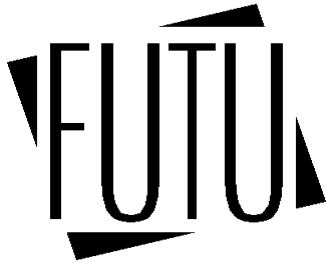TURUN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULU
TULEVAISUUDEN TUTKIMUSKESKUS

TURKU SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
FINLAND FUTURES RESEARCH CENTRE

FUTU

FUTU-publication 6/97

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**FUTURES STUDIES AND THE TRENDS
TOWARDS UNITY AND DIVERSITY**

The purpose of the research programme Citizenship and ecomodernization in the information society – the futures approach – is to study the social and ecological dimensions of emerging information society. Particularly we aim at assessing social impacts of new informational structures that are impinged on citizens. We also focus on analyzing the ways application of information technology influences on targets and realization of sustainable development. The study programme comprises of ten individual research project organized around above sketched themes.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Although futures studies is a field which cannot be described as scientific (as its object the future has yet to exist), they nonetheless have extremely sophisticated methods at their disposal and can be of great use to other disciplines. Recent history has challenged the capacity of the social sciences to address the increasingly interrelated and complex issues of the present. In their attempt to search for trends from the past to the present into the future, and to set and clarify future goals, as well as the routes to be followed to achieve them, futures studies can be extremely useful to the social sciences. At the same time, futures studies need the support of the social sciences in order better to understand the past and the present. Even for setting and clarifying goals, futures studies must also have the support of sound, reliable information and data concerning the past and the present.

Another important role of futures studies is that of preparing and educating for the future. Never again will the future be created gradually by a process of slow change. Especially in the social sphere, changes will be increasingly rapid and interrelated. It is important that futures studies should provide indications of the different paces of change in the various areas in conjunction with the social sciences and indeed with all sciences.

Futures studies (Barbieri) are necessarily interdisciplinary. They address complex situations in a global context and deal with specific areas in geographical or content terms. They are also normative, in the sense that in looking ahead they are always involved in values in one way or another. And, finally, they should be participatory, with the contribution of those who will be involved in their realization, and certainly dynamic, since they must constantly be updated following changes in society.

"Unity and Diversity"- the topic of the 1989 World Conference of the International Sociological Association- has been addressed in various ways in the context of futures studies. It is particularly important and timely that social scientists and futures studies scholars should analyze unity and diversity at the present historical juncture. In this article I shall try to develop such an analysis from a future-oriented point of view.

2.   WAYS OF LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE
AND HOW THEY ARE RELATED TO
UNITY AND DIVERSITY

There are several different ways of looking into the future. One can look at the future from an extrapolative perspective, considering the past and the present and extrapolating into the future; one can look at a future which, from point of view of the present, is a utopia; one can search in the present for the indications of the realization or the frustration of goals hoped for or feared.

Of these, the second is the most ancient approach and can be traced back to Plato and his Republic, Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and many other scholars over the centuries. This second approach is highly value loaded. It is also usually closely related to the historical moment in which it is developed and in contradiction with the situation experienced by its authors. According to some, this approach is a way of avoiding reality, having no real foundation and stemming from a value system.

But even utopia, as conceived by Plato, Bacon or More, is in some way connected to the present, albeit often in contradictory terms. In Plato's case, utopia was a society based on justice - something not feasible at the time; in that of More, a society that was equal - highly improbable at the time; in Bacon's case a society based on the centrality of human capacities.

The first approach - the extrapolative approach - studies trends in the past and the present as guides to the future. It was used especially after World War II, when futures studies gained certain formalization, more or less simultaneously, in the United States and France. That was a period of rapid scientific and technological progress, and changes were generally considered to be improvements on what had already been. The future perspective was a linear one, in which more and better of the same was expected. The techniques of extrapolation were developed, mainly in the United States, by mathematicians, systems analysts and so on. In this approach, which was on the whole judged to be objective, values seemed to have no place.

The events of the 1970s and especially the 1980s revealed that the futures studies developed according to this approach were not value-free at all and were always to some extent linked to choices and historical context. Events such as the growing awareness of the people of the South of the planet and the upsurgence of the Eastern European countries, with all their contradictions, have shown that extrapolation from the past and the present into the future is not objective and is always related both to a set of value systems and a specific historical moment.

In this last decade the trend in futures studies seems more to be one of setting goals in the future but, at the same time, searching in the past and especially in the present for indications of such goals being realized or not. This third approach is neither utopian nor extrapolative, but what I have referred to as one of vision (Barbieri, 1983).

Thinking about the future can never be detached from the past or the present. Indeed for many, such as John McHale (McHale, 1969), the future orders the present in terms of order towards objectives and gives meaning to the past. We understand the deeds and the decisions of the past by seeing its results in the future.

For example, the full impact of de Toqueville's remarks on the United States emerged only in our century, through the capacity of the United States to demonstrate the results of democracy to the rest of the world. At the same time the future also gives order to the present.

3.   UNITY AND DIVERSITY

The topic of unity and diversity has been debated in a variety of ways in different cultural and epistemological contexts. In Christian thought, unity is part of the basic belief that all is one in God, that humanity will find its unity at the end of time in eternal happiness in which every form of diversity will disappear. According to other epistemological approaches, differences will continue to exist.

Economic diversity was at the basis of Marxist ideology. Political diversity has been at the basis of many of the cruellest conflicts over the centuries. Technological diversity is at the basis of many of present conflicts. A historical study would surely bring to the fore many of the contradictions existing in the last century. However, for the moment, we shall consider the foundations of the more recent contradictions between the trends toward unity and diversity.

Events of the very recent past stemming from the Second World War showed trends toward unity. At the beginning, it was a dichotomous unity: East and West, centrally planned economy and free market economy, centralized decision-making and representative decision making at the political level.

However, different trends soon started to become apparent: the developing countries started to claim social justice, something not necessarily linked to centralized decision-making as many believed. Developing countries also began to realize that gaining political freedom from the former colonial powers would not necessarily mean they would achieve economic independence.

The trend toward a dichotomous unity has been accompanied by an increasing uniformity of aspirations and desires at the global level, in part due to increased communication via the media, both audio and visual. Everyone wants cars, videos etc; everyone wants to participate in the economic market, as is emerging very clearly now in the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe; women all over the world want equal rights.

In this last case, women first voiced their political rights in relation to men; then demanded that their social role be acknowledged. More recently still, women have been indicating their capacity to address environmental crises at the global level. This is a growing phenomenon that emerged very clearly in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

Minorities the world over want to have a voice, from the Basques in Spain to the American Indians in the United States and the Aboriginal population of Australia. Citizens the world over are claiming the right to decide on their role in society.

Thus we have two trends: one toward unity, which is greatly fostered by the media and originates mainly in the North, and the other, which is much more contradictory, toward diversity. Below the superficial uniformity, at the deeper level of aspirations and values, diversity is being further reinforced, especially in terms of culture, i.e. values, behaviour and value-loaded action, which take much longer to change.

The need to assert identity at the cultural level can often lead to an exaggerated emphasis on diversity, as in the current global emergence of different forms of fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism in Africa, the Middle East, and even in Europe is a consequence of mass migration and the need for assertion. Similar fundamentalisms are emerging in Christianity, with the proliferation of various sects, such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostal movement in Latin America. In Japan the Shintoist religion has been experiencing the same phenomenon in recent years. What seems to be emerging is a need for differentiation in a vision of a global world seemingly moving toward unity.

Another expression of this same phenomenon is the emergence of different forms of terrorism: in the name of a belief or a political will, such groups use drastic actions to show their differentiation. Another example is the refusal (sometimes violent) to co-exist with other differentiating groups, as in the former Yugoslavia.

I believe that in the years to come this dual trend - global thinking and differentiated aspirations - will continue. The market will probably become more and more globalized, because of the impact of the new technologies; politically, it is not realistic to imagine that events taking place in one part of the world will not have immediate repercussions on the rest of the world. Decisions taken in China will surely influence the whole of Asia; decisions regarding the unification of Germany have had repercussions on the whole of Europe and the rest of the world.

But this apparent homogenezation will be accompanied by significant differentiation at the deeper level, at the level of what we might call the roots of life. When groups or individuals come to the essentials of life, birth, marriage, or death for example, cultural differences emerge very strongly.

Empirically, this was very apparent in research conducted in Canada on two generations of families who had migrated there from Italy, the former at the beginning of the twentieth century and the latter after World War II (Barbieri, 1991).

In terms of labour, society and education, for example, these families had integrated in Canadian society extremely well; but, in terms of the important events of life, differences remained. They continued to follow the traditions that they had been accustomed to practising in Italy, and even within their own specific region of Italy.

This is something we find in all ethnic groups and communities all over the world. Once the reasons for accepting homogenization end (improved life style, ideology or whatever) tensions and conflicts inevitably emerge. Thus the present and the future seem to point toward a dichotomy between homogeneity and unity at the global level and the re-enforcement of diversity, especially at the cultural level.

4. UNITY AND DIVERSITY: A SOURCE OF NEW DIVISIONS

Another aspect which I would like to highlight is that even the apparently marked trend toward unity is dividing the world into two groups: those who are protected in the global scenario and those who protect. Protectionism can take on different connotations. For example in Latin America, with the debt issue, we are witnessing a new form of colonialism and protectionism on the part of the industrialized countries, and the signing of specific agreements between countries. Something one would rather not have to underline is that at times even multilateral agreements are another way of establishing favoured relations that bind countries and people in a new form of subjection. Some African countries are in the same situation, vis-à-vis Europe, with rich countries on one side and poor on the other.

This is an issue, which will need to be followed very carefully in co-operation and development programmes. It is a trend which has produced extremely negative consequences, with severe environmental crisis in many African countries and which in the future will probably emerge in the relations between East and West Europe (the indications are already present in economic agreements) or even between the latter two as a whole and the US and Japan.

5.   SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE NEW DIVISIONS

Having indicated very generally some aspects of the contradictions emerging from the unity and diversity trends shall now discuss some specific features of these trends in a little more detail.

5.1.   Diversification, deriving from the world population structure, related to population settlements and migrations.

In the 24 OECD countries, the population over 65 has doubled between 1950 and 1980, increasing in absolute terms from 47 to 93 million. This seems to be an irreversible trend. The percentage of the population over sixty-five years of age, again in the OECD countries, was 8.1 per cent in 1950, 11.5 per cent in 1980 and 12 per cent in 1989.

Even more striking is the percentage of the population of the OECD countries over 75 years of age: in 1989, 4.4 per cent of the total population. It is expected to increase to 5.4 per cent in the year 2000 and 7.2 per cent by the year 2025 (de Jouvenel, 1989).

At the same time the fertility rate is decreasing in the developed countries. It is currently 1.9, which means 1.9 children per woman in fertile age (15-49 years). Italy has a rate of 1.3, the USA 2.0, and Canada 1.8. This trend is also beginning to appear in some developing countries such as Singapore, Colombia and Cuba. The global fertility rate is currently 3.3, and is 3.8 in developing countries (including China).

If we look at the overall population of the developed countries, we find that in 1992 World Population Data Sheet mid -1992) it is indicated as 1 billion 224 million. In the year 2010, it is expected to be 1 billion 333 million, and in the year 2025, 1 billion 392 million. The overall population of the developing countries (including China) was 4 billion 196 million in mid-1992, and is expected to be 5 billion 781 million by the year 2010, and 7 billion 153 million by 2025.

If we consider the younger population, in mid-1992, on average, 36 per cent of the population in the developing countries was under 15 years of age. In the developed countries, around 21 per cent of the population belongs to the under 15 age bracket, ranging from 24 per cent in ex-Yugoslavia to 17 per cent in Italy (World Population, 1992).

Another important indicator is that of the active population, i.e. the working age population between 15 and 64. In the developed countries it will foreseeably grow by 54 million in the next fifteen years, moving from 782 million (1989) to 836 million. In the developing countries the active population is expected to increase by 854 million, in respect to the 2 billion 156 million of 1989, reaching 3 billion ten million (Golini, 1988).

This is the cause of the extensive migration from the South to the North. We can expect a shortage of active population in the North and a shortage of jobs in the South. It should be stressed however that such scenarios give rise to long-term consequences, not only in economic terms but also in terms of social structures, cultural values, religion and perhaps political attitudes.

Another significant difference between the North and the South concerns the phenomenon of urbanization in the developing countries, which is increasing at an enormous rate, with vast migration from rural to urban areas. By the end of the century almost half the world's population will be living in towns: approximately two billion of the population of the developing countries and one billion that of the industrialized countries. The constant exodus from rural to urban areas in the developing countries seems unlikely to diminish. On the contrary, it may increase. Moreover, whereas in Europe and industrialized countries in general this movement from rural to urban took over a century or more, in the developing countries it has taken place in the space of about twenty years.

According to the United Nations by the year 2000 there will be five megacities with a population exceeding 15 million, three of which will be in the developing countries. The definition of megacities is a city whose population exceeds 8 million inhabitants. In the industrialized countries cities are tending to remain more or less stable even with migration from the South. In the developing countries they will continue to grow. Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Calcutta and Bombay all have had a population over 8 million since 1985. Megacities are growing in many other countries: Seoul, Teheran, Istanbul and Cairo are just some. Middle-sized cities with a population of about one million are also increasing in the developing countries.

Again, this is an example of disparity between North and South within the apparently similar framework of migration from rural to urban areas. Moreover the timing and the pace of the phenomenon is also different: urbanization in the industrialized countries accompanied industrialization whereas in the developing countries we have been witnessing urbanization without industrialization

5.2.   Science and technology

This is an indicator of both unity and diversity. On the one hand, it seems that science and technology are meant for everybody, and has the same objectives, but, on

the other hand, the new technologies are only available to those who produce them or who can afford to buy them, or even maintain them. The poorer countries can avail themselves only of those technologies that the richer countries place at their disposal.

This issue has been greatly debated. What has perhaps not been sufficiently addressed is the possibility that there may be sciences, other than those emerging from the Western civilization, which are based on empirical evidence and on the repetitivity of empirical evidence, which can be used to forecast similar events in the future.

There may be different systems of knowledge, stemming for example, from Hinduism, or from the ancient Chinese or Egyptian systems of knowledge, which have been completely overlooked by science as a potential source of problem solving. This is another dichotomy of trends with unity in science coupled with diversity in relation to other systems of knowledge that may be of great importance in the future (Nandy, 1987; Goonalitake, 1984).

5.3.   Changing centres of economic power

The continuing trend towards a single centre of economic power, as the United States used to be, is being seriously challenged by the creation of centers of economic power in the Pacific area, where Japan and the four tigers, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong, plus Australia and Thailand, and to some extent China, are showing an extraordinary vitality. The possible transfer of economic power to the Pacific and indeed the potential of a united Europe as another centre of economic power, are once again the expression of alternative possibilities and diversification and multipolarity of trends which only a few years ago seemed heading for unity, or the dichotomy of the United States and the Soviet Union. Diversification seems indeed to be the route of the immediate future.

5.4.   Ideologies

We have already referred to the re-emergence of diversity at the political and social levels. For years it seemed that the two main ideologies were capitalism and socialism. At present many believe that the former has been victorious. However we are now witnessing the emergence of local beliefs, religions, ethical systems, which are re-inforced by nationalistic ideals etc. Again this is a double trend, the outcome of which is difficult to foresee.

5.5. Social movements

Another issue to be considered in terms of unity and diversity, especially in relation to the future, is the impact of the so-called social movements. For each of these movements, as time passes there seems to be a move toward a global understanding of needs, and at the same time increasing diversification in the expression of such needs both in industrialized and developing countries.

For example, the women's movement has been a global movement, in the sense that women all over the world have a growing awareness of their role and their rights; at the same time the expression is greatly diversified, depending on whether the women belong to the developed or the developing world.

We can say the same of human rights movements, where there is a basic core, which is common to all, but also a set of diversifications, depending on the context.

In ecological movements, the global trend is survival for all, though from different perspectives, as for example in Finland, Colombia or Brazil. The basic perception of the ecological issues may be the same, but how they are faced is completely different. In Germany the ecological movement has become a political party; in Italy the movement is highly diversified and refuses to become one. In Colombia interestingly the main focus of ecological movements is education through university and education of local administrators.

5.6. Migratory movements

These show the greatest contrast, because of the population trends indicated earlier in this article. On the one hand we have the important migration from the South to the North, or from Eastern Europe to Western Europe; the migration of people who must find a job in order to survive to countries that must find workers because of their ageing population and declining working population.

These migratory movements are global, and at the same time are vehicles for the transfer of differences: values, beliefs, religious behaviours and actions. People with different family structures, or different values, behave differently in the work place and indeed in society as a whole. For example Eastern Europeans who always had a job whatever happened are not able to act as productively.

This kind of movement, in my opinion, will only contribute to furthering the differences, and will not re-enforce the trend toward unity.

6.   CONCLUSION

It seems that we must expect the contrasting trends of unity and diversity to continue. The task of sociologists with a future-oriented view is to further analyze this duality and indicate possible action for the future. At the moment the duality is showing potential for conflicts, that are already becoming serious and could become far more so without a prompt and correct analysis of events and trends and the will to overcome tensions.

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ABSTRACT

This article considers different approaches of Futures Studies to issues and favours the "vision" approach. It also looks at the role of Futures Studies in social sciences in general. It examines trends in the issue of unity and diversity, since the Second World War and some possible outcomes of such trends in the near future.

PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS:

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