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“Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future”

Perspectives from Armenia, Canada, France, Georgia, Germany, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

A FRENCH TOUCH

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*“It is more easy to change culture than nature.
However, it is difficult to change culture as it is like nature”*
– Aristotle (Ethic to Nicomaque, VII – 10)

A deep and serious thinking on cultural perspectives for the future would have needed to question the semantics and differences of terms as Culture and Civilization. Civilization is contingent, Culture is (more) permanent, and Culture is more individual – even if shared with others – Civilization more easily referring to collective values; personal “life of the mind” for the former, collection of the “conditions of life” for the latter. Differences between life (daily) and Life (long), what we do in life and what we do of Life with the corresponding values (small v) as learned answers to problems and Values (big V) as ethical rules and aspirations (see Edgard Schein). This point is not just semantic debate as those distinctions often create self tensions, drive choices and are a permanent search of creative balance.

Leaving those considerations to further elaboration, I will present the “French Touch,” i.e. the French perspective as I can see it, in other terms from my experience as manager and consultant, and from my contacts, readings, and personal research

On the horizon, Cultural Values will be “Human-Centered” and “Human-Minded.” We will, more than today, rediscover the importance of a human approach having in mind the permanence of questions since Greek philosophers that Man put to himself, his environment and the Future in comparison of his unique, but in a way, limited skills to answer them with satisfaction in spite of progresses of all kinds .

Throughout history, humans relegated the power to God, then to Nature and often to other humans. We are discovering, with some hesitation, that what matters are social links, respect for nature and what it really means to be human.

ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Ecology will become after Biology the main value, not only for the environment's sake and for the objective of sustainable development but also as the new paradigm, a type of philosophical posture and, of importance for our subject, a frame of reference.

The basic principle of Ecology is "All living species need to survive to live in harmony with their environment." We are a living specie and our environment means not only nature but generally speaking "Others": civilisations, cultures, religions, gender, ages, generations, minds, bodies and physical appearances. Ecological thinking and framing will *naturally* bring tolerance, openness, empathy, and support to promote new goals illustrated by new processes as "Inclusive Design" and "Eco-design." The same consciousness will lead to the development of Fair Trade, respect for Mother Earth and decent heritage for Future generations.

This trend will have its counter-trend: the search for definition up to fighting to defend oneself and impose identity.

I feel by experience that such "symbolic tools" (used by Joel de Rosnay in *The Macroscope*) as Symbiosis and Co-Evolution could be complementary and of great help in understanding the present, finding emergent "Patterns," and enabling foresight; but this will need another article!

AGE AND YOUTH

There arises the question of what it means to be old or young and how the definitions that have already evolved will change again in the future as a function of demography. Remember that old has been segmented between seniors (over 50) and as we say in France, the "fourth age" refers to people over 70 or 80.

In this domain, the main concept seems to be Generation. Social peace will depend on our ability to find an equitable role in society for all generations and mainly solidarity between the young and the elderly. At the present time, youthfulness is a trend, nearly a value, and we have even created a neologism: "jeunisme."

In the near future, I envision that we will recognise the importance of the elderly who will make a "comeback" in society and business because of increased longevity and also because of quantitative and qualitative needs for specific competencies. There is also a recent but strong awareness of the value in mixing experience and risk taking in complex situations and projects.

NEW JOBS AND RIGHT BRAINS

New jobs will appear mainly in the information field for the "engineering" of information in the spirit of "Information ecology" (Davenport) and the necessity to distinguish data from information (Data, Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom, or DIKW). Innovation will be needed in all fields and the only "sustainable" answer to global competition.

The majority of new jobs will be interdisciplinary or better trans-disciplinary with tasks given to groups or networks more than to individuals. Examples can be found in very different areas such as cognitive sciences, mechatronics, biotech, and nanotech. Management and business scopes will be extended, suggesting the possibility of design courses in top business schools or creativity as a topic in Davos!

More jobs will concern new issues as security, worldwide governance, strategic intelligence, sustainable development, new energy sources, health and personal care but also in specialized high-tech products as R.F.I.D. and sensors needed in a huge variety of business-to-business or business-to-consumer products. Those types of components are also strategic as leadership in innovation, and monopoly in production will hurt competitors and make users dependent. In the past, the Japanese have called this type of basic electronic components: “Industrial rice,” and the metaphor is self-explanatory.

Innovation will be needed in all fields to overcome complexity and as the only “sustainable answer” to global competition. Good times are ahead for creativity and right brains. After the knowledge workers identified by the great Peter Drucker – as all businesses are becoming intelligent or at least smart businesses – we will be looking to “idea workers,” who are not the same and in some aspects opposite. Today few people are aware of the difference and able to imagine the idea business in all aspects of management from strategy to finance. Fighting to find and to keep this type of talent exists, but will be intensified among companies. Education that has focused more on how to teach than how we learn must rethink and revise programs and teaching methods to speak with efficacy to right brains.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS

We don’t know exactly how the future will be but I bet that Information, Innovation and Relation will be core competencies nurtured by what I call three C “stainless skills”: Curiosity, Creativity and Communication.

The star-system will lose its dominant position to produce celebrities. The show will not go on ... alone! Authenticity will at least partially replace superficiality, and this split may become the new transversal segmentation for people and artefacts. In a world of turbulence, complexity and threats of all kinds and sources, and urgent requests for risk taking and quick answers, I anticipate that courage will be the most admired quality. Courage in politics, business, education, and all domains where decision has to replace demagogy and quick fixes.

In this respect future studies are still too much “reserved” to public affairs and big companies that have the time and financial resources to be “Ambidextrous” – optimizing current business while preparing for the future. Unfortunately, managers of small businesses – which represent the largest part of French economy, employment and jobs creation – “keep their noses in the handlebars,” as we say.

In the political area, I think that the best way to illustrate the problem is given by the following quotation: “The horizon of politicians is the next elections, for statesmen the horizon is the next generation.” A signal of politicians’ myopia is that Commissariat au Plan in charge of national planning created by De Gaulle in 1946 has been abolished by the Prime Minister in 2005. This at a time where France needs some guidance, strategic thinking and industrial policy. The commissaire Alain Etchegoyen, who was a professor in philosophy in favour of real future studies methods, was replaced by a governmental official who focuses more on government specific issues and projects and more with an inside-out approach than one based on global scenarios .

To summarize, if future studies exist in France, their use is still too limited compared to the various benefits that “Futuring” represents. I think that the tipping point will be reached when anticipation is recognized as a need and a strategic tool for business and the state and ... taught in school. Maybe the established and promoted interest for innovation will be of some help. The Big Picture is for me the best way to think out of the box!

GLOBALIZATION AND ROOTS

Because of globalization and the countless reminders of it, the people know they belong to the so-called Global Village and are conscious that they are under an obligation to share daily practices via the Internet or the English language to communicate or to adopt lifestyles as fast food or be inspired by foreign tested solutions in national issues, but they want to maintain the fundamental features of their culture. In general they try to mix, balance or share, even in a paradoxical behaviour, “roots” and “imported values.” MacDonaldisation is a word used to describe the fact to stupidly adopt Anglo-Saxon rules and attitudes. But ... France is the leading market for MacDonald’s in Europe. People condemn outsourcing and delocalisation but they enjoy buying cheap Chinese products.

They adopt and adapt, using a DIY psychology.

MID-LIFE CRISIS FOR ALL AGES

As regards values such as work, the attitude largely differs among the public and encompasses extreme positions – workaholics on one part and 35 hours a week aficionados on the other extreme. Same thing between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants,” trend setters and traditionalists, etc. They group together according to affinities within tribes, communities, and networks.

I have also noticed some disturbing underlying patterns that one should take into consideration for future scenarios as the switch of status from Need to Value and reverse. Work that was a value is becoming a need, whereas safety was a need and is now positioned, lived and demanded as a value. Same from need to rights. Health and accommodation were once regarded as needs, but they are now considered as rights.

At the individual level, complexity, newness, diversity, and speeding up of changes do not give to human brains the time to adapt by learning and mainly unlearning; we are really living “future shock.” This create not only tensions but also despair or “mal de vivre.” Mid-life crisis occurs at all life stages!

The different aptitudes – psychological, social, and economic – to integrate the change and attain a fair level of resilience, increases the break-up of society into social nodes, networks and “hubs.” We define this as a “mosaic society.”

TOLERANCE

The essential national consensus on vision, main issues, and projects will definitely require a type of society reconciliation; shared vision starts by sharing visions. I think that the main driver for success – or not – in this field will be tolerance. Tolerance for differences in culture, values, lifestyles, and respect for choices from religion to politics with the conviction that one’s own rights end where others’ rights start.

In addition, a rising trend of Feminine Values is also anticipated.

... Persuasion rather than Force
 Consensus rather than Authority
 Compassion versus only peaceful conscience
 Affective relation instead of competition spirit
 Nuance preferred to clear cut

...

These trends may ease the evolution and, reinforced by the importance of old population, will help to build a calm but dynamic diversity and richness of individual and collective energies and forces to deal with XXI century opportunities and threats while also ironing out internal fights to maintain past privileges and corporatism.

FROM EGOSYSTEM TO ECOSYSTEM

...From the power over to the power to do.
From egosystem to ecosystem.

I know that it is quite an optimistic view and that society may crumble, but I am convinced that people feel the limits of partisan and selfish mentality. As usual, the future will be somewhere between opposite scenarios.

In a broader scope, Europe is tired of centuries of wars including conquest or colonial ones, and recent experience has reinforced the feeling that good and evil is a relative notion and even that the value of an adult or child life is not so shared on our planet. We are convinced that what we call progress or civilization in its strong and first meaning cannot be imposed by force. It is the case for the French republican principle and value: the famous Republican Universalism that we always hoped to export for the benefit of other nations and that is now only applied to some aspects inside our nation, for instance to immigrants. So, we are supposed to cautiously qualify a value as universal.

METRO-BOULOT-DODO

For daily life we have a figurative expression, borrowed from a poem and used as a slogan: Metro – Boulot – Dodo (Subway – Work – Sleep) which is supposed to represent the daily rhythm of people living in Paris or big cities (French scale). This taken for granted, commute syndrome is managed and “customized.” People view their cars as mobile homes and, thanks to cellular phones, as telephone booths. The fad for SUV’s is part of that trend.

In a recent study on French people’s opinions, they declared the following objects as essential to their daily lives:

- | | |
|-------------------|------|
| 1. Cellular phone | 53 % |
| 2. Home P.C | 38 % |
| 3. Microwave | 35 % |

Plus CDs, DVDs, MP3, disposable products and ... Post-It ® notes!

Every day life is already influenced by other cultures. In food (Pizza, the Big Mac, Couscous, Paella) dress (US Jeans or Nike, Friday wear), made in the UK weekends, time spent watching reality shows on TV, or hours with the company of Mister Google and Miss Wikipedia or our favorite eBay storekeeper. This openness to other cultures is balanced by the resistance to preserve “French exception” on the national level in the arts, movies, public policy, and social and private life through many expressions of touch and taste.

I envision that no other culture will be dominant – as such – one day in France. Integration does not mean normalization and standardization.

To be integrated and “nationalized,” foreign cultures must be first known and secondly understood. This is the case in France presently with Islam, where there is a convergent effort of media (TV, radio, books, special issues ...) to go in this direction to improve relationship and facilitate the distinction of peaceful Arab populations, including French citizens, from fundamentalists.

FRANCE HAS MUCH TO TEACH US

What lessons useful for the challenges of the future from France?

A very good question that calls for an answer delicately balanced between conviction and needed humility.

We can propose writers that built our culture and our vision of the world from Montaigne to Paul Valery, whose lessons are time-honored. Let me add that a real tradition for research from Pasteur and Marie Curie to professor Montagné and our leadership in several high tech areas is often hidden behind our image for food, arts, luxury, entertainment, and tourism. I will not hesitate to mention fathers of French future studies and terms: Gaston Berger (Prospective) and Bertrand de Jouvenel (Futuribles) and encourage our readers to go back to their same founding texts.

But definitely I think that our core value and historical and natural skill useful for the journey to the future lies in our sense of measure in both deepest and broadest sense. Measure to keep the sense of proportions in all things from artifacts and architecture to nuances in relationship and judgment and the rule to always behave in a moderate way.

For this future many challenges have been identified and the consensus on the key issues is real, even if some discrepancies endure, sometimes due only to personal exposure or sensitivity.

From my viewpoint what intrigues me more is the impact on future society of a variety of existing but new, on a long time scale, lifestyles, habits, and social trends. I will not judge them as positive or negative but I think only that we take them as granted with no further analysis practices for which we have no real hindsight and only short experience.

I will mention in order: Homosexuality and homosexual couples, combined family, daily use of psychotropic drugs or monthly visit to psychiatrists of all sorts, sometimes narcotics, unemployed youth, teenagers or even children becoming consumers and brand addicts before starting to work, interbreeding, intangibility, ubiquity, and virtual reality even in toys. Those social trends, combined with the weakening or even decline of “structuring institutions” as traditional couples and families, religion, the Army, education, and the nation, may have a noticeable impact on future society.

In this domain we have to take into account not only the specific impact of a particular trend but also the hidden potential of convergences and cross-impacts.

Pursuing the same idea, we have to examine various potential consequences of this human history first: the cohabitation of so various generations or cohorts in the sociological sense. To complete this analysis we must integrate the evolution of the characterization itself of generations as X, Y and other “boomers” and the shortening of time spans.

In the “Wild Cards” register, encouraged by the advice to “think the unthinkable” and “expect the unexpected” (Roger von Oech), I dare to put forward two hypotheses. First:

A crisis of consumption in developed countries.

By the confluence of very different trends – from satiation of needs, ecology issues, the oil crisis, the wisdom of the elderly, the search for spirituality, the rising leadership of “cultural creatives,” and a clear and persuasive answer to the question, “How much is enough?” – hedonism is replaced by asceticism, and products stay on shelves and cars in dealers’ parking lots. What will become global business, economies of emergent countries, weakening purchase power of the “Base of the Pyramid” and attached strategies?

Marketing people will have to make a quantum leap in creativity to escape unemployment! Even if this scenario is not probable, scenarios, company strategies, and nations' plans based on an *implicit* assumption of increasing needs and purchases is risky.

And a wilder hypothesis:

Free Western world governments have to negotiate with official representatives of an alliance of terrorist territories and groups after a series – in a short period of time – of “successful” 9/11s .

We have to imagine what would be the conditions, the demands of terrorists, and the amount of latitude of the free World ... just to take preventive measures and check the adequacy of our national and international Early Warning Systems, crisis management training programs and preventive plans.

After such an unacceptable scenario, it is difficult to see the optimistic side except if we refer to the humorous expression: a pessimist is an optimist who took time to think! More seriously, the situation is paradoxical; people are not satisfied but a majority is “optimistic with realism.” Optimism is more on an individual basis, except in the fields of employment for the youngest and retirement conditions for the eldest; pessimism is collective expression but mixed with hope of change.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

For a while France has suffered a lack of trust, living a depressive nostalgic mood, assuming a period of repentance for several past historical events. This convergence of pessimistic attitudes has been kept going by media who invented the term “Declinology.” People are forecasting a period of change – reinforced by the coming presidential elections and candidates' programs – and foresee an upheaval of the society (50 %); meanwhile they build and develop a strong individual “resilience.”

We can outline the main aspirations of French people:

A welcoming and consensual society
An equilibrium between Economic and Social
A protection of the weakest.

They request more security and if needed will accept more authority. Their values are (in rank order) Family, Honesty, Tolerance, and Freedom. They are worried about the planet's future and start to show true ecological behaviors in their daily life and talk.

To summarize the French people's perspectives on the future, I will say that there are three levels of consideration: a) France, b) the World and c) the future place of France in that future world. For the French nation, everybody is convinced that the status quo is not bearable, and agree that if not declining, France is “Stalling.”

Comments show the sharing of this need to recover. “Time has come for France to choose its future”¹ and must find the “Taste of the Future”². In anticipation of this situation, Nicolas Bordas asks us to consider “optimism as a civic duty”³. And J. Attali⁴ hopes that the leaders of the country will know how to “make possible to be happy with life in France and to implement a human ideal made of measure and ambition, of passion and elegance, optimism and insolence...”

¹ Gerard Mermet, sociologist, in *Francoscopie*

² title of book by J.C Guillebaud

³ Vice Président, TBWA France, in *Le Monde*

⁴ latest book, *A Short Story of Future*

In front of this issue – except left extremists who, by ideology strictly refuse globalization and capitalism and, as such, present society – the vast majority is in one way or the other ready to participate to the change ...without revolution! A real leader with a vision and a project can break the “shell” of individualism or indifference.

Our two key factors of success are on one side a rebuilt trust in government and on the other side a real desire to share the efforts to overcome past divergences for future common good. Major issues are civism, education in a broad sense, improved economic knowledge among average citizens, a fair conception of identity avoiding the hard line, and above all a quantum leap in future consciousness.

Internationally, France shares with other countries threats and fears as terrorism is linked with atomic danger, impact on the economy, competition primarily in low-wage industries, the demographic imbalance of the working population vis-à-vis retired people, and some others

In foreign relations, we have definitely to re-launch the building of Europe after our “off the subject” vote and to deal with the complexity of enlargement. Solving the delicate problem of immigration is also of prime importance. We have proven in the past that we strongly reject any and all hegemony from anywhere, whether the would-be hegemon is the USA, China, or the new Caliphate.

But reasonable people are convinced that there is no alternative to the power of states for the large scale protection of our freedom and values in this turbulent and aggressive world, often at the edge of madness. This needs a common effort to find the best way to resolve the tension among the allied and aligned.

It is difficult to give priority to present issues for the future, but after deep careful consideration I may propose the following.

First and foremost we have to rebuild trust and overcome differences to rediscover the feeling of belonging, national impulse and the sense of future.

The core question for France – after making the inside effort to change to anticipate and adapt – is: to what extent the future outside world will permit us to preserve not all but our fundamental ways of thinking and living? This in accordance with the true motivation to be a good and fair player in the global team of volunteers for a better world to participate in peaceful efforts on hunger, respect for women’s rights, child protection, healthcare for all, ecology, and freedom.

If we look back in our history, we had always these same types of goals with our share of mistakes, utopias, confusions in ways to achieve, and ... delays.

It is not so easy to accept being a relatively small country while feeling and acting to stay a great nation.

But, as a people, we are intimately convinced with Jerome Bindé of UNESCO:

“The desirable futures, for human societies in their diversity, are those giving to humanity a human future.”

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- *Tuvéé refers to the lifestyle extremes of workaholics and “35 hours a week aficionados” that are found in contemporary France. Various other nations in Europe are also characterized by balance among work, family, and leisure, as evidenced by longer vacations, for example. By contrast, many US workplaces are a working lunch, eat-at-your-desk, eat-while-you-drive, and “being sick is not an option” culture – with some companies even mandating uncompensated overtime. In the present globalization environment with multinational corporations, which working lifestyle will prevail in your country in 2015?*
- *Tuvéé envisions that in the near future, the elderly will make a “comeback” in society and business because of increased longevity and also because of quantitative and qualitative needs for specific competencies. Will this comeback make some societies less youth-oriented and more age-oriented (including increased respect for the elderly), and if so, which ones? Furthermore, how will this comeback affect the ways that people of all ages live and work?*
- *Tuvéé observes that “There is also a recent but strong awareness of the value in mixing experience and risk taking in complex situations and projects.” Does this awareness herald a new business model – and if so, in what timeframe and with what role for risk? (As one data point, a new business often starts on the basis of a vision that is seemingly a “wild idea” but later becomes risk-averse – as expressed by the old adage, “Don’t bet your company on a wild idea.”)*
- *Several nations can be characterized as left-brain societies, as suggested by their emphasis on mathematics and science education. Do you agree with Tuvéé that good times are ahead for right-brained people and idea workers? If so, in which parts of the world?*
- *According to Tuvéé, “The star-system will lose its dominant position to produce celebrities.” In 2020, who will the celebrities be, and why?*
- *Tuvéé further anticipates that “Courage in politics, business, education, and all domains where decision has to replace demagoguery and quick fixes” will be the most admired quality. In various parts of the world, people are increasingly disillusioned with political leaders, especially when the “cast of characters” changes but the “drama” remains invariant. Furthermore, in various professions – even the military, which traditionally has valued leaders – one can find so-called leaders who are nothing more than “go along, get along” managers. In 2018, will leaders in politics, business, and education be primarily conviction leaders or consensus leaders? (See other articles on leadership, this issue and prior issues.) Will they be more likely than many of today’s leaders to think and act beyond the “quarterly earnings statement” and the next elections? In what other ways will the leaders of tomorrow and those of today be different?*
- *Tuvéé observes that (at least in France) future studies are primarily the realm of large companies that have the time and financial resources to commit to them. In 2015, will more small companies in your country conduct or utilize future studies or otherwise become more future-oriented?*
- *The article states that “People condemn outsourcing and delocalisation but they enjoy buying cheap Chinese products.” For how many more years are outsourcing and delocalisation as now practiced, including the delocalisation of capital and investment, sustainable? Explain the basis for your estimate.*

- *In 2015, what will be regarded as rights as opposed to needs, and in which nations?*
- *Tuvéé anticipates a resurgence of feminine values. Do you agree – and if so, what will be the impact? (Also see David Day’s article, this issue.)*
- *Tuvéé notes that “recent experience has reinforced the feeling that good and evil is a relative notion...” Is moral relativism sustainable through 2015 – and if so, with what impact on intercultural relationships?*
- *Tuvéé envisions that no other culture will displace contemporary French culture within France. Which other nations and peoples will maintain their cultures through 2020, and which ones will experience substantial deculturation?*
- *Among the social trends that Tuvéé has observed are a weakening of “structuring institutions” such as traditional families as well as religion and even the nation. What is the long-term prospect for these structuring institutions, especially the family, in your country – and with what consequences?*
- *Tuvéé anticipates a crisis of consumption in developed nations – the result of several factors including satiation of needs – perhaps culminating in unemployment for marketing people. Indeed, the consumer economies of several nations are based on creating and then satisfying discontent, but progressively more people are finding that material possessions and even social status do not bring fulfilment. What will follow the economy based on discontent, and in what timeframe?*