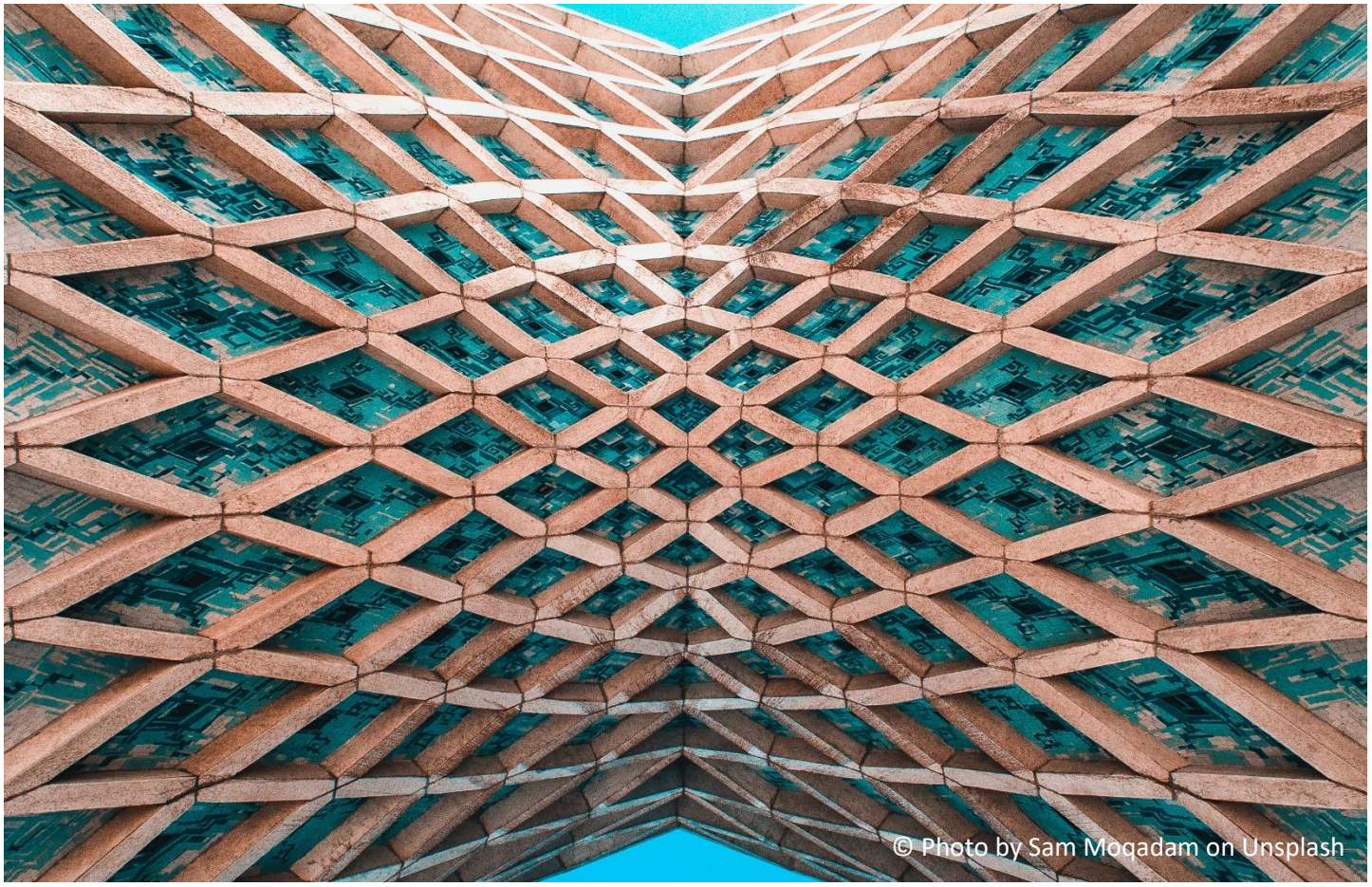

T7 Task Force International cooperation for the global common good

POLICY BRIEF

FUTURE DESIGN: FOR THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANKIND

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Think7

G7 GERMANY 2022

Abstract

Humanity has been experiencing a breakdown of peace due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, collapses of the Earth's circulatory system including cycles of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and a collapse of biodiversity. These problems are related to our survival.

At meetings of world leaders, including the G7 and G20, the only discussion has been from now to the future. Discussions about the future have been hampered by the short-term interests of individual countries, which have prevented us from reaching agreements and developing creative visions for the long-term future. As the future generations do not have any voice to bargain with the present generation, the present generation may take civil and military decisions which may unintentionally harm future generations.

Long-term future design has advanced greatly over the past three decades. Techniques such as Scenario planning, statistical long cycle forecasting and back casting have become popular[1][2]. UNESCO's Futures Literacy Labs seeks to improve Futures Literacy as a basic competency that anyone can acquire. It uncovers advanced approaches to designing and using the future to build capacity to discern and make sense of complex emergence. Future literacy can help overcome fear and antipathy towards the uncertainty that is inherent in a non-deterministic universe.

Research has found that in discussing long-term future issues, solutions become more creative and innovative by utilizing "future point of view". We have developed the method of Future Design (FD)[3][4] to systematically allow policy makers to imagine policies from a future point of view. When we think about the future from the present, we tend to get caught up in the present. Because the vectors of each proposal have different directions, we cannot reach consensus and have to make compromise. FD can provide individuals, organisations and governments access to a better understanding of the world, and to act in accordance with our values through the consideration of the richness of experimentation, innovation and creativity that surrounds us. We would like to see the leaders of the G7 use FD and become imaginary future presidents or imaginary future prime ministers, to debate and negotiate future policies. We propose to try out the Future Design method on a challenging contemporary issue at a smaller scale.

Let us reduce future failures that burden future generations and make sure that future generations say "thank you" to their ancestors who made bold transformations at Schloss Elmau in 2022[5].

Challenge

What is the greatest challenge for the G7? It is not only to stop Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Even if the aggression ends and some agreement can be reached and implemented, big challenges will remain: how to design a world that does not produce a second Putin, ensure a defensible Europe, avoid nuclear conflict and nuclear proliferation, and ensure energy security?

There are many other challenges for the G7. How to ensure sustainability of earth systems by restoring the broken carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles? Not only have these cycles been broken, they are also leading to the collapse of biodiversity, invoking major planetary threats to future generations[6].

Let us call a failure that places a heavy burden on future generations a ***future failure***. Humans continue to make future failures that threaten their very existence. Neuroscientist Sapolsky[7] suggests this is because humans have three important oddities: myopia, impulsivity, and sociality. Sharot[8] includes optimism, saying we have evolved to forget unpleasant things of the past, to seek immediate pleasures, and to be optimistic about the future.

On the other hand, as we see in Ukraine, parents try to help their children at the expense of selves. Is it possible to extend this idea to future generations? This is conceptualized as ***futurability***. A person exhibits *futurability* when she or he experiences an increase in happiness as a result of deciding to, and taking action to, forego current benefits to enrich future generations. *Future design* is for designing and implementing mechanisms to activate futurability within societies and within participants, thereby, for example, encouraging action on harmful alterations of various biogeochemical cycles, such as those of carbon and nitrogen.

This Future Design method is an opportunity to overcome deadlocked political discussion. It is also successfully used in the management field of sustainable business transformation[9]. In sustainable management, it generates new possible solutions derived from unconventional thinking. It is the kind of thinking change makers use who do not adhere to old concepts and paradigms. It is a way to disrupt path-dependency and is similar to the way of thinking of pragmatic entrepreneurial leaders who develop new scenarios of action that are highly disruptive because they have a high positive impact towards society.

All these change makers have one thing in common: they do not construct the world in opposition or linearly along outdated theories. Instead of thinking in terms of shortages, they see the abundance of entrepreneurial solutions and the systemic **combination of economic success and sustainable development** in order to have a **positive impact on others** and at the same time serving the individual goals. By thinking the present from the future leaders are able overcome the trade-off between short-term and long-term thinking and create real win scenarios for all – current as well as future generations.

We have developed mechanisms to activate people's futurability and have used them to design sustainable societies in various regions. How do we activate it? There are various methods, but the simplest way is for participants to become imaginary future generations. First, we ask world leaders to travel forward in time to the year 2050, without changing their ages, and envision what society would be like there. We would like them to envision the year 2050, a time when people around the world are living happily. We would like the leaders to suggest what we should do now in order to make it happen.

The role of the G7 is not to create incremental change. Isn't it to provide the world with a new vision? Therefore, rather than limiting our possibilities by making false trade-offs we can together build a future which creates more opportunities for our and future generations than we once had. This could become a new definition for the sustainable development of our world: “Creating MORE opportunities for today’s AND tomorrow’s generations by overcoming the old trade off thinking – **let us start thinking the present from the future!**”

Proposals

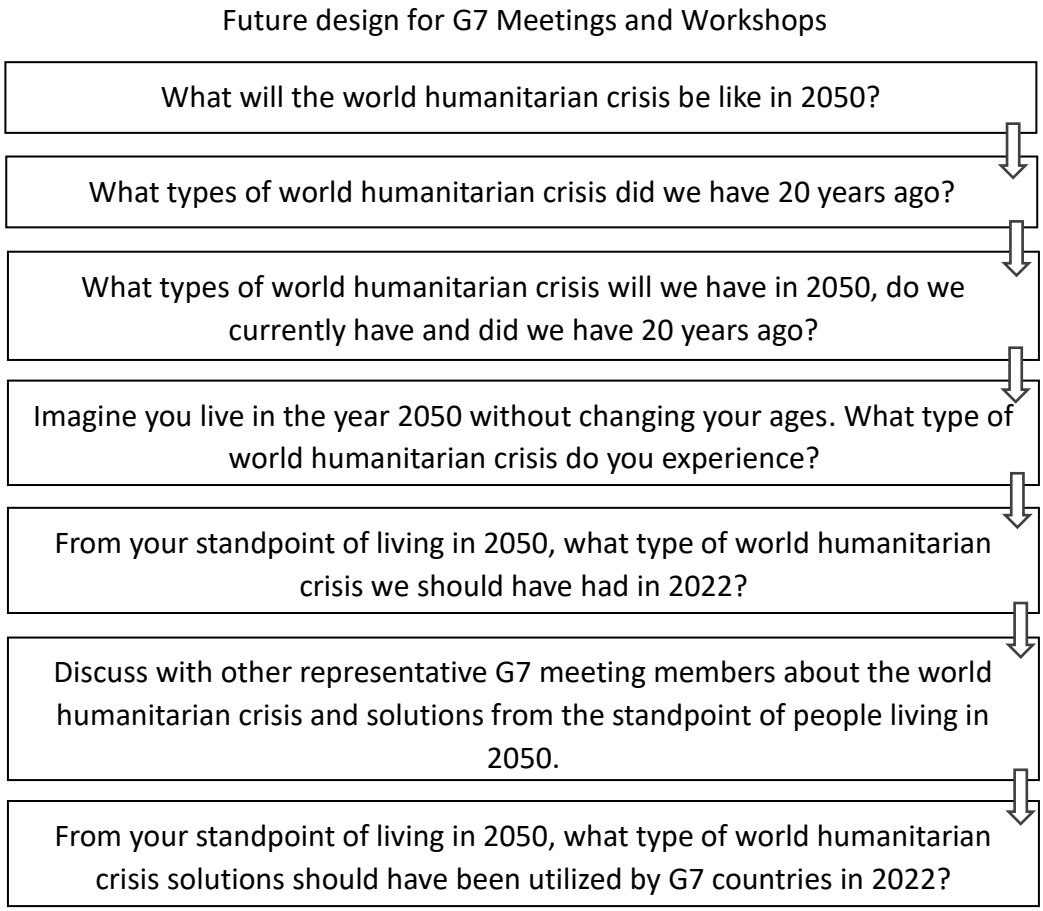
We would like to see Future Design used at all G7 meetings and workshops, but this time we propose that it be used at a small number of meetings. The most important issue for the G7 is what vision of the world the G7 leaders will design for the happiness of the people of the world.

In our intervention, the G7 leaders will virtually time-travel to the year 2050 without changing their ages. They will draw a picture of what the world would be like in 2050. Then, they would draw a future pathway to get there, and suggest what should be done now. If not the leaders, then participants from each country could do this exercise.

We understand there are many unresolved specific issues and questions, such as internal relations among GX, and the relations between Russia and other member countries. Putin showed his desire in the past to join NATO. Will China, Russia, India, and other countries be members? What is the relationship among the members? What is the political structure of each country? What is the relationship with the so-called developing countries? The current SDGs should have been completed, but have the "no one left behind" world of 2050 been realized? What about climate change? There are many more, but we would like you to choose one of these topics and hold a Future Design session there.

Implementations

Members of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature at Kyoto and the Research Institute for Future Design at the Kochi University of Technology, in collaboration with renowned experts from different continents and fields of research, are available to assist in organizing Future Design Sessions. No special equipment or devices are required. Figure 1 represents an example of possible implementation of future design in G7 meeting and workshops.



Note: When you discuss from the standpoint of future people, use past tense for the current generation decisions.

Figure 1: An example of the implementation of future design

There are seven different steps in figure 1 related to past, present and future world humanitarian crisis and solutions experiencing the future generations' standpoints. In doing so, participants can clearly distinguish the past, present, future and they are ready to experience the future generation in 2050. Participants need to answer several questions to ensure their standpoint of 2050. For instance, a moderator may want to know about the participant's living environment and economic inequalities in 2050. Subjects experience the perspective of future generations to look back on the present [i.e., 2022], to determine how experiencing

the perspective of future generations might influence subjects to evaluate future world humanitarian crisis and solutions. After experiencing the perspective of future generation, subjects provide initial suggestions about future world humanitarian crisis solutions in 2022. After that, all the participants of the future design session go into a group discussion about future world humanitarian crisis and solutions. After group discussion, subjects provide final suggestions about future world humanitarian crisis and solutions in 2022. By doing so, subjects can apply divergent thinking to generate not only creative but also insightful solutions of future world humanitarian crisis and solutions.

Endnotes

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Tatsuyoshi Saijo received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Minnesota in 1985 in the field of institutional design theory (mechanism design). As a teacher, he has worked at Ohio State University, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Tsukuba, Osaka University, and Hitotsubashi University, and is currently Director of the Research Institute for Future Design at the Kochi University of Technology and advisor at the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto. He was a vice president of the Economic Science Association during 2010-2014 and a member of Science Council of Japan during 2014-2021. Since around 2015, he has been proposing various mechanisms to design current society using future perspectives and practicing them in actual municipalities and companies.

Paul Shrivastava - Pennsylvania State University; Club of Rome

Paul Shrivastava is Chief Sustainability Officer at The Pennsylvania State University, Director of the Sustainability Institute, and Professor of Management. He is a member of the Club of Rome. Previously, he was the Executive Director of Future Earth, where he established the secretariat for global environmental change programs. He served as David O'Brien Distinguished Professor of Sustainable Enterprise at Concordia University, Montreal. He Chairs Arts and Sustainable Enterprise at ICN Business School, Nancy, France, and is an advisor to the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto, Japan. He has published 17 books and over 100 articles in refereed scholarly journals.

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Moinul Islam received his Ph.D. from Kyushu University in 2016 in the field of environmental engineering. As a teacher, he has worked at Kyushu University, Hiroshima University, and is currently an assistant professor at the Research Institute for Future Design at the Kochi University of Technology. His research and teaching activities focus on Future Design, Economic Policy, Environmental Policy, Environmental Economics, Field Experiment, Laboratory Experiment, and Development Economics. He collaborates and conducts research with UNEP, UNESCO, IPCC, and various international organizations.

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