

Methodological Experiences in Hungarian Foresight Activities

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1 Introductory Thoughts

We are living in unstable socio-economic processes, with significant social changes occurring and decisions being made with controversial effects on the population. This time, it is not sufficient to foresee trends, given that possible futures were developed by way of studying the facts of objective reality. Neither can we consider future expectations and planned actions by key stakeholders, because the affected population may act against future conceptions and decisions that can be regarded reasonable and professionally well-founded. Therefore, we should become familiar with the views, opinions and expectations of the individuals and the population regarding the future.

People tend to realize that they need to live with their future-shaping power for the sake of their individual future, embedded in the future of their wider environment. More and more people wish to be involved and do not regret the time and energy invested. Futurists should not make decisions or evaluate observed processes on their own. Stakeholders, attentive public and opinion leaders should be involved in the foresight process. This is the reason why we are working to improve foresight procedures which opens the way to a participatory approach (cf. Nováky 2004).

We have gained substantial methodological experience in foreseeing the future for education, regional development and in the macro sphere of society. The first social foresight study prepared in Hungary for the future of education was in (1992-1994 and 1995-1996) and the second one was carried out in 2006. We have elaborated public foresight procedures for regional foresight in two cases (Tuzsér 2000 and Kiskunfélegyháza 2003). We also used participatory future study methods to look for future alternatives for Hungary, beyond tomorrow. We are of the opinion that methodological experiences thus gained can also be used in the area of technology foresight.

2 Foresights in the Field of Vocational Education

In Hungary the first social foresight was prepared for the future of education and vocational training (between 1992-1994 and 1995-1996; cf. Hideg/Nováky 1998b). The foresight project was conducted and accomplished by authors of this paper. The first phase was part of a World Bank programme to develop education of Hungarian youth, while the second phase was ordered by the Hungarian National Institute of Vocational Training.

The aim of this foresight activity was to elaborate complex, long-term development alternatives for domestic vocational education. The most important stated goals were to

- underpin development of the Hungarian system of vocational education;
- explore expectations of stakeholders of vocational education regarding the future;
- establish the position of vocational education in social future-models;
- provide possible, desirable, complex and consistent futures alternatives to policy makers and other stakeholders;
- influence policy makers towards the most desirable and affordable direction of development.

During that time, the know-how of forecasting was generally known and popular, so we started our researches as if it were a social forecast activity. *During preparatory work, however, we soon realised that proceeding with the project could not be a forecasting-type activity*, because domestic trends were changing after Hungarian political transformation (in 1998) and international trends also showed signs of shifting in education and vocational training tendencies. Consequently, we had to develop a new methodology to solve the given futures task (cf. Hideg/Nováky 1999). Under these conditions we had to reveal whether Hungarian society showed signs of change, new thoughts, expectations and intentions that would imply modernization of the education system. We therefore interviewed socially decisive actors of education and vocational training, how they saw the problems, identified possible avenues of development of the Hungar-

ian educational system. In addition, we wanted to offer an international outlook and to include its results to the stakeholders' expectations. Therefore our attention was focused on the following three areas:

- Placing the problem in an international context, we were mainly interested in how certain well-developed countries and region, known to be spearheading even faster development of the time, defined socio-economic functions of vocational education and corresponding tasks.
- What was the position of the decisive players in the Hungarian vocational education system on the problems and prospects for future development in this area?
- Were there any clear future alternatives which could be developed, based on the expectations of different stakeholders and which could be seen as local solutions of global and regional problems of vocational education?

Our study of international outlook was focused on products of futures studies, the aim of which was to describe social future-models and which concentrated on the long-term development strategy of education and vocational education. This work was done by experts of foresight in the form of study writing.

In the first phase of the project, stakeholders were given the task of studying 65 schools of vocational education which took part in the World Bank programme. School directors were asked about their ideas of development of Hungarian vocational education, by using a two-round Delphi method. It was noted that there was yet another involved and important stakeholder in vocational education, namely the Hungarian population, because people had attended, were attending or might attend school at any time. *Representatives of the Hungarian population were interviewed by using one-round Delphi, so-called public Delphi method. We were interested about their future orientation and the role of schooling in their life.*

The second phase of this foresight activity was carried out in terms of extending the circle of stakeholders and deepening vision of possible future alternatives for developing Hungarian vocational education. In the second phase, selected circles of stakeholders were:

- schools involved in vocational education as providers of school service;
- children participating in vocational education as students;
- parents directly associated with some form of vocational education, whose decision and expectation influence the schooling of youth;
- employers, as "consumers" of vocational education, who require qualified workers in their working process.

That foresight activity was extended to include the whole Hungarian society, therefore the involvement of stakeholders was carried out through their representatives. The method used was the one-round Delphi. Our hypotheses, that (1) each group of stakeholders was competent in a different scope of issues; (2) valuable information could be gained about the Hungarian society and economy (as the environment of vocational education), about social functions and possible systems of vocational education, if different questions were put to the different types of stakeholders; (3) stakeholder involvement was achieved in different ways, which in time proved to be correct, on the basis of historical valuation of future alternatives of vocational education, elaborated during that foresight activity which is still under discussion.

After surveying opinions and expectations of stakeholders, comparative and consistence analyses were carried out by foresight experts. The aim of consistence analysis was to fit the valuations of situation (given at the time) as problems and expectations regarding the future of that time as possible problem solutions for vocational education to one another, also with a view to results of international outlook.

Futures workshop technique was applied in Hungary, firstly in foresight activity. In the first phase a futures workshop was held with the participation of so-called "World Bank Schools". The results of stakeholders' workshop were feed-backed to the futurists' workshop for using additional future information in the development of future alternatives concerning Hungarian vocational education (cf. Hideg et al. 1995).

In the second phase, even more workshops were held, because more stakeholders were involved in the foresight procedure. The results of experts' and stakeholders' workshops were also fed-back to the futurists' workshop to finalize the two possible development alternatives regarding the education and vocational education system in Hungary (cf. Hideg/Nováky 1998b).

The second social foresight activity in the field of vocational education was organised for elaborating the idea of setting up a network of regional vocational examination centres in Hungary. It was carried out in

2006 on behalf of the National Vocational Training Institute¹ (cf. Bartus/Hideg 2007; Bartus et al 2007). The foresight project was led and accomplished by Éva Hideg.

The purpose of this foresight activity was to work out future ideas for a network of regional vocational examination centres, their possible establishment and forms of professional operation in terms of prevalent and future domestic conditions; including social acceptability and/or eligibility for support for the 2007-2013 period. The proposal for the establishment of the regional examination centres was based on research conducted on the following topics:

- The shared points of development paths of Hungarian and European Union societies and economies and the resulting considerations.
- Experiences of reforms with comparable objectives and subjects undertaken in other European Union Member States.
- The statistical and critical analyses of Hungarian vocational examination practice in the period 2000-2005.
- The ideas of stakeholders of vocational examination practice, such as examining teachers, examination board chairs, regional training centres, chambers of commerce, industry and agriculture, representative associations of employers, working to improve and develop the current examination system.

Research of the first three topics mentioned was carried out by experts through making analysis and development studies. Exploration of future conceptions of key stakeholders of vocational examination practice at that time was made by directed study writing. Some questions were put and while answering them, stakeholders could express their views and expectations about the present and future system of vocational examination. The stakeholders could answer freely because the questions provided only the framework for their answers. The content of answers was not influenced and the length of answers was also not limited.

We were unable to involve all important stakeholders, due to the limited time available for the research. The research did not extend to the opinions and ideas of examinees and persons ordering examinations. Our view is that they should be involved at the stage where professionally justified ideas have already been mapped out. One of the ways that this can be ensured – apart from publishing the results of the research – is to hold workshops for the various groups of examinees and future examinees, where the various vocational examination centre ideas and the models of their potential feasibility and operation would be presented and participants could try these models and express what they would accept and what they would want to change and why. In addition to these live workshops it would also be expedient to create an interactive online website for a limited period to ensure that the opinions and suggestions of the widest possible spectrum of citizens is taken into account during the transformation of the vocational examination system. Our position is that the involvement of those at the receiving end of vocational examination services could play an important role in the utilization of research results, e.g. during the process of detailed planning and / or a pilot programme.

We have gathered a total of seven different regional examination system concepts from the ideas presented by the stakeholders concerned. After gathering the opinions and expectations of stakeholders, a number of different filters were used to tone down the subjectivity of stakeholders. *These filters included comparative and consistence analyses, professional workshops with different compositions and number of participants.* After filtering we utilized these ideas during our synthesis work by aligning the ideas of the stakeholders to the views on the environment and the system of expectations gathered by studying the first three topics referred to above. That is why the final concept does not fully correspond to any of the ideas put forward by the stakeholders. Another reason for this is that within the various ideas of the stakeholders we strove to find

- common cores and elements,
- those shared points in terms of which the various ideas can complement, enrich one another, and
- possible sources of conflict, which must be resolved by finding possible modes of resolution in the course of our synthesis work.

The guiding principle of synthesis work was to define and interpret vocational examination in a manner that is professionally well-grounded and can aid the development of domestic practice and to draw up the

¹ Name of this institute has been changed. The National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education is the legal successor of the National Institute of Vocational Education from the beginning of the year 2007.

new institutional concept, the main functions of operation, the possible framework and feasibility of operation in line therewith.

Workshops were the most definitive forms of synthesis work. We have developed the concept of the new vocational examination centre network during these synthesis workshops. In addition, we have also identified the larger issues, where we have encountered diverging interpretations and have found an interpretative framework, which allows us to handle and answer questions in a manner that fits into a consistent system. One of the most significant tasks to be achieved during the workshops was to draw up alternative proposals for feasibility, estimation of material, labour and infrastructural requirements, as well as envisaged costs of implementation.

The concept and implementation ideas of the regional vocational examination network emerged through a series of workshops where participants were representatives of key stakeholders as experts of vocational examination, representatives of economic chambers, the representative of National Institute of Vocational Education and the leader of this foresight activity. Results of these series of workshop were sent to a larger group of experts and stakeholders as a working document, who then proceeded to work on the concept and possible modes and forms of implementation within the framework of a one-day discussion and workshop. *Participants of the wider scope one-day discussion and workshop were representatives of would-be stakeholders as trade unions, multinational and national enterprises, the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists and representatives of the Labour Ministry as authority, besides representatives of key stakeholders mentioned.* The main reason of involvement of extra stakeholders was that the outcome of the series of workshops, according to which the circle of actors of vocational examination system should be expanded in the future so that vocational examination can better serve people's adaptation to labour needs and life-long learning.

We have also taken into account critical observations and proposals for further development, made at the wider scope one-day discussion and workshop. The synthesis study, the result of this foresight procedure, was primarily based on the experts' studies, discussed, filtered and fed-back future ideas of stakeholders, the outcomes of synthesis workshops and the wider scope one-day discussion and workshop in this way. *A "consensus future" has not emerged because of conflicting interests among different stakeholders (especially between the economic chambers and other stakeholders) but three future alternatives have taken shape.*

3 Public Foresight for Regional Foresights

3.1 The Future of Tuzsér Village and the Small Region of Felső-Szabolcs

The research was carried out in 2000, using public Delphi (cf. Nováky 2000). Participants were from Tuzsér (a small village in North-East Hungary, in a not so rich region) and people who are somehow related and feel responsible for the future of this region. The first round of the surveys mapped topics of the future that the participants thought responsibly about, and changes they thought would define the future of the region. The second round investigated what the possibilities were for development, and their expected time-horizon. The time-horizons were 1998-2002, 2003-2010, 2011-2025, 2026-2050, after 2050 and never. The intervals are widening with a view to neutralize growing instability. The third round, based on the results of the second round, examined events that were anticipated in each time-horizon and what the expected order of the events could be.

In the first round participants mentioned changes, referring to actual trends (e.g. education in the elementary school has a focus on environment protection) and weak signals (e.g. Tuzsér becomes a conference centre). The appearance, evolving and strengthening in the future of the top-down (e.g. development of vehicle traffic) and the bottom-up (e.g. cooperation of local communities) processes could be observed from the answers. The changes can be grouped according to their most important effect, such as economic, social, technological or environmental relevance. According to the answers, most of the events would possibly happen in the between the years 2003-2010. Two subjects regarded as "never to happen" and "the present situation would never change"; these were the kind of events participants were very much concerned about and thus they would not change without external initiation. These two critical questions were: ethnical conflicts and the development of the local bus transport; participants could not imagine that a turning point could come, so professionals' mediation is required.

Societal changes were considered to happen later than the economic ones: this is an acceptable and normal phenomenon, considering different time requirements of these processes. In environmental and technological topics people were very open to the changes, and they were willing to act for them, even though in some cases of external determination they were sceptical. About changes that were visible, appreciable and known they thought to happen relatively early and they seemed ready to act for them. Consequently, they were willing to take action for changes they can see the outcome of, but for processes of long-term result or long-term effect they were not so committed. Hence decision-makers, professionals and futurists have indispensable responsibility for the future, splitting the long-term projects into smaller cases and objectives, making them more familiar and accessible.

Events of unstable outcome in the questionnaire (e.g. nearly similar possibilities in two different and far time-periods) offered the alternatives for the future. Three alternatives could be created, regarding the focus of development: economic, societal and economic-societal. In the first alternative *the economic development* is in the spotlight, that later will cause the societal recovery. This carries the risk of inefficiency and increases the possibility of unwelcome developments in the small region. If the *development of societal processes* is significant, it will be based on modernisation, like expanding the Internet for education or communication purposes. In this case the unstable factor that threatens accomplishment is an ethnical conflict, which should be resolved. In the third alternative *societal and economic processes are strengthening each other*, but only in case that the system has a positive feedback, creating new possibilities and these changes have positive effects. The future orientation and responsibility of decision makers and the stakeholders is required to this end (cf. Nováky 2007). People are open to implement changes they are motivated for. To advance long-term changes, people have to be conscious about their possibilities, and also be aware that long-term future will come eventually, and we have to prepare for it in the present.

3.2 The Future of the Hungarian Town Kiskunfélegyháza

Kiskunfélegyháza is a small town in Southern Hungary. Its future was studied, based on its population's expectations until the year 2020, with the aspect of substantiating the development plans of the town. The research (cf. Nováky 2003) concluded that dealing with the future has become more important, the future belonged to everyone, so everyone should be involved in designing the future. Inhabitants' opinion was collected with a three-round public Delphi method. The three aspects of the questions were the following: (1) external processes that influence the town's societal-economic development, (2) forces inherent in the local management and the civil communities' and (3) townspeople's expectations of the future. The examined intervals were: until 2005, between the years 2005-2010 and 2010-2020, and after 2020 and never.

The results of the first round show that inhabitants were not particularly innovative, they were interested about the future just to break away from the present. Despite this, their thoughts about the world were complex and coherent. People were the most undecided about the factors on world economics, on the EU and on the labour force. The majority thought that most of the events and changes would happen between 2005 and 2020. They thought that local management is not sufficiently innovative or creative. They agreed that the role of civil movements / communities was important, but the relationship with the local governance is not successful yet, thus it should be developed. At the end of the third round it became clear that they were very uncertain in a lot of questions. One of the uncertainties was linked to Hungary's joining of the European Union. The research took place before our EU membership, so people could not know what to expect from it, what effects it would have. Some favourable events, like the increasing protection of the environment, job creation or canalisation, were considered to happen in the distant future. This vast instability means that they did not trust the positive influence of certain processes, and this ultimately leads to inactivity.

With some answers the participants foresighted the situation of not only Kiskunfélegyháza, but of the whole country, like how development projects fell through, despite given possibilities. We now know that in present-day Hungary we are not able to benefit from various opportunities, economic growth is slow, funds from the EU-tenders are not allocated well. Many answers alluded to this, even though we were two years from joining the EU and that time the only factor that could turn the climate of opinion optimistic about Hungary's EU membership were the high expectations about possible EU support.

Alternative scenarios were designed for the future of Kiskunfélegyháza, based on the evaluation of instability and possibilities: like expectations about reliance or fear and whether possibilities are appreciated or

depreciated. The four alternatives are: “Successful Future”, “Pusillanimity”, “Confidence” and “Unhappy Future”.

The “*Successful Future*” turns true, if the development does not run into any material or personal obstacles; a preferable scenario. Expectations filled with fear, hinder the development in the case of “*Pusillanimity*”, but it can be avoided with a strong guidance that overcomes fear and strengthens favourable processes. Its advantage is its risk as well: a pusillanimous community can be easily led and used. If “*Confidence*” rules a community the way out from depreciated possibilities is conscious future orientation, which can open up new possibilities to for development. In an “*Unhappy Future*” attitude, local development options can fail due to inadequate guidance, illusory expectations about EU or other funds, moreover there is no constructive relationship between the town governance and the population to resolve this situation.

These alternatives are simplified visions of the future, a mixture of these could probably come true. A common feature is that the decision makers have two tasks: examination of the stability of processes, to see clearly which ones could be changed and which ones are the most sensitive; to shape and making real and conscious the future-designing forces, expand the studies of future orientation and improve the future-consciousness on this basis. Without these activities the expected development will not be successful or it will take more time (cf. Nováky 2006). But communities and the future cannot wait, we have to take actions in the present!

4 Looking for Future Alternatives for Hungary beyond Tomorrow, by Using Participatory Futures Studies Methods

This is the third long-term complex future image for Hungary, completed in the year 2000. The first one was constructed in the early 1970s, focused on the NNP per capita with top-down approach. The second complex future image, of the mid-1980s, concentrated on individual necessities. The third future image of Hungary is the study “*Hungary beyond tomorrow*” (cf. Nováky 2001), its aim is to find acceptable alternatives for the future, instead of finding and shaping the most probable future. In the study more methods are used and the results are presented with scenario building, because some facts were evident: the emerging and differentiating future orientation of individuals, societal institutions and enterprises; the observation of many seeds of change in the present; and generally the feeling of the unstable circumstances. The approach is dynamic and complex, offering the possibility to top-down and bottom-up observations.

We know from previous examinations of future orientation (cf. Hideg/Nováky 1998a; Nováky et al. 1994) that in the 1990s people’s future orientation had practical reasons: the main goal of the activities was to assure the right future for the family and the children, plus to organize the work rationally. Participants did not perceive that hard work and other activities was the source of qualitative changes, because they thought it was difficult to cope with the circumstances. The future of enterprise orientation is filled with fear, and enterprises are thinking and doing very little about the future. Consequently, the economic situation and its factors were analysed in “*Hungary beyond tomorrow*”.

Different future alternatives were formulated, according to the possibilities of political and economic (Hungary and the global world) development. These scenarios or versions of the future are not based on trends, but on future possibilities, built upon alternativity and instability-based bifurcations. Eight versions of the future were developed: all of them were possible, but not all were acceptable for society. The eight versions were examined from three other aspects to highlight the question of acceptance and support: expectations of joining the EU, changes in values and individual aspirations. Hungary’s EU membership divided the population, therefore people’s relation to the eight versions was not homogenous: hope, pragmatism, ability and disability were the four groups that could be identified. From changes in values another four groups were created, based on the idea that similar values were important for somebody: new consumer values with varying life-styles; environment-friendly values; peace, security of the family, happiness and material welfare; trustworthy, responsible, brave, rational and helpful values. People with different values could accept and support different versions of the future (cf. Masini 1993). Individual aspirations as the third aspect could be the future of the family and of the children; influencing the future; “space-age” perspective; education and work in the future. The eight versions of the future were filtered through these three aspect groups, and it emerged that two of the versions (the 2nd and 7th) were acceptable from some aspects, while everyone was ready to accept one of the eight versions (the 1st). This latter one is a future, based on regional integration, on economic policy with prominent national interests and a balanced development within the European Union. To reduce the high number of versions, another two aspects were in-

troduced: possibilities, thence stability or instability of the processes and the environment, and expectations that favour changes or not.

In the first alternative, possibilities and expectations are in balance, they are both stable, so it causes idleness and postponing actions and changes. In Hungarian we call this the “*Pató Pál-effect*”, which is similar to the Spanish “*Mañana*”: i.e. leave everything for tomorrow. The second alternative contains “*the societal claim for change*” that typically generates revolution, without unstable processes, like it happened in Hungary in 1848 and in 1956. The third alternative offers the possibility of change, but with the lack of interest surrounding it (due to unfulfilled possibilities and fear of change) – after a while this future can be termed “*the ship has sailed off*”. In the fourth alternative, Hungary is ready to make favourable changes and societal expectations – “*the winner takes it all*”!

The 2nd and 7th version, that were termed as “partly acceptable” for everyone, were collateral with the fourth alternative (possibility of big changes), while the 1st version, that everyone could accept, was part of the second alternative (where processes and the environment need to be changed). As a consequence we can state that the ability of innovation and the presence of future designing forces are definitely necessary for reaching a breakthrough.

Today we are aware that expectations connected to EU membership were too high, and activity was lacking to make changes happen. The study on “Hungary beyond tomorrow” projected this drawback. The only way to change the future is to think about it, then take action for it. The activities can be followed by expectations, but expectations without action will not change anything.

5 Methodological Experiences for Technology Foresight

We are of the view that our methodological experience gained while leading social foresight activity can also be applicable in the field of technology foresight. Technology foresight consists not only of a list of new possible scientific solutions, embedded in technology novelty, but also of new socio-economic relations to technology and its development and human acceptance of possible new technology. The latter two relations are of particular importance if technology foresight is carried out. Human relations to technology foresight could be strengthened by taking into consideration of our methodological experiences.

1. In social foresight projects discussed, working with participatory tools developed in critical futures studies were preferred to involve stakeholders, including non-professionals as well, and to integrate their future expectations into the future shaping process. The main aim of methodological solutions thus developed was to produce synergy between future thoughts and expectations of professional and non-professional stakeholders.
2. Stakeholders have different ideas and expectations depending on their future orientation and position in the system, their future is the object of foresight. Their ideas and expectations constitute building blocks in foresight activity and vice versa the ideas and expectation of stakeholders developed by participation in foresight activity.
3. Given that stakeholders are competent in different scopes of issues, therefore their involvement in the foresight procedure should be achieved in different ways depending on the aim, task and object of foresight activity.
4. Important are not only the typical future thoughts of stakeholders, but also the extreme ones, if they can become the object of discussion and generate new future alternatives during the process. Therefore, maintaining the right and possibility of freedom of speech and free expression of opinion, is the focal point of the whole foresight procedure.
5. Both direct and indirect subjective methods should be used for exploring, generating and applying future thoughts of stakeholders.
6. Comparative analysis of futures ideas and expectations opens the way to look for consistency and inconsistency among stakeholders’ opinions. Dialogue among stakeholders can serve both consensus building and mapping of future alternatives.
7. Futures workshops help to highlight potential conflicts among stakeholders that can ultimately lead forward to another trajectory, which is different from the present one.
8. Neither scientific experts nor futurists are able to find out or invent the future, but they can contribute to outlining the framework of possible futures.
9. Dialogue between scientific experts and different stakeholders, also helps to bridge distances between scientific and practical knowledge about the future.

10. Dialogue has proved to be a useful means to generate reflexive learning and knowledge production regarding the future.
11. Methodology and methods used are also dependent on the aim and object of foresight. There is not one good foresight procedure and combination of methods for all purposes.
12. Search for further opportunities of stakeholder participation in foresight activity, should be an important research topic for futurists.
13. Laymen are mature enough to articulate their opinions and their future expectations, while futurists, using the tools of academic futures studies, can open the process and involve them in helping to develop future alternatives and foresight specialists.

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