

Editorial

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Journal of Futures Studies Special issue on Planetary Futures of Health and Wellbeing

The annual FFRC conference was organized in June 2022 with the theme 'Planetary Futures of Health and Wellbeing' in Turku, Finland. Prior to the conference, the COVID-19 pandemic had already lasted two years, and it also had an impact on the choice of the conference's theme. However, COVID-19 is only one phenomenon that threatens the health and well-being of our planet and its inhabitants. Several earth-shattering events are taking place at the same time: climate change, biodiversity loss, and many other human-caused phenomena that test the planetary boundaries. By now, it is clear that we need to change our daily behavior in all areas of life to ensure a habitable planet for future generations. However, change cannot be pushed only on the shoulders of individual people. Extensive systemic and structural transformations are also needed. This requires the contribution of planetary imagination and futures thinking.

The 'Planetary Futures of Health and Wellbeing' conference was organized in a hybrid format, both on-site in Turku, Finland and virtually. There were more than 300 participants and 120 papers from 27 different countries. Thanks to the timely topic and active global participation, the conference was successful in generating multidisciplinary and insightful discussions that promoted co-creating and networking between people from different backgrounds and, we hope, contributed to tackling our global challenges.

The participants of the conference had the opportunity to submit articles and reports to a special issue of the Journal of Futures Studies, which dealt with the themes of the conference. As editors, we were interested in questions such as: How can people today identify new pathways for fostering the conditions and behaviors that allow human and non-human life to thrive? How can health and wellbeing for humans and other species be supported at a planetary scale? What structures and actions are needed to produce a sufficient level of human wellbeing at the global level to improve our socio-ecological resilience?

We welcomed authors to submit manuscripts focusing on the following themes:

- Planetary futures: philosophy, methodology, ethical considerations
- Novel interconnections of health, social justice, land use planning and the environment
- Ecological regeneration and wellbeing
- Futures of mobility in relation to human health
- Cultural transformations and planetary wellbeing
- Humans and their technologies – impacts and effects of coupling tech with bodies
- Societal structures and individual agency – the need for systemic change?
- Local and global social justice, intersectionality and wellbeing
- Futures of lifestyles – relations to physical, mental, social and environmental health
- Effective governance of future health and social service systems
- Coping with past, present and future pandemics

As a result, we received a number of articles and reports that approached the requested topics from many different perspectives. We have organized the published articles so that the first four articles focus on the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual development of futures research

while also touching on the health and well-being topics of the conference. The following three articles are united by a more substantive emphasis related to the health and well-being theme of the conference. The final article combines these emphases and turns its gaze to the future by examining the need for change in our economic system.

Opening the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual articles, Knudsen, Ahlqvist, and Taylor take on the challenge of defining ‘future generations’ by reviewing the literature from the futures field and conducting a questionnaire targeted to key experts. As future health and wellbeing are sought for future generations, the epistemic considerations they raise build our foundational understanding of who is included in these future generations and where their boundaries are. Weh, Weil, de Haan, and Leinfelder, in turn, review the ‘ecosystem scenario’ concept central to integrated ecosystem assessment projects and connected to participatory scenario frameworks. Discussing different forms of capital, their paper provides an overview of aspects to consider for combining natural capital assessment and social capital formation in scenario framework design. More robust scenario frameworks, then, enable the exploration of planetary futures of health and wellbeing.

Continuing the methodologically oriented papers, Jenkins, Malho, and Hyytiäinen use a workshop to identify and categorize weak signals and wild cards related to the sustainable development of Finnish marine space and the offshore wind industry. Contributing to assessing foresight work, they also evaluate the robustness of the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways scenario framework considering the weak signals. Their article reminds us of the importance of considering weak signals and wild cards in sustainable development and scenarios. The final methodologically oriented paper is by Campos Muñoz, Garduño Garcia, Mendoza Franco, and Harari Masri who explore neurotechnology, social justice, and the social implications of new technologies by presenting a framework and workshop structure and discussing the learnings of conducted workshops.

Turning to the papers directly linked to the conference’s theme of planetary futures of health and wellbeing, Koebe, Schillings, and Schwarz develop scenarios on how superintelligence affects human health using the intuitive logic scenario approach. The scenarios tackle questions of health promotion or harming and the dominance of superintelligence or humans, and the authors draw policy implications for safeguarding population health in the future age of superintelligence. Giesecke, Cuhls, and Wasserbacher, in turn, review the work of the European Commission’s Mission Board to fight cancer, discussing what role foresight can play in reflexivity in the governance of science, technology, and innovation. They consider foresight as a suitable instrument to align future orientations and support mission-oriented policymaking on health topics.

Hakala, Esmailzadeh, Hakala, Berg, Rinne, and Pesola discuss replacing private cars with public transport to take children to sports hobbies, combining environmental and health themes. They conducted a study comparing the bus and car travel patterns of 10–12-year-old children in two cities. The authors further propose interventions that promote access to sporting activities through public transport for children and their families.

Finally, Hines explores alternatives to the dominant neoliberal capitalism, identifying signals of change and key drivers. Based on an overview of the literature, the paper discusses three guiding images: circular commons, non-workers’ paradise, and tech-led abundance. These images and the transformative change they entail provide a fitting closing note to the special issue, reminding us that planetary futures of health and wellbeing are within reach but require significant shifts in mindsets and societal structures.

Taken together, the articles and reviews in the special issue highlight the need for systemic change as well as the consideration of multiple perspectives and multiple future scenarios in promoting planetary futures of health and wellbeing. We invite readers to start exploring planetary futures with an open imagination and mindful of our place on this shared planet.