

Prospectiva e innovación, Vol. 1, Visiones (Prospective and Innovation, Vol. 1, Visions).

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Enric Bas and Mario Guilló edited last year, in Spanish, the first volume of the trilogy *Prospectiva e innovación (Prospective and Innovation)*, subtitled *Visiones (Visions)*, published by Plaza y Valdés Editores as part of its Colección Futuros (Futures Collection). The book has a prologue by Federico Mayor (ex-director of UNESCO), an introduction by Enric Bas, and a chapter zero by Jesús Moneo (ex-director of the National Institute of Prospective Studies of Spain), plus thirteen contributions by diverse authors, most of them well known to the futures community. The book, originally conceived as an homage to Emilio Fontela, ended up by being an homage to him and Jesús Moneo, both visionaries of high stature, and important pioneers of Spanish Prospective Studies, and both unfortunately dead (the first, born in France but Sevillian by family origin, in 2007, and the second, Asturian, in 2011).

Texts about Prospective Studies in Spanish are less abundant than would be desirable. This book is thus welcomed as an important contribution to the dissemination of some basic, introductory, ideas to the field among the Spanish speaking public. Secondly, the book includes contributions by an important variety of Futures thinkers (and others) and thus allows the readers to appreciate different points of view, shades and approaches about Futures Studies. The contributions are all essentially of a general, introductory, nature (although some make reference to specific applications), which makes the book attractive to both, specialists and interested public. Enric Bas and Mario Guilló made an excellent selection of authors. Their variety and quality resulted in a rich and interesting book worth reading.

The prologue by Federico Mayor, very well written, establishes the value of Moneo and Petrela for Futures Studies, and the value of the field itself, citing Moneo (taken from chapter zero of the book): "...the prospective attitude articulates the necessary efforts of synthesis in two main moments, the exploratory and the normative. It has been said that the future is not to be forecasted but to be built. But, without the exploration of what is possible, the discussion of the desirable and what could lead to a futures vision and the elaboration of a project loses its meaning, and could lead to the opposite, that is, to a mere dream, which is also something that may be projected into the future. Recently Hugues de Jouvenel asked: 'What is a project if not a dream passed through the filter of reason?'. Mayor is

categorical and asks the readers not to forget the teachings of Petrela and Moneo: "... the great responsibility for all of us is to build a future which stands up to the human dignity... The past has already been written. We must constantly review it so that we will not forget its teachings. But it has already happened. It can not be modified. The only thing possible today, duly channeling the present trends, is to work toward a tomorrow harmonious with the great principles which remained intact in all the human and professional trajectory of Jesús Moneo and Emilio Fontela. The future is to be made. We are left with the clairvoyance, the urgency, the great human tension of those who tenaciously worked to find answers". And this book is testimony that this is possible and that in different trenches and under different paradigms and points of view the rigorous exploration of the future is a valuable exercise.

In his introduction Enric Bas declares himself in a state of perplexity facing a culture which lacks an strategic vision, both collectively and individually; a culture that resists change and innovation and considers the future as something predetermined and beyond our will, castrating the visions of the future from the beginning from a creative point of view. Bas refers himself specifically to Spain, but his reflection is equally valid for Latin America in general. It is true that there is a growing number of individuals in the region reflecting upon the future; but such reflections, as Jesús Moneo stated, represent individual efforts and for the most part are not institutionalized. This limits our capacity to permanently review the basis and methods of futures studies and their concrete applications, and thus what such studies can offer. In Latin America, as Bas points out referring to Spain, there is "a collectivity of 'free radicals' which, in spite of having been totally unstructured from a formal point of view, it exists and is making important contributions, in different issues, since the end of the 1970's". This situation, however, has begun to change in recent years, not without problems and difficulties and ups and downs, and this is encouraging. Bas poses many relevant questions for Latin American countries (and probably many developing countries): "Will we be able someday, as a country, to generate an educational system with a future vision and oriented to developing an innovation culture from the bases? Will we be able to reach a minimum consensus about which country we can and want to be? Will we be able to identify our potentialities as a country and to articulate mechanisms to set priorities? Will we still be towed by circumstantial situations ..., and be dependent on the decisions of others?"

Chapter zero of the book is the prologue that Jesús Moneo prepared before his death, and in it he presents and justifies an initiative to "launch from Spain an Institution Oriented to the Future with enough technical bases, interdisciplinary and basically supported by the social society", which he and Emilio Fontela had been working on. He proposes that "what is making change more visible is a general acceleration which, however, has different rhythms, each capable of acting as an accelerator or a break for the rest". According to Moneo, we are living a critical situation, in a world he refers to as of "high density complexity", with waves of innovation that try to be an answer to an out of control change, and which sometimes have very unfavorable effects. These innovations not always achieve the results sought, not even temporarily. And generally the results are accompanied by 'unexpected guests'. To ensure some success, "an innovation culture, strongly supported by a prospective attitude, is needed". Moneo detaches himself from a simplistic and essentially wishful vision of the assurance of a desirable future by

the mere fact of imagining it. Wisely, he states that “the essence of future reality is dialectic, the result of fights and confrontations. These confrontations are polyhedral and hardly understandable, given that many fights have no sense except in their own framework. What each actor observes is for him the main argument and the rest is its context. But in reality there is a whole hierarchy which depends on the degree of power and influence each of the diverse actors have”.

In addition to these three valuable chapters, the book has, as pointed out above, thirteen contributions by well known futurists and social scientists. As should be expected in a book of this kind, the nature, central object, paradigm, points of view, etc., of these thirteen contributions are dissimilar. Possibly their main value is precisely that they form a rich kaleidoscope about futures studies.

The chapter by Wendell Bell reproduces, in a revised version, a paper published in 2005 by the *Journal of Futures Studies* (10 (2), 2005, pp. 113-124), about a hypothetical interview to the author by Levelhead 753, a transhuman robot, who questions him about how and why he became a futurist. Not being new, the chapter, of an introductory nature to the field of futures studies, is interesting above all because the author is Wendell Bell, author of the two volumes *Foundations of Futures Studies*, one of the most complete and solid works about the field written up to now.

Eleonora Masini, with her peculiar stile and her always present interest in the human beings as central actors of futures studies, in values and cultural issues, and social innovation, reminds the readers her claim that future alternatives “can only be born outside of the main trends. This is possible in cultures different from the dominant cultures in a country or region, or may even be posed by visible actors who have not yet been totally subdued by trends that prevail overwhelmingly”; women, young people, marginalized populations. She further insists, quite rightly, that “the futures visions are the stimulus to change the present”, and that it is important to reflect on the future because always something is changing, something can change, or something should change.

The chapter by William Halal is about a series of technological and scientific forecasts from a project executed during the first decade of this century at the George Washington University and the author’s firm, TechCast LLC, based on the opinions of one hundred experts collected with an improved version of the Delphi method. Forecasts cover the fields of energy and environment (alternative sources, desalination), information technologies (precision agriculture, biometry, wireless technology, quantum computing), e-commerce (entertainment on demand, global access, virtual education), manufacturing and robotics (nanotechnology, intelligent robots), medicine and biogenetics (artificial organs, telemedicine, cure of cancer, life extension), transportation (hybrid cars and fuel cells, automated highways, hypersonic planes), and space (space tourism, Moon base, men on Mars). Although valuable, most of the topics included are by now essentially common place in the literature about science and technology forecasts.

Sohail Innayatullah, always interesting, states that the purpose of futures studies is to better understand the processes of change, and defines six essential concepts in futures thinking: used future, rejected future, alternative futures, alignment (between action and strategies), social change models, and the uses of the future. According to him, “futures methods decolonize the world we believe we may desire –they cast doubts in our most basic concepts; they deconstruct, and thus futures thinking helps

to create conditions for a change of paradigm, the meme (transmissible cultural components) and the microvita (non-local consciousness which helps to give sense to reality). He includes six basic questions about the future and six pillars of futures studies. His thesis, repeated here as in many other of his papers, revolves around macrohistory and metaphors. Here he gives a tight summary of his method of causal layered analysis, and that of critical futures of four quadrants (Richard Slaughter, based on Ken Wilber), as well as different possibilities to generate escenarios.

Peter Bishop and Andy Hines in their chapter introduce what they call the six phases of strategic foresight, with suggestions and recommendations for the tasks facing a group of strategic foresight operating within an organization. On doing it, they present interesting and useful ideas; for example: “To face the inherent ambiguity in strategic foresight it is needed an attitude which must go beyond the provision of information or correct data”; “It may be that the process of strategic foresight is confusing, but their results cannot be so”; or “The objective of strategic foresight is to make better and more informed decisions in the present”.

Anita Rubin makes emphasis in a social reality ever more complex and difficult to assimilate by individuals, and a future that depends on our decisions and selections, yet to be made, unexpected and, in part, unimaginable, in a present where we cannot even know with any certainty how things truly are. She proposes that the images of the future help us to make sense of the world, and signals the role played by, among others, values, knowledge, social pressures, capacities and identity of those who generate the images. She points out the growing difficulty of collecting and absorbing relevant information about the world and our social environment, to such a degree that individuals, instead of analyzing reality, tend to limit themselves to living it. She asks if there can exist a privatized but social individual, and if we will ever be complete individuals. Against all the virtues associated with the construction of future images, which no doubt influence the decisions made in the present and influence the construction of the individual and social identity, Anita Rubin puts on the table, as means of a balance, that “there is also the possibility that the images of the future bring with them confusion and cause stress, conflicts and tension, socially as well as personally.

Jose Ramos analyzes the role of the World Social Forum (constituted in Brazil) as a source of innovation for social alternatives, and as a fundamental anti-systemic process which casts doubts on the futures of the status quo of the world capitalist structural framework, pointing out that its objective was to congregate those fighting against a globalization dominated by corporations. To do so, he analyzes the process of the World Social Forum using: the causal layered analysis of Inayatullah; the panarchic model of Gunderson and Holling; a spatial model developed by Boulet; a structural model by Sklair; and a study on inter-organizational networks of Trist. He concludes that the vision of the World Social Forum process is a reflection of emerging social ecologies of alternative ways of life, pointing out that “It is no longer possible that a specific political manifesto proclaims the definitive future; instead, many existing social alternatives –or visions of differences- must share the space in an emerging field of possibilities, as ‘manifestations’”.

Pero Mičić presents a tight summary of the basic concepts in his book *The Five Futures Glasses*, where he clarifies the existing confusion about the objectives of futures studies, the roles of those who develop them, and the methods, as a result of the different types of futures which globally categorize the future. To identify

the types of futures he uses four criteria: identificability, probability, suitability and controllability. He proposes that each type of future (probable/improbable, buildable, desirable, surprising, planned, imaginable) needs a special set of glasses to see them.

The chapter by Jorge Hurtado, though interesting, does not refer specifically to future studies, but to the social sciences in general. He states, with Wallerstein, that from the middle of the 19th century, as a consequence of the liberal ideology and its derivations, the study of social reality got institutionalized around three big divisions: A temporal division (the past belonging to History; the present to Economy, Sociology and Political Sciences; and I may add the future to futures studies, although this is a much younger field, dating from the middle of the 20th century); a spatial division (the West, belonging to the four disciplines mentioned; and “the others”, studied by Anthropology and Oriental Studies); and a third division referring to the distinction between the State, the market and the civil society. Following González Casanova, he states that the criticism to such division of knowledge has its origin in the Sciences of Complexity, which propose a different way of knowing other phenomena, “discarding that their unpredictability or indetermination is a product of ignorance or insufficient knowledge, which, on becoming fully scientific, would equal the determinism of classical mechanics”.

Andrés Montero, in his chapter “Futures for the (in)security”, poses the possible future political role (and as such, economic; and thus in energy) of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), beyond its military role, in as much as “global politics is the geo-strategy of energy and financial economy”. After pointing out that “the true motor of the global economy is consumption”, he states as a paradox that “if the economy is essentially private, the economic position of the States in the world, and thus part of their influence, depends, among other factors, on the strength of their firms beyond their frontiers”, something which is, or at least should be, beyond the control of the States. He states that “the most dangerous derivative of the debate between the future of security and liberty will be that of control” (the Big Brother of Orwell; the happy world of Huxley; the hallucination of Matrix), whose most refined product is that of illusory freedom.

Tomás Miklos and Margarita Arroyo claim that futures studies rest on three essential strategies: “the long term vision, its holistic coverage, and consensus building”, which allow the offering of alternative scenarios, their strategic evaluation, and their tactical planning. For them, futures studies is close to a methodological strategy that allows escaping from the extremes of blindly believing in science and blindly believing in mystical elements. They propose that during the last decades “an anticipation movement has been born in the scientific fields that may be defined as an effort to make probable the most desirable future. This is the Prospective (Futures Studies), the attitude of the mind toward the future’s problematique, being a key element of a planning style better suited to the current circumstances”. Although their emphasis is in the desirable future, the “best” future, as is the case with most of the contributions of the book, at least initially the authors appear to take for granted that this future is unique, and not multiple, and that in its multiplicity there may be (generally are) contradictions, the polyhedral fights and disputes pointed out by Moneo in chapter zero of the book, mentioned above. Later on, however, they pose this problem of the definition of a desirable future as solvable by means of a negotiating model capable of managing conflict. The last part of this chapter describes summarily four application cases developed by the authors.

Adolfo Castilla, in the next to last chapter, “Prospective of the ideas”, states that futures thinking makes sense only when there is a desire to act upon the present in favor of a future when one confirms that the possible future (the future suggested by trends) is not adequate. He suggests that a formal process of futures studies must have three stages: Trend analysis (predictions of reference); futures studies itself (alternative futures); and normative future (selection of the more adequate alternative future, and formulation of strategies and concrete measures to reach it). He considers that futures studies are a “logical trick” which allows us to understand the present and make better decisions about what may affect the future. According to Castilla, the main objective of this chapter is “to analyze the possibilities that the more general ideas about man –the world of logic, consequence, rationality and reasoning which allows him to interpret and explain nature, life, society and himself- may serve as an instrument of futures studies”. For that purpose he assumes as distinctive characteristics of man, following different authors, his being radiant, teleological, governed by exponential rules, and being an imitator. He then reviews some different cosmogonies and cosmovisions of man, arriving in the present to find a post-modernity frightened by absolute truths and with a prevalent relativity of opinions and customs. He ends comparing the products and services of the industrial society with those related to the modern cosmogony.

Joaquín Guzmán, in the last chapter, centers on the economy. Reviewing the thoughts of Keynes, he points out that one of the outstanding elements of his economic philosophy was his preoccupation with the future: “He did not believe in the inertia of the past, nor in the short-sightedness of the present”, says Guzmán, and he quotes Keynes as stating in 1926: “I don’t know what makes a man more conservative, if knowing only the present or knowing only the past”. He also quotes from Gailbraith, who, making reference to the forecasts of economic analysts, said: “Given the unpredictable but inevitable influence of the economy as a whole, it is clear that those who pretend to describe the future financial performance of an industry or a firm don’t really know it; ...they don’t know what they are talking about, and in general they don’t know that they don’t know” (deep uncertainty). And referring to the limits of knowledge he also quotes from Samuelson, who doubting the predictive capacity of economic theories, stated “during my whole life my teachings have been only half right; unfortunately I could never be sure which half was the right one!”. According to Guzmán, since after Adam Smith, “Economy begins to organize itself as a science elaborated by the rich and for the rich”. Guzmán believes that the majority of texts of the economics orthodoxy “scarcely allude to the problems of the disadvantaged, and when they do, they are stated as an exogenous variable of the corresponding economic model, with a certain dose of ‘compassion’”. He suggests that reductionism of economics to the merely technical derives in a very high risk of confusing the means with the ends, advocating in favor of a quantification of social phenomena, to be able to find solutions and to increase the well being of society. He is clearly against the scientific colonialism, the intellectual autism, the lack of realism, and the forgetfulness of the ethical roots which seem to dominate current economics.

The two remaining volumes of this trilogy, Prospective and Innovation, promise, the second, concrete experiences and case analysis applied to the territory and different professional situations, and the third, new approaches to the application of futures studies in areas where it has been absent up to now. If the variety of points of

view and experiences of these two future volumes equal those of this first volume, with a similar quality, they will certainly be worth reading.

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