

FUTURE*takes*

Transcultural Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

Vol. 4, no. 3 (Winter 2005-2006)

From the Desk of Tim Mack, President, World Future Society



One of my commitments upon taking office as WFS President 18 months ago was to put more focus on the ‘World’ in World Future Society. Over the past three months, this has certainly been the case. The planning for the Toronto conference in July 2006 has proven to be a very international process, and we are getting more overseas registration and session proposals than we have seen in quite awhile. As well, the interaction between WFS chapters and the international office has substantially increased of late, including a series of visits we were able to make to Asia, Central and South America this fall.

Tamkang University was the host of an a conference in early November on “Global Mind, Global Soul” which saw scholars (including a substantial number of WFS members) from the Pacific Rim and beyond addressing the technological, cultural, political and economic changes that have resulted from the accelerating globalism that is transforming all of our lives. Following that conference, quick visits with futurists in New Zealand and Argentina were followed by a series of trend discussions with a number of international trade associations in Montevideo, Uruguay. This was part of a range of presentations and seminars that WFS has been able to initiate with business and issue groups concerning coming challenges and opportunities. The result has been a greater understanding about the practical utility of foresight tools and studies in a variety of settings.

One of the critical lessons from these discussions is how important a factor that geography is in shaping the futures agenda. This does not mean that Tom Friedman is wrong when he says that “The World Is Flat,” but that local cultural issues have not yet melded into one uniform global mindset. This was especially the case during my visits to the WFS chapters in Brazil, such as in Sao Paulo, which is the commercial and financial capitol of the country. Instead of wanting to hear about new technology trends for their own sake, the Brazilians focused on the “human” side of technology transformation, including how it was affecting the ‘social gap’ between rich and poor, the growth of democratic institutions and the quality of life for the average citizen. At a number of universities and in the national government, the impact of technology and science policy is a matter of constant discussion and high priority.

This is especially the case in economic arenas where Brazil has been a world leader, such as the development of open source software and the production of fuels from biosources such as sugar cane. Brazilian innovation in distance learning and futures from the elementary school level all the way up were very impressive, as were advances in more complex scientific areas. A uniquely Brazilian aspect of their approach is the energetic manner in which they weave the technical, policy and social elements of change management into a coherent whole.

Finally, WFS was able to meet in October with the legislature of Mexico to work together in addressing a trend and policy agenda for the future of that country, involving government, private sector and academia. They were very interested in reviewing the experience of other countries in both hemispheres and the Society is in the process of linking them up with a number of members who have relevant backgrounds.

Another international initiative that may be of interest is in the area of education. In addition to a survey of all the foresight courses being taught around the world, WFS is also developing a range of teaching tools, both for secondary schools, colleges, and mid-career training. Ed Cornish's book, "Futuring: The Exploration of the Future," is now being used in 30 colleges and universities and the Society is involved in developing a workbook and CD to accompany that volume. Another endeavor is the upcoming launch of an electronic education newsletter early next year, to highlight new projects and papers from both individual members and organizations. The first step in this process is to pull together material for the initial issue, and I would be very happy to hear from any potential contributors to this new publication.

Accordingly, please get back to me at tmack@wfs.org or 301-656-8274 concerning your interest in contributing stories, offering editing assistance or any questions about the publication that you might have. Of course, we will be looking both at futures education and the future of education. Ideas about stories or information on innovation education programs that you are aware of would also be very useful, as would be suggestions concerning who else in the education field we should be asking for additional articles and ideas.

All in all, it has been a very productive year for the Society and our move into a range of new areas has been paying off handsomely. Our greatest payoff has been the growing level of member involvement in the programs and direction of WFS, resulting in a richer range of programs and a much more interactive organization. I applaud those who have contributed their ideas and time to date and encourage every member with a commitment to a better Society to join with me in making that a reality.