



SOCIAL FUTURING – CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

First Conference of the Social Futuring Center

05/05/2017

9.00 – 15.00

A38 Ship

Program



9.00 – 9.30 Arrival, Registration

9.30 – 9.40 Opening ceremony, Foreword – János Csák

9.40 – 12.00 I. Plenary Session – The Concept of Social Futuring – Prelude, Approaches, Factors

Chair: Zoltán Oszkár Szántó

9.40 – 10.10	Bálint Ablonczy Ideas of Social Futuring in the Hungarian History of Ideas
10.10 – 10.15	Commentary: Luca Kristóf
10.15 – 10.45	Petra Aczél The Social Futuring Discourse: The Lingual and Cultural Approach to Social Futuring
10.45 – 10.50	Commentary: Csaba Török
10.50 – 11.20	Péter Pillók – László György Test Criteria of Social Futuring
11.20 – 11.25	Commentary: János Csák
11.25 – 11.55	Balázs Szepesi Who Are the Key Actors of Social Futuring?
11.55 – 12.00	Károly Mike
12.00 – 12.25	DISCUSSION, Questions and Answers

12.25 – 13.00 Lunch Reception

13.00 – 15.00 II. Plenary Session – Contexts of Social Futuring – Venues, Processes, Methods

Chair: János Csák

13.00 – 13.30	Róbert Iván Gál 40 Is the New 30
13.30 – 13.35	Commentary: Tamás Bartus
13.35 – 14.05	Gyula Bakacsi The Future is in Networking
14.05 – 14.10	Commentary: Károly Takács
14.10 – 14.50	DISCUSSION, Questions and Answers

14.50 Closing Ceremony, Afterword – Zoltán Oszkár Szántó

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

9.40 – 10.10 Bálint Ablonczy

Ideas of Social Futuring in the Hungarian History of Ideas

Commentary: Luca Kristóf

It is quite impossible to introduce the last two hundred years' theories of Hungarian social futuring as a whole, since its literature is really complex and diverse. So, in order not to slip into endless text analyses, I have chosen three thinkers, and try to present their lives' work. To put István Széchenyi, Miklós Bánffy and Zoltán Szabó on the same page might seem startling, but due to their ideas being so unique and influential, they all have importance reaching way beyond their personal merits as thinkers. Studying their work might provide answers not only to „what” to do, but also, „how” to do it.

István Széchenyi, The Distressed Nation Founder

„Many think that Hungary is the past. I would like to think she is the future” – Széchenyi had written as the closing words of his book 'Credit', which sentence later became his credo. It shows great anticipation for his nation but also a strong sense of distress over its possible disappearance. Although this tension has also lead to his personal tragedy, we can still see the momentum and results of his program today: building the Chain Bridge, spending on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The take-home lesson of his monumental work of founding a civil nation is that how a field study describing the economical, cultural, communicational and demographical state of a country may be changed to acts, to building, and it also shows that only one single person can affect the discourse of the future of a whole nation.

Miklós Bánffy, The Institution Founder

Miklós Bánffy was not only a gifted writer and talented drawer, but also an outstanding politician of the Twentieth Century who was able to realise our national interests in an ever-changing international environment. „We cannot follow illusions and misleading ideas. We have learned through bitter experience that with our existing forces, the only way for our International Relations is through politics based on reality” he said in his inauguration speech in April 1921 when he became Minister of Foreign Affairs. He gained respect through the fact

that it was his view that helped Hungary to his greatest foreign policy success, the referendum of Sopron. After his return to Transylvania in 1926, he showed how it was possible to found institutions and communities through reaching otherwise far-flung elite groups. Should it be culture (Erdélyi Helikon), economics (Transylvanian Hungarian Economical Society) or religion (Transylvanian Diocese of the Reformed Church), Miklós Bánffy always found a way to act even at times when political rights were denied from Transylvanians. He acted in favour of the Transylvanian Hungarian communities' future in a holistic way as we would say today.

Zoltán Szabó, Rethinker of the Nation Concept

If we accept it as a basic thesis that a Hungarian national community existed and still exists, and we try to consider its social futuring, we cannot evade Zoltán Szabó's ideas offering ointment to our historical traumas. The renowned sociologist, who was active during the inter-war era, always remained antifascist and anticommunist – much unlike his contemporary peers. He always thought about the possible self-definition and possible future of a Hungarian national community, no matter he was in Hungary, or in exile in Britain and France. He was among the first to point out that in a self-definition one cannot start out from an area, a state, or a country, as one third of Hungarians lived in different countries outside the borders of Hungary: therefore, he argued, Hungarian was a diasporic nation. Hence, thinking about our social futuring, one must consider all Hungarians living abroad too, even those who have, after the 1956 revolution, settled in Western countries, and whose offspring might not even speak Hungarian. He, therefore, tried to find a cure for our soon-to-be hundred-year-old national Trianon-trauma, stating: „a person is not only a part of a community, but also an offspring of a certain area, son of a unique and nowhere-else to-be-found diffraction”. This leads us to see, that a certain area could be home to lots of different peoples, and that we are connected to areas long lost, such as the Carpathians, the Lower Danube, Székelyföld, Mezőség, Bereg, Gömör, even if we cannot consider these regions our own anymore.

10.15 – 10.45 Petra Aczél

The Social Futuring Discourse: The Lingual and Cultural Approach to Social Futuring

Commentary: Csaba Török

The formation of the idea of social futuring is deeply rooted in language and discourse. The act of naming is also „giving birth”, putting our subject into interaction, shaping our symbolic reality. Therefore, defining and formulating the idea of social futuring invites new narratives and discourse; a communicative act that shapes our way of seeing.

But what kind of ideological system is one in which social futuring is analysable? Where and what kind of discourse is one that might define or undermine a person's or entity's futuring? How can social futuring become a discourse-shaping factor?

My presentation in relation to these questions aims to uncover three main connections. First of all, wishes to connect the idea of social futuring with some other, semantically similar ideas (future-orientation, future-proof, future-preemption, certain strategies of optimism and pessimism, visions and rethorical visions) and point out some skills and competences that correlate with social futuring. The target is to put social futuring on a personal, mental and sociological-sociocultural map, and try to show how the birth, the descriptive and analytical function of this idea could shape already existing discourses and narratives. Third, I would also like to point out how the paradoxes existent in our social communication could be solved with the idea of social futuring.

The presentation puts emphasis on our lingual-communicative attitude towards future and discusses the symbolic and social factors needed for active and proactive solution forming against related problems, chances, conflicts and challenges.

10.50 – 11.20 Péter Pillók – László György

Test Criteria of Social Futuring

Commentary: János Csák

In our presentation, we are trying to establish a framework that allows for us to be used as an integrated system of methodological and thematic approaches of the questions to be examined.

According to our point of view, social futuring of a country can be grouped according to four main factors:

- Knowledge: That is, what kind of lexical and cognitive elements and skills do we need and how can we acquire them;
- Material requirements: What are those material requirements and establishments (in a broad sense, including IT and technology) that define the possibilities of social futuring;
- Environmental possibilities: that is, what are those natural resources that are to be dominant in the future and how a certain country manages these resources
- Social possibilities: That is, what kind of cultural elements and merits are required to hold a local, national and international society together and manage the previous three factors.

The balance, the quantity and quality of these four factors determine the quality of life, which is, according to certain views, the main goal of social and economical activities.

The four said factors provide an exclusive and complete framework for further research, and after establishing this framework, one can try to find out what methods should be used to gain knowledge, and to determine the main goals of the research.

11.25 – 11.55 Balázs Szepesi

Who Are the Key Actors of Social Futuring?

Commentary: Károly Mike

My presentation offers a conceptual framework that may help to define and analyze the key actors of social futuring.

This framework supports

- to reveal who shapes the future of a certain sociological entity (community),
- to analyze the characteristics, motivations and acts of these key actors,
- to formulate statements and proposals regarding social futuring.
- The presentation aims:
 - to map the literature that discusses the operation and possible changes of certain communities;
 - to elaborate a conceptual framework focusing on the attributes, operations of key actors and on the context, motives and chances of these operations;
 - propose a draft working program to develop and apply the conceptual framework.

Social futuring is defined as the ability of communities to utilize (or generate) opportunities and manage risks created by external or internal changes. Our intention is to get insight into the cast of these changes. The presentation build on a literature review that focused on institutional economics, analytical political economy, economic sociology and organizational sociology.

13.00 – 13.30 Róbert Iván Gál – Márta Radó

40 Is the New 30

Commentary: Tamás Bartus

The ratio most frequently used to measure a society's pace of aging is the old-age dependency ratio, which is calculated as follows:

$$\text{old-age dependency ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of 65+ year olds}}{\text{Number of 20-64 year olds}}$$

The numerator and the denominator change independently of each other, and as public opinion sees it, infavourably. The numerator, the number of elderly people, is growing, because mortality rates are quickly improving especially in higher ages. Although everybody agrees that this progress is favourable, there seems to be a general consent that we cannot afford it. Secondly, the denominator of the ratio, the working age population, is decreasing due to past and recent low fertility rates. Consequently, as the argument goes, population aging puts a great burden on the welfare system and slows down or even halts economic growth –in short, it is a gravely negative process.

There are, however, some more optimistic views. Some say population aging is not as alarming as we tend to think, and fending off the negative effects does not necessarily involves stopping the ageing of society that is equivalent to unremitting population growth. Population aging is inevitable; it can only be postponed. However, various components of the process compensate for the negative effects partly automatically and partly through rational policies. More specifically, the demarcation line between working age and old age is not carved in stone. People can stay longer in the labour market. In addition, lower fertility gives an opportunity to save the resources not spent on children and accumulate wealth that can sustain growth and support the social security system during the demographic transition.

This research aims to analyze these two alternatives.

13.35 – 14.05 Gyula Bakacsi

The Future is in Networking

Commentary: Károly Takács

Barabási's scale-free theory with its network-model and new terminology offers a whole new viewpoint in analysis of global socio-economical (interdependence and power structures) relations. These networks are free of human intervention, that is, scale-free (controlled from few hubs); the only personal choice here lies in which hub to connect to. Barabási points out that these networks are robust (self-correcting), but in the same time, the hubs are very vulnerable: weakening of hubs might lead to the collapse of the whole network. The most important question in the context of social futuring is therefore to find that very aptitude attraction the obsolescence of which might lead to weakening, and the new aptitude attraction that redraws the whole scale-free network with the establishment of new hubs and connections. By drawing up the networking patterns of the future we might get a chance to predict how a part of the network (Hungary) would be able to find a suitable place in this network with regards to its chances, competences and resources. However, connecting to the wrong hub (mistakenly believing it to be more important or strong than it actually is) or connecting to the network too late might result in sub-par positions.

This presentation intends to show and analyse a few network patterns of the past and tries to formulate hypotheses and ideas about future networks, aptitude attractions and hubs.