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Megatrends as perceived in Turkey in comparison to Austria and Germany

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Abstract

Countries and companies use foresight studies to manage uncertainty. Environmental scanning and trend analyses are important tools for identifying and monitoring change. Trend analysis requires more than simply extrapolating to the future. The content of communication serves as the basis of inference so those trends could be explored.

This research uses an interdisciplinary approach combining media content analysis and factor analysis to discover many ways Turkey and the world may restructure and what the new society may look like as perceived by the individuals who participated in the survey. It determines six types of individuals in Turkey with different personal attitudes towards megatrends. Similarities and dissimilarities with previous studies in Austria and Germany are identified and discussed.

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1. Introduction

Many people in Turkey as well as in other countries are concerned over the direction in which the society may be moving. As the pace of change accelerates, this need is becoming more urgent for all to concentrate individually and as a nation on accounting of what major options may be available. A thorough awareness of such options and of the courses of actions that might be pursued to attain them would give a larger fraction of the public a new chance to participate in the formation of its own future and to provide decision-makers with a more rational planning basis.

Foresight is equivalent to a bundle of integrated [1,2] and systemic [3] efforts to look ahead in order to choose more effectively. Thereby, foresight takes into account that there is not a single possible future. Depending on action or non-action at present, many futures are possible, but only one of them will happen. To select a desirable future and to facilitate its realization is one of the aims of technology policy [4]. OECD defines foresight as “*the process involved in systematically attempting to look into the longer-term future of science, technology, the economy and society with the aim of identifying the areas of strategic research and the emerging generic technologies likely to yield the greatest economic and social benefits*” [5,6].

Foresight studies have become increasingly important as national approaches in Europe since the beginning of the 1990s [7–10]. Germany started learning from Japan so that, meanwhile, a series of Delphi studies are available in Germany [11]. Delphi’98, the second comprehensive foresight study of Germany, started in 1996. In the first round of the Delphi’98, the experts were additionally asked to reveal their personal opinion about the chances of occurrence of some 19 megatrends and their probable influence on the general development of science and technology in the future [11–13].

The Austrian Delphi Study in 1996 included 17 megatrends and the participants were asked for their opinion on the trends—whether they agreed or not—and a time horizon divided into two—trends will be realized before the end of 2015 and later than 2015. The participants have assessed the impact of trends on science and technology on four different categories as in the German megatrend questionnaire [14].

In this paper, we aim to assess the Turkish individual’s perceptions of developing megatrends and compare the findings with the results of megatrend studies done in Germany and Austria in 1996. The present study is the first study in Turkey aimed at determining evolving megatrends. It is a pilot study in scope. We carried out this research as an exploratory and demonstrative project.

In the next section, we review literature on foresight, trends and content analysis. Section 3 gives the methodology. Section 4 gives the results. Section 5 reports personal opinions for similar scenarios on future. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. Trends and foresight

Several leading social theorists have pointed out that one of the most significant features of modernity is its attitude to time in general and the future in particular. For modern societies, the future is something to be carefully thought about, influenced and, ideally, planned. The future may not be known ex-ante, but it is useful to remind ourselves that the future is created by human beings and, insofar as this happens, the question of foresightful action—action that aims at influencing what will be—becomes relevant and important to explore [15].

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