s and the early 2000 as a paradigm shift. With this she refers to the current competition between futures paradigms.

Hideg takes reference to the Gödel theory and to the argumentation of Feyerabend and states that each paradigm has a blind spot and when recognized it will pave the way to a paradigm shift. The blind spot is its failure to recognise the futures, inherent in the present. The researcher is leading to imply that action by humankind, significance of choosing possible futures or the future shaping individual efforts, are influenced by social values as foundations in preparing forecasts.

The creative Hideg analysis covers the Positivist futures paradigm, the Evolutionary futures paradigm, the Critical futures paradigm, the Co-Evolutionary paradigm of theoretical futures and the Participatory paradigm of practical futures. Her matrix has seven components to which each paradigm is related to. These are revealing the picture of the time line and the content of the developed paradigmatic approaches. Changes and alterations of individual characteristics over time are noted, so the matrix is suited for expressing also complex paradigm dynamics. Thus the dynamic collation is not harmoniously fitting the content typologies usually quoted in the bibliographies. As the dynamic paradigm-matrix remains hypothetical and conditional it needs the full description of the internal consistence, reconstruction of methodology analysis of futures literature, demonstration of the main reasons for paradigm changes, their circumstances and consequences, supporting arguments, historical facts, practical forecasts, foresight studies backed by solutions.

The possibility of the evolutionary track is more expounded than the others because it includes most of the factors that induce the dynamism and the interconnection of the paradigm, thus it makes it possible for her to define integral futures themselves. Hideg further elaborates the construction and ingredients of the integral futures in the making. New societal demands are imposed in the field: sustainability, democratic participation and the problem of creating new knowledge. Theoretical and practical futures operate in continuous connection with each other thus creating new knowledge. The integral futures option is a process within scientific futures that with the recombination of paradigms creates a new section. It is a result of the differentiation within futures, which is the separation of several knowledge creating paths, and that of integration, which is the paradigmatic builder of interconnections of the knowledge creating paths. However, the integral view is not the end of the development of futures, but a new period that widens and modernises the capacity of futures to solve tasks by eliminating their blind spots.

Finally, Hideg points out that current integral futures consist of two futures that are independent but simultaneously develop a strong interconnection too: one is theoretical and the other is practical. They capture different issues and create knowledge accordingly. It is worth to note in the complex meta-analysis of the futures field that they both have blind spots. So the development and competition in the field of futures is not over yet.

Futures and forward-looking organisations are the topic of Jennifer M. Gidley's article in this issue. The actual claim she asks if futures organisations ahead of their times, and then elaborates her standpoints by bringing in the evidence from the past decades of futures studies literature.

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