

# Future Visions for 2030: Of Economy, Sustainability and Employment

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Future Visions for 2030: Of Economy, Sustainability and Employment as seen by Students of the International Study Programs in JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

## Introduction and motivation + background for the research

JAMK University of Applied Sciences (later in this paper: JAMK) is a Finnish institution of Higher Education, offering programs (undergraduate and graduate) in various academic fields. As the pedagogical strategy of JAMK (JAMK, 2012) aims at high quality of education and internationalization, research initiative “Future Visions 2030” was launched in the first half of 2012. By studying the *futuribles* of its students, the schools of JAMK aim at a better understanding of their *weltanschauung*, and thus are able to critically review its practices and develop curricula to serve the future actors in their respective professional fields.

The key research questions were:

1. How do the students of JAMK envision the state-of-things in year 2030 in terms of

- economy, sustainability and employment?
2. How are the different layers of future visions– personal, national and global development inter- or co-acting?
  3. Can we bring our undergraduate students to the picture as contributors to the process of future foresight – as researchers as well as informants?

## 1. Implementation of the study

On the basis given above the following areas of the study were chosen to the first implementation round in 2012 :

- a. Economic growth direction (growth, non-growth, de-growth) and pattern (stable vs. volatile)
- b. Usage of resources
- c. Employment and careers.

The visions of things-to-be in the issues above were assessed by the informants on three layers, Global/National/Personal (career visions on Personal level only).

The survey was implemented with a quantitative on-line survey-tool in April 2012, with the repetition round in September 2012, due to low response rate at first sending of the survey link (April timing colliding with heavy student workload with course-endings, final exams etc.). To the informant sample the students were chosen from the cohort of five International Study Programs (tuition in English and appr. 50 % of students of Non-Finnish origin): International Business, Facility Management, Music and Media Management, Logistics Engineering and Nursing. The students for this survey were chosen to be all degree students from these programs from first to fourth year of their studies.

## 2. Key results and conclusions

Key findings of the research can be condensed in following statements:

- a. Believe in economic non-growth/de-growth is far from a marginal phenomenon
- b. On a personal level, students rely on their abilities to limit or even downsize their usage of natural resources (even when their rising socio-economic status in the future raises opportunities of spending)
- c. Students surveyed have serious doubts about the ability of nations and global community to make similar kind of limitations to use of natural resources – main doubts were raised based disability of governments to act for it and ways of governance in societies
- d. Students have largely abandoned the idea of linear, steadily rising career paths. Instead the idea of multidimensional careers (has become the “default setting” in their career thinking Volatility in terms of employment and career development is the leading mental model. However, in some students groups the confidence to own career was far more positive than the view on the employment and career development in higher level – national or global
- e. Also there was a strong tendency to see self-employment as a viable option for future, with lot of variation between different study groups

The main author of this paper acting as a project manager for “Future Visions 2030” interviewed the three undergraduate students of the research team to find out if the research tied to Futures’ issues had an effect to their overall orientation to Futures Thinking, something that can be called a Meta-result/effect of the research

performed. The interest was to see how their engagement to the study had “radiated” to their social environment, both inside and outside school. The term used in this paper is halo-effect, assuming that being posed near future researcher and research has an impact to interest towards future. This “halo-effect” was verified in the interviews - as a grown overall interest towards topics surveyed and Futures research as a domain.

### 3. Summary and ideas for further research

As Jim Dator (2006) said when writing about Campus Futures, the education should be future-orientated, and quest for futures should be part of daily development agenda in education as a default setting: “Because the images of the future held by young people are, and increasingly will be, much different from the images of many of today’s decision makers, college and university faculty and staff must also consider the possible and preferred images of future generations when mapping institutional directions.”

The statement above has not lost its appeal in 6 years of aging. On the contrary there are signs of growing overall concern of future of our societies, as measured in public movements and initiatives launched by governments, companies and “third sector” actors, as well as results of the study in hand.

The path of research now opened at JAMK will hopefully gain strength and importance, primarily via two main streams of evolution:

1. Adding more student cohorts (e.g. students of non-international programs, exchange students spending limited time at JAMK etc.) to the sample. And also of importance: Studying the futuribles of the faculty and administration of the University. Do our world views as educators meet those of the students? Is that match needed?
2. By doing longitudinal research the impact of new events and generations to the ways of seeing the future and impact of changing curricula can be addressed.

By following the evolution of the students’ views, especially if there is comparable data from another educational institution (or many), universities can assess whether the implementation of its strategy has an effect of shaping students’ thinking. This effect has been coined by Giroux and Penna as “Hidden Curriculum,” which “is a side effect of an education, lessons which are learned but not openly intended, such as the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs conveyed in the classroom and the social environment” (1983). Do we as educators, faculties and institutions transmit values and beliefs of the futures and for the futures? Should we?

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