

Crazy Foresight is a workshop to be organized in Bucharest, in January 2011. The coordinators are Prof. George Cairns and Prof. Ziauddin Sardar.

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Vision and Objectives

'Any useful idea about the future', says Jim Dator 'considered by many to be grandfather of the field' 'should appear to be ridiculous'^[1]. Why? Because much of the future is going to be totally novel and has not been currently or previously experienced. Thus, anything useful that one can say about the future would appear to most people as quite crazy. Dator goes on to state, in his Seventh Law of Futures, that 'if futurists expect to be useful, they should expect to be ridiculed and for their ideas initially to be rejected'. In a slightly different vein, Sardar's First Law of Futures Studies states that 'futures studies are wicked'. They are wicked because they deal with 'wicked problems' which are by nature complex, chaotic, interconnected with in-built contradictions and uncertainty. But futures studies are also 'wicked in the sense that they are playfully open ended (like a 'scientific' discipline they do not offer a single solution but only possibilities). Their boundaries, such as they are, are totally porous and they are quite happy to borrow ideas and tools, whatever is needed, from any and all disciplines and discourses'^[2].

So what some people may perceive as crazy may actually be highly useful. And wickedness 'that highlights and plays with complexity and uncertainty with verve and wit' can actually open up new domains for the future, unlocking the 'unthought' of foresight and futures studies. Far from being irrelevant, crazy and playfully wicked ideas have a positive role in futures and foresight work and can be useful tools for investigating the outer boundaries of futures deliberations and perceptions.

This workshop explores the role of crazy and wicked ideas in futures studies 'an exercise that has never been undertaken before. It asks such questions such as:

- What is perceived as 'crazy' and 'wicked'? Are perceptions culturally grounded? Can we define and pin down such notions? Can we escape negative connotations of them?
- How do we encourage genuinely crazy and wicked ideas in the exploration of alternative futures 'in scenario work, visioning, game theory and other methods?
- How do we break free of dominant paradigms of rationality, 'the truth' and a search for the 'right answer' when dealing with complex and ambiguous problems?
- How do ideas 'like the personal computer' turn from being crazy fantasies to every day realities?
- Are all crazy ideas relevant? Or, are some more relevant than others? If so, how do we distinguish between the two? How do we define 'relevance' in any case?
- Is it possible to judge the validity and quality of crazy futures? If so, what criteria would we use to evaluate such notions?
- Can crazy and wicked ideas contribute to shaping and formulating policy?

Format

The workshop will be organised as a 'round table' format. Participants will be required to submit a brief discussion paper for distribution at least 3 weeks before the event. From these, the coordinators will identify a number of key themes and issues: both of convergence in thinking and, specifically, of divergence. These will be used to form the initial agenda for an open dialogue in line with the principles of the Bohm Dialogues on Day One. On Day Two, the coordinators will set an outline agenda, derived from Day One, that seeks to focus thinking towards futures for higher education in Romania within a global context.

Deliverables

A number of specific papers will be commissioned for the workshop with the hope that they will become the basis for a special issue of Futures on 'Crazy Futures'.

Participants

The workshop will bring together colourful characters from the fields of Foresight & Future Studies, from Australia, USA, Europe and South-East Asia:

- George Cairns, School of Management, RMIT University, Australia
- Jim Dator, Hawaii Research Center for Future Studies, Grandfather of Futures Studies, who first suggested the idea of crazy futures, USA
- Jennifer Gidley, President of the World Future Studies Federation, Australia
- Lik Meng Lee, University Sains Malaysia, Malaysia
- Alfonso Montuori, California Institute of Integral Studies and World Futures Journal, USA
- Ziauddin Sardar, Futures Journal, UK
- Wendy Schultz, Infinite Futures, Independent Futurist who specialises on crazy ideas, UK
- Jordi Serra del Pino, Periscopi de Prospectiva i Strategia, Independent Futurist, Spain

Rapporteur:

- Campbell Warden, Instituto de Astrofisica de Canarias, Spain

Participants:

- Cristina Aliman, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Lavinia Andrei, University of Bucharest
- Irina Bujor, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Raluca Ciobotaru, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Adrian Curaj, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Radu Gheorghiu, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Cezar Haj, Bologna Secretariat
- Alina Irimia, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Iulia Maries, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding

- Alexandru Mironov, Science & Techniques Magazine
- Adrian Nicolae, Science & Techniques Magazine
- Octavian Popa, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Alexandra Roman, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
- Nicolae Toderas, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration
- Marc Ulieriu, Science & Techniques Magazine
- Lazar Vlasceanu, University of Bucharest
- Marian Zulean, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding

References

1. ? http://www.futures.hawaii.edu/stage/2006_06_01_archive.php
2. ? Ziauddin Sardar, 'The Namesake: futures, futures studies, futurology, futuristic, foresight - what's in a name?' Futures 42:3 April 2010.