

Dealing with future selves (2023)

Intro:

Policymakers strive to establish future-focused policies that set the pathway and conditions for a better future and society. However, developing policy that effectively considers a range of possible future state is often easier said than done.

Especially as our world is in transition. We don't live in an era of change, but in a change of eras.¹ Current systems are nearing their end and no longer meet the demands that we, as humans, place on them. The systems must now reinvent themselves, but we humans must reinvent ourselves too.

The Futures Gardens project supports policy makers in their efforts of envisioning and working with these possible transformational futures. The Futures Gardens team scans for signs of new indicating these possible futures, makes these possible futures come alive, and checks with citizens how they perceive these possible futures.

Context

Dealing with future selves: There is an increasing understanding of the importance of intertemporal choices (the ones we make not for ourselves alone, but also for future citizens and society overall- especially regarding climate change and environmental degradation) and new more related ways of trying to connect with our future citizens and future societies². Various initiatives are emerging, from government commissioners, for future generations to “climate black boxes” as messages to “future us”³. With so much at stake, citizens will want to deal more explicitly with their (individual and collective) trauma and take better care of their future selves, including consciously relating to them and even involving them in political decisions.

Headline:

The emergent future has the power to rewrite the past. Detox, integrate and transform. Who are we and where do we **want** to go?

Horizon scans:

- 1.1. What is writing the story of life – how much are our worldview and values influencing our life and our relation with the environment? (insights from: memory reconstruction theory, quantum retro-causality, biocentrism, post-memory, integral & developmental theories)
- 1.2. Togetherness / Connect Home / The formidable links between earthlings – how much are we (already) interconnected? Can we imagine our future as collectives? (insights from collectives as the locus of knowledge / intelligence, brain synchronization, electromagnetic fields of the brain and heart, microbiome, shared DNA, individual organism vs processes view in biology)
- 1.3. Collective healing and trauma integration (in relation with environment) – can healing personal/collective trauma significantly help our ability / capacity to makes

¹ Rotmans, J. (2023). Embracing chaos; how to deal with a world in crisis? Emerald Publishing Limited 9781837536351, 183753635X

² Hershfield, H. E. (2019). The self over time. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 26, 72-75. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.06.004

³ <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/australians-create-black-box-hold-world-accountable-climate-crisis-2021-12-07/>

changes? (insights from: biophobia, going beyond guilt shame and pride in eco-activism, personal/ancestral/collective trauma healing and integration)

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- 1.4. Expanded affective ecosystems – as we deepen our understanding of emotions and embrace new technologies, what practices and environments enhance the diversification, transparency and entanglement of emotions, and how will the fabric of society change? (insights from: acknowledging emotions of non-human beings, brain that feels, emotion recognition, emotion sharing and efficiency, emotional labour, psychedelics)
- 1.5. Systemic communication breakdown – the fabric of our society have been already questioned and an era of exploration is underway. Are we on a sustainable path of civilizational change or will we risk systemic failures on the way? (intergenerational fairness, eco feminism, collective mental disfunctions, transformation of systems)

Research by:

Foresight on Demand – Institutul Prospectiva - Radu Gheorghiu / gheorghiu.radu.cristian@gmail.com & Bianca Dragomir / bianca.dragomir@prospectiva.ro

Futures garden immeasurably transforms culture, policy and behaviour.

Annex – Horizon Scans

Theme **Dealing with future selves**

The emergent future has the power to rewrite the past. Detox, integrate and transform. Who are we, where do we ‘want’ to go/create?

1.1. What is writing the story of life

How much are our worldview and values influencing our life and our relation with the environment?

Memory reconstruction theory

“Memories are not fixed and unchanging, but rather are constructed and reconstructed based on our current knowledge, beliefs, and expectations”

Quantum retrocausality

“Retrocausal models suggest that there is a mechanism that allows circumstances in the future to correlate with past states. This scenario could remove the threats to locality and realism, though there’s disagreement among experts about the implications of these models.”

Biocentrism

Biocentrism is the idea that life creates reality.

“Without consciousness, ‘matter’ dwells in an undetermined state of probability. Any universe that could have preceded consciousness only existed in a probability state”

“The biocentric view of the timeless, spaceless cosmos of consciousness allows for no true death in any real sense. When a body dies, it does so not in the random billiard-ball matrix but in the all-is-still-inescapably-life matrix.” (Robert Lanza, Biocentrism)

Idealism is the notion that reality is essentially mental. While the dominant paradigm of reality is that matter is primordial, idealism can be consistently supported by philosophy, neuroscience, psychology and quantum physics ([book](#))

Post-memory

“Post-memory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.” [website](#)

Integral & developmental theories

“Kohlberg's theory holds that moral reasoning, which is the basis for ethical behaviour, has six identifiable developmental constructive stages – each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than the last. Kohlberg suggested that the higher stages of moral development provide the person with greater capacities/abilities in terms of decision making and so these stages allow people to handle more complex dilemmas.”(Rest, James; Clark Power; Mary Brabeck (May 1988). "Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987)". American Psychologist)

(Robert Kegan The Evolving Self / Lawrence Kohlberg – Stages of Moral Development / Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs / Ken Wilber- Integral Theory/...)

1.2. Togetherness /Connect 4321Homme/ The formidable links between earthlings

How much are we (already) interconnected? Can we imagine our future as collectives?

Collectives as the locus of knowledge / intelligence

“Since embedding a brain within a social structure changes how it and other brains perform, it makes no sense to only study individual minds in isolation, because it doesn't provide the full picture... It is based on the notion that intelligence is a dynamic of looping cause and effect among multiple brains.” [article](#)

Brain synchronization

“The brains of human participants mirrored each other on a neurological level when engaging in activities together, such as making funny, meaningless gestures with their hands while watching each other.” Another study involved giving one of two romantic partners a painful stimulus – either alone in a room, in a room with their partner, or in a room with their partner while holding hands – and monitoring the effects on brain synchronisation. Unsurprisingly, hand-holding produced the most similarity in partners' brain signals, and the person in pain reported that it also eased the pain.” [article](#); [article](#)

Electromagnetic fields of the brain and heart

“With an electrical component about 60 times greater and an electromagnetic energy field 5000 times greater than the brain's, the heart's energy is said to reach about three feet outside of the physical body and can be detected in another person sitting nearby via an electrocardiogram (ECG). Positive emotions such as love generate a harmonious pattern in the heart's rhythm, leading to coherence and greater emotional regulation.” [article](#)

Microbiome

A holobiont is an entity formed by the association of different species that become an ecological unit, or a multi-species complex. A holobiont generates new morphological, physiological and immunological characteristics – among others – that do not exist separately in species. In other words, what we consider to be an “organism” can actually be a set of integrated organisms. This may question the very existence of the “individual” as we typically understand it. Understanding ourselves as holobionts not only has implications for our health, but also for the environment. [article](#)

Shared microbiome: “We share parts of our microbiomes with the people we spend the most time with.” [article](#)

Shared DNA

We share the information encoded within our genes with all other life forms. We gained important insights into human health and disease through studying organisms that don't even remotely resemble us (e.g. roundworm, zebrafish, squids etc) [article](#)

Individual vs. processes (in biology)

*“*process view* - organisms and other biological systems exist not as fixed objects or materials but as flowing patterns and relationships in a river of flux.”*

1.3. Collective healing and trauma integration (in relation with environment)

Can healing personal/ancestral/collective trauma significantly help our ability/capacity to make changes?

Biophobia

“Biophobia is the aversive response, such as fear and disgust, that people can show towards some natural stimuli, settings, or situations. Excessive biophobia can reduce people's support for pro-biodiversity policies and actions, and increase their antagonism towards nature, both of which can have enormously detrimental impacts on biodiversity conservation. There are likely several self-reinforcing feedback loops whereby the consequences of excessive biophobia lead to increases in negative feelings towards nature through strengthened human disconnection from nature”. ([The vicious cycle of biophobia](#))

Going beyond guilt, shame and pride in eco-activism

Guilt, shame and anger promoted by eco-activism is sometimes seen as necessary ([article](#))
“In-group responsibility for environmental damage increased participants' guilt and anger, whereas in-group responsibility for environmental protection increased participants' pride” ([article](#))

However, the efficiency the politics of guilt as a driver of social change in view of protecting the environment seems insufficient. Can we also boost a less egocentric perspective in relation to the environment? Can we go beyond protecting towards immersing and caring? (paradigm based on the S&T&I for ecosystem 2050 project)

Personal/Ancestral/Collective trauma healing and integration

“...by coming together to integrate the past and heal trauma, we can unlock vast reserves of untapped energy and hidden potential, a profound resource that can be consciously used to light the way toward better possible futures.”
https://www.kosmosjournal.org/kj_article/collective-trauma-and-our-emerging-future/

1.4. Expanded affective ecosystems

As we deepen our understanding of emotions and embrace new technologies, what practices and environments enhance the diversification, transparency and entanglement of emotions, how will the fabric of society change?

Acknowledging emotions of non-human beings

Ethologists who study animal behaviour increasingly accept the idea that fear keeps animals away from predators, lust draws them toward each other, panic motivates their social solidarity and care glues their parent-offspring bonds. Just like us, they have an inner life because it helps them navigate their outer life.

“Human culture and language may be the result of 'self-domestication': an evolutionary process that leads to less aggressive and more prosocial individuals. A research team argues that elephants -- like humans and bonobos -- may also be self-domesticated” (article)

“People and other great apes are known for their willingness to help others in need, even strangers. Now, researchers have shown for the first time that some birds -- and specifically African grey parrots -- are similarly helpful.” (article)

“The social life of corvids [birds] is a crucial factor for whether the birds act generously or not” (study)

Brain that feels

Our rational mind is truly embodied, and without this emotional embodiment we have no preferences. In order for our minds to go beyond syntax to semantics, we need feelings. And our ancestral minds were rich in feelings before they were adept in computations...The brain that 'feels' precedes the brain that 'thinks'. [article](#)

Emotion recognition

“The interest in emotion recognition and practical implementation of this technique is steadily increasing and finds more areas of application”. Current methods use sensors (e.g., for Electroencephalography, Electrocardiography, Heart Rate Variability, Electromyogram, Electrooculography, Galvanic Skin Response, Respiration Rate Analysis, Skin Temperature Measurements) or visual analysis (Facial Expressions, Body Posture, and Gesture Analysis) and Voice analysis. The best models use a combination of those inputs and machine learning for data analysis (Human Emotion Recognition: Review of Sensors and Methods. Sensors, <https://doi.org/10.3390/s20030592>)

Emotion sharing and efficiency

Sharing emotions is increasingly acknowledged as contributing to regulating collaborative intentions in group problem-solving ([article](#))

Emotional Labour

Hackman describes emotional labour as “the editing work of emotions that someone would do in order to have an effect on the emotions of someone else.” It happens in formal as well as informal settings, but is often “offloaded onto women,” or other disadvantaged groups in society. She says that even if this kind of work is noticed, it still goes unpaid. And if we continue to ignore and devalue it, we are exacerbating inequality. ([article](#))

Psychedelics

Psychedelic drugs like psilocybin and ayahuasca have been used in spiritual ceremonies for thousands of years in non-Western cultures. More recently, psychedelics have captured the attention of Westerners, and scientific interest in the medicinal effects of these drugs has resurfaced. Evidence shows that the use of psychedelics increases spirituality, and in turn, leads to better emotion regulation. [article](#)

1.5. Systemic communication breakdown

The very fabric of our society (generations, gender, work, communities etc) have been already questioned and an era of exploration is underway. Are we on a sustainable path of civilizational change or will we risk systemic failures on the way?

Intergenerational fairness

Older people today hold disproportionate power because they have the numbers and the means to do so. Their voices, amplified by money, carry farther politically than those of the young and impecunious. Dealing with the repercussions of political decisions may affect the young in disproportionate ways (e.g. The 2016 Brexit vote, in which 73 percent of the 18-24 age group cast a ballot for Remain when more than 60 percent of 65 and older voted Leave). A profound and growing experiential divide now fuels conflicting outlooks, material interests and political priorities. The environment is one of the critical lines separating the old from the young (see the youth-led Global Climate Strike). The other critical divide is the economy. The older generation enjoyed a comparatively high minimum wage, affordable college tuition and reasonable costs of living; for everyone after, stagnating wages, ballooning student debt and unaffordable housing have become the norm. (article)

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism. Ecofeminist philosophy offers a set of principles to challenge current conceptions of environmental management and to build a different relationship with nature: first, by developing ecocentric connections where humanity is seen as part of the web of life; second, by revaluing epistemological frameworks to include what is currently denied by hyper-rationalism; and, finally, by focusing on an ethic of care as a moral imperative and call for action.(article, article)

Moving beyond gendered identities. Feminist and gender fluidity movements can be seen not only as a reaction to and re-positioning in the context of a history of male dominance, but as a sign of transcending the role of the feminine-masculine as a creative polarity in society and possibly as an enabler of other polarities (e.g., individual-collective).

Collective mental disfunctions

The incidence anxiety has reached considerable weight in population, more depressions, all sorts of anxieties, etc. which suggest that we may actually have systemic challenges (e.g., uncertainty, speed of change, disconnect from nature, too much competition for attention) that is affecting society. And probably we did not reach the bottom yet.

Collective neuroscience offers a different way of seeing neuropsychiatric conditions such as depression and schizophrenia, for example – not as instances of individual ‘dysfunctions’ in the brain, but as phenomena that emerge from multiple dynamic physiological and social processes. Since brains appear to work differently when placed in relationships with others, we might begin to recognise the necessity to tailor interventions to improve mental health in terms of the wider social environment, rather than focusing on individual pathologies. (article)