

Part I

Approaches to Futures Studies

Literature on Futures Studies mentions a wide array of methods and techniques to explore, gather, and recognize facts to develop the process of the inference of futures.

During the past 100 years, many schools and hybrid approaches to Futures Studies have arisen around the world. Sometimes fueled by defense initiatives or ambitions concerning geostrategic interests. Then, whether out of the corporate interest in preventing unforeseen turbulence in markets, or out of a nation's need to rethink itself including discussion about the role of communities in the emerging processes of long-term strategic reflection.

The main schools can be found in Europe and America, and they have integrated various aspects into their approaches.

Some of them are known for centering the discussions on the future to guide decision-making in the present, stating that the future must not be suffered, and it must be built instead. This is a sign that shows the degree of human sovereignty in the process of creating its own path, where tendencies are only some of the many signals that offer a chance to create conjectures on the future, however, without surprises. Anyhow social action is the determinant factor of human becoming.

Other approaches operate through the increasingly faster (and more diverse in terms of sources) systematic gathering of data, using an increasing number of ever "smarter" algorithms, as a means to try to answer the question of what could happen tomorrow in an itinerant way to study the future through prevision and forecast. This approach has progressively needed better computational capacities, exceeding by far those of the IBM 360 of 1966. The triad composed of data + mathematical artifacts + computational capabilities has been reconfirmed, and again.

Other approaches, however, have assumed positions in-between, while others have shown signs of radicalness. Even though the future is of interest as a subject of study, some approaches see consensus as the central point in decision-making concerning the actions to be taken in the present to face the future. Other approaches emphasize the role of mankind, centering their reflections concerning the future of human doing and becoming.

In the process, all the schools and hybrid approaches that emerged have found converging paths. This convergence process, which has had ups and downs since the 1950s, has recently shown increasing vitality and has become the subject of greater interest. Particularly due to the dramatic expansion of new technology and approaches from the modeling of social systems, digital social networks, and the growing recognition of artificial intelligence; among other novelties, where Futures Studies have an important chapter to write.

In the process of future visualization, notions as understanding the systemic structure of the strategic design, the fuzzy nature of value judgments made by decision-makers, experts and other concerned social actors, and the link between Futures Studies and strategy. All have had a notoriously limited development in academic literature. All the while, there is a limited literature that discusses the use of Soft Computing methods in strategic prospective.

To contextualize the evolution of thought in the West around the Future Studies, the following is a brief historical overview.