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10. Ethical perspectives in futures studies

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Futures research, according to Amara (1981), has three different tasks: imagination, analysis and participation. Imagination brings up alternatives not yet seen although still possible in the future. Analysis places emphasis on both factors and actors creating the future. The basic questions to be asked are, Who are the key actors? What are their interests? Who will have power to fulfil their vision? The final task, participation, helps actors re-formulate the future towards a preferred alternative based on shared values.

As a starting point for the futures studies are Ossip Flechtheim's thoughts about futurology and its purpose, which he formulated in the mid-1940s. This vision includes the prevention of wars, guaranteeing of peace and prevention of famine and poverty. According to Flechtheim, the best solution for this is to create a new *Homo humanus* with ethical principles (Flechtheim 1972).

FuturesLab CoFi is a research group at Laurea UAS whose focus is on futures research, foresight and scenario approach. CoFi was founded in 1999 at Åbo Akademi University and moved to Laurea in 2010. FuturesLab CoFi is an expert in futurology, especially in combining futures research with strategy work, both in theory and practice. Working in close co-operation with businesses, local and national governments and citizen-driven NGOs, it is possible to have an impact on the decisions made today but posing influencing on the future in the long run. FuturesLab CoFi offers organisations research, development, consulting and education services, having experience in short-term customer-specific projects at the local level as well as in long-term, multi-partner futures research projects in international contexts (CoFi 2020).

Futuristic perspectives will bring to the RDI work at Laurea's FuturesLab CoFi important themes. The need for clean water and renewable energy, the prevention of marginalisation of any citizen group and responsible business development are in focus at CoFi. Ethical perspectives are an integral part of RDI work at Laurea, and futures research will complete that with the aspects of sustainable development in which future generations

are systematically in focus (Bruntland 1987). Living conditions in economic, social and ecological perspectives are important in Laurea's key areas of RDI, including, e.g., safety and security, the circular economy and social and healthcare issues. All these include ethical aspects from the futures perspectives, paying attention to privacy in digital operating environments, responsible consumer behaviour and production amidst global climate crisis, and equality between present and future generations and between different social groups. According to professor Pentti Malaska, "In futurology we have to focus on issues in the long run, having influence on the whole universe at least for the next 1,000 years."

A timeframe in futures research will cover more than 20 years to guarantee conditions for the good life of future generations. Multidisciplinary futures research (Bell 1997) relies on participatory methodology to get all voices heard but also to confirm the citizen's role as an active subject, not only as an object in society (see also Meristö et al. 2016).

In this article, futures research and its applications at Laurea UAS's FuturesLab CoFi will be described in the perspective of ethics. Serving as a starting point for the futures studies are Ossip Flechtheim's books about futurology and its purpose as early as the mid-1940s, including the prevention of wars, the securing of peace and prevention of famine and poverty. According to Flechtheim, the best solution for this is to create a new Homo humanus with ethical principles.

Futures perspectives based on Flechtheim will bring to Laurea's RDI work important themes like the need for clean water and renewable energy, prevention of marginalisation of any citizen group, and responsible business development. The time frame in futures research will cover more than 20 years to guarantee conditions for the good life of the future generations, too. Multidisciplinary futures research will rely on participatory methodology to get all voices heard but also to confirm the citizen's role as an active subject, not only as an object in society.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Futures research will have as its basis the global challenges concerning the future of the planet and humankind. The UN's goals to end poverty and protect the planet are the guiding ethical principles in the futures research community, too. The responsibility for future generations will be strongly accounted for when estimating the consequences of alternative scenarios from different perspectives.

A holistic view to the future means a multidisciplinary approach with political, economic, social, technological and ecological dimensions. These so-called PESTE perspectives (Meristö 1991) take into account both actors and factors from different levels, including the global, international, continental, regional, national and local levels.

Nearly all countries have promised to improve living conditions to protect the planet and improve their citizens' life as based on UN principles. These sustainable development goals include 17 sub-goals, covering areas such as living conditions on land for humans and for wildlife but also responsible consumption, sustainable housing and sustainable economic growth, among others (UN 2020).

FuturesLab CoFi Laurea focuses on sustainable development with all its aspects, including economic, social and ecological development. Methodologically, CoFi will use especially on the action scenario-approach (Meristö 1991), which means not only creating alternative scenarios for the future but also formulating recommendations for decision-makers based on scenarios to make better decisions today and to improve the conditions in the long-run.

LAUREA'S FUTURES PROJECTS RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The main research areas at FuturesLab CoFi include the wellbeing of different age and citizen groups, living in sustainable communities, sustainable business practices in global competition, and future skills and competences to create a better world from a sustainability perspective.

The ecological perspective includes environmental (E), health (H) and safety (S) dimensions. These EHS criteria play an important role in the citizen's mind, though individually with a changing importance of ranking. The individual's attitude varies, based on their position in society and their community but also based on the time perspective of the future. According to Club of Rome (CoR 2020), most people focus on their neighbourhoods, relatives and families in the short run, and only a few will pay attention to the planet and humankind along a longer time horizon. The shorter the futures timeframe to consider, the more selfish the choices among futures alternatives are. Concerning the RDI work, the expectations of the results are often opportunistic, looking for immediate benefits over a short term instead of considering their long-term consequences. Therefore, futures research is needed as an incubator to lengthen and broaden perspectives to make choices to fulfil sustainable goals as reported by the UN in order to improve living conditions equally.

In FuturesLab CoFi's portfolio at Laurea UAS, we have had a wide range of projects supporting the UN's goals for sustainable development. These projects will push staff and students as well as project partners towards responsible choices based on the UN's criteria for sustainable development goals. A couple of examples from CoFi's projects will be presented as examples here. They all fulfil not only the UN's goals for sustainable development but deal with scenarios in the long run to achieve the goals of futurology.

These projects, related to the **UN's goals for clean water, clean energy and sustainable economic growth, include opportunities not only for people but for the planet too**. From CoFi's viewpoint, these projects fulfil the UN's goals in terms of *think globally, act locally*. Projects presented here as examples are the CIRCLE project coordinated by Dr. Lauri Tenhunen from HAMK and financed by ERDF for two years (2017–2018); the Elli project coordinated by Seppo Niittymäki from HAMK and financed by ERDF for two years (2016–2017); and Sustainable Community Scenarios, financed by Tekes for 2010–2011 and coordinated by professor Pekka Kauppi from Helsinki University.

In the **CIRCLE project**, we created economically and environmentally sensible opportunities for energy and nutrient recycling in the water supply, whereas in **project Elli** the focus was on promoting clean-tech business, efficiency and regional energy production in three target residential areas in Lahti, Riihimäki and Hämeenlinna. Companies and other stakeholders participated in future workshops in order to create alternative future scenarios to support energy-efficient regional planning. **The Sustainable Community Scenarios project** investigated alternative futures for organising people's lives in order to sustainably live, work, travel, eat, recreate, construct and care for the elderly. This results in a community that follows the principles of ecological, social and economic sustainability both in regards to its structures as well as its activities in long run.

On the other hand, CoFi's projects will focus on challenges at the individual level, based on the UN's goals for equality, education and good health, which include opportunities for people with disabilities and restrictions. These goals will be covered in CoFi's projects, i.e., in the project ZET, funded by ESF from 2015–2017 and coordinated by Hanna Tuohimaa, the project Työke funded by ESF from 2017–2020 and coordinated by Hanna Hakulinen from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, and project Nappi, receiving financial support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to promote health for 2018–2020, coordinated by

Heidi Jokinen from Laurea UAS. These projects prevent marginalisation of any kind in society regarding, for example, youth or people of occupational age.

In the Zet project, young people developed, in collaboration with experts from the game industry, a game or youth for envisioning their future and planning and managing their lives in order to avoid marginalisation. The process provides youth positive change and opportunities to be engaged and influence society. The design process was carried out in futures workshops in Hanko and Lohja. The Työke project, on the other hand, has its background in the changes in working life cultures and in the transition process of Finnish social and health services. The aim of this project is to develop functional integration between occupational health systems and social and health services, not only for those who have a job but rather for all citizens of working age. Alternative scenarios for the next 20 years have been developed to meet those challenges proactively, not reactively. The Nappi project encourages young people with special needs to engage in physical activities and will support their active lifestyles. Young people in the target group may deal with various physical, mental or social obstacles that hinder their participation in normal life activities, such as sports and other forms of exercise. Nappi's aim is not only to promote the health of young people with special needs but to support their wellbeing by increasing participation in order to prevent loneliness and marginalisation.

CONCLUSION

Futures research and ethics go hand-in-hand in promoting conditions for a good life, independently on your roots and age. The UN's sustainable development goals form the shared values for the activities in research and development work but also in life in general. In terms of future generations, sustainability as a guiding principle means economic, social and ecological sustainability: live today in such a way that future generations will have opportunities to live their lives according to their dreams and wishes (Brundtland 1987).

At Laurea FuturesLab, CoFi co-operates within the international network of futurists and the larger innovation community to make the world a better place. At the same time, CoFi will integrate foresight projects into regional development work with actors from local and national ecosystems, as well as into the educational programs at Laurea. In this way, the values and visions based on *Homo humanus*, described by Flechtheim in his book on futurology, will be shared widely in society, not only today but in the future.

While the future is not predictable, it is not predetermined: it can be influenced by individual choices and actions (Amara 1981). In the near future, digitalisation will play a larger role in our everyday lives. It is a huge challenge to ensure the equality and participation of all citizens in this transformational process. Furthermore, at a time when artificial intelligence is replacing human labour, the ethical issues concerning future solutions will rise up in many new ways (Ollila 2019).

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