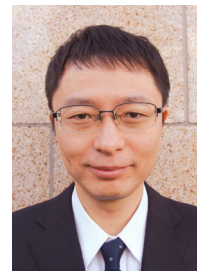


Future Design for Political Systems

By Yoichi Hizen



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What Is Future Design?

Future Design (FD) is an academic field (theory, experimentation, inquiry) and its praxis that aims to build new social systems catering to future generations, so as to achieve sustainable, future-ready societies. Tatsuyoshi Saijo of Kochi University of Technology established a research society together with Keishiro Hara and colleagues of Osaka University to promote discussions, resulting in the setting up of the Research Institute for Future Design at Kochi University of Technology, and a Future Design Section in the Center for Open Innovation Research and Education at the Graduate School of Engineering at Osaka University.

The building of social systems draws on macro-issues of economics, politics and engineering, all the way to micro-issues of psychology, evolutionary biology and neuroscience, to answer the question of whether humans are disposed to carefully consider future generations (i.e. humans who do not yet exist) and, if they are so disposed, what is needed to mobilize that disposition. Furthermore, finding answers to questions regarding the nature of what it is that will fundamentally benefit future generations draws on philosophical issues. In this way, FD drives collaboration by surpassing the traditional boundaries of academic disciplines. Government officials of local bodies and ministries, too, are participating in the research, and results are being turned into practicalities. The results are becoming visible in education, with FD classes to start being held in 2019.

How to Include Future Generations

The fundamental question is how a new social system can cater to future generations. To answer this, the main current topic of research in FD is the establishment of “Imaginary Future Generation” discussion groups. That is, creating groups within citizens’ town planning discussion forums and, for example, asking them to imagine that they are citizens in the year 2060, to discuss from that point of view what they think will be of benefit to their society, and seeing what ideas they produce.

Sustainability research to date has used “backcasting”, asking what sort of future conditions will be engendered by the current generation and then considering what must currently be done for the sake of them. Nevertheless, it is difficult to reach agreement among

the current generation about future conditions that, in order to achieve them, entail disadvantages. This is why policies necessary for bringing about benefits for future generations, but to the disadvantage of current generations, tend to be deferred. There is no avoiding it: future generations must be brought into the debate. But those future generations have yet to appear. This does not mean giving up on participation by future generations. Rather, it means creating an imaginary future generation in today’s society, and having it participate that way. Behind this approach is a powerful sense of crisis: an understanding that without going to such lengths, solutions to the issue of sustainability will be difficult to achieve, and a concurrent widening of the scope of shared consciousness. The ideas and initiatives of FD have been covered by the major domestic Japanese newspapers, and also introduced in 17 languages on the internationally broadcast NHK World-Japan.

The FD method of creating imaginary future generations has been used for town planning purposes, including the town of Yahaba in Iwate Prefecture and numerous other local bodies, from Hokkaido to the Kansai region. Observing what is happening on the ground there, the trend is towards creative, concrete ideas being produced that aim to leverage each municipality’s strengths. Furthermore, imaginary future generation-style group discussions have been held in Japan, Nepal and Bangladesh as experiments undertaken for research purposes, and the results published as papers in *Sustainability Science*, *Futures*, *PLOS ONE*, and other academic journals.

Evidence of the usefulness of imaginary future generation-style citizens’ discussions for town planning is steadily growing, raising expectations of their being noticed and taken up by other local bodies and spreading nationwide. Such expectations extend to the administrative staff of local bodies who organize these citizens’ discussion groups. It is hoped that they will create imaginary future generations among themselves, establishing “Future Departments” within local bodies, and take on the task of incorporating a future generation perspective into current measures and policies. If the notion finds currency among the Japanese people in general that local bodies without such a department lack foresight *vis-à-vis* future generations, then the spread of Future Departments throughout local bodies across Japan can only accelerate. The Yahaba town hall has already established the Yahaba Future 22 Research Center. Local authority initiatives of this kind reaching the national level would result in the establishment of a “Ministry of the Future”. The officers

of the Ministry of the Future would involve themselves in all policies that affected the interests of future generations, negotiate with other ministries, and work to ensure benefits for future generations. (Although a limited-period project, an actual example of this is the Swedish government's "Mission: the Future" – a long-term project that examined issues from 2015 to 2016. The minister responsible was Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation Kristina Persson, who was referred to as the "Minister of the Future".)

Possibilities in Politics

The above initiatives and frameworks are posited as being undertaken mainly by citizens and government officials; but the regular way of doing things is that politicians appeal to the people concerning how the country's future should be, are chosen through elections, and proceed with bringing that about. So, is FD possible by the hand of politicians?

In current elections, voters are citizens aged 18 years or over. It follows, therefore, that for politicians to win an election on a platform that brings disadvantages to the current generation in order to achieve benefits for future generations, they must have the support of the current generation of voters. Saijo defines futurability as follows: "A person exhibits *futurability* when this person experiences an increase in happiness as a result of deciding and acting to forego current benefits as long as it enriches future generations." ("Future Design: Bequeathing Sustainable Natural Environments and Sustainable Societies to Future Generations", Working Paper, SDES-2018-4, Kochi University of Technology, 2018). To achieve benefits for future generations by way of the electoral system in its current state, the present generation must have futurability and exercise it in its voting decisions. If this is deemed difficult, then the introduction of a new electoral system must be considered. I introduce an electoral system design that establishes a representative seat for future generations, and a ballot for the sake of future generations.

Creating Seats for Future Generations

Creating seats means establishing a special constituency for future generations where election candidates can vie for seats on the basis of their public commitments made for the sake of future generations.

The number of seats allotted to such a constituency could be increased, and aggregated as one of two chambers, which chamber could then be named the Future House. Ultimately, it would be given supreme authority, with bills that passed through the existing house having to be ratified by passage through the Future House as well. However, voters in the special constituencies would, like those in other constituencies, be of the current generation, and election winners could well end up being those candidates who minimized disadvantages for the current generation.

Such a danger can be postulated, as demonstrated in the results of research on elections for the lower house in India ("Does Political Reservation Affect Voting Behaviour? Empirical Evidence from India" by Yuko Mori and Takashi Kurosaki, *Economic & Political Weekly* 51 (20), 2016). In constituencies with large numbers of those from the former untouchable class, there is a rule that only those of that class may stand for election. (Electorates of this kind are known as reserved constituencies.) This is a measure by which the socially disadvantaged can send representatives to parliament; but to look at it from another perspective, voters living in such constituencies but who belong to the upper social classes must choose who to vote for from among those belonging to what was once the untouchable class. Mori and Kurosaki took data from the National Election Study 2004 (the results of a questionnaire survey conducted on approximately 27,000 Indian voters by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) and subjected it to regression analysis. While the voting rate among members of the former untouchable class was 3.6% higher in reserved constituencies than in other constituencies, no difference was found between constituencies in the voting rate among those in the upper social classes. That is to say, giving preferential treatment to a particular class makes no difference to the voting behavior, in terms of whether to go and vote or not, of classes not afforded such treatment. However, the opposite result emerged in regard to the decision as to which party to vote for. Namely, there was no difference in the party vote between constituencies of former untouchables; but compared with other constituencies, there was a tendency for upper social class voters in reserved constituencies to vote less for parties supported by former untouchables and more for parties supported by the upper classes.

Creating Voting on Behalf of Future Generations

The effectiveness of rules to try and give special groups a political voice can be weakened by changes in the voting behavior of other groups – a point that must be considered when establishing voting on behalf of a future generation. Paul Demeny declared the need for governance that is keenly responsive to the voice of the younger generation, as a measure to cope with the declining birthrate, and proposed a voting system that gives parents a proxy vote on behalf of their children who have not yet reached voting age (“Pronatalist Policies in Low-fertility Countries: Patterns, Performance, and Prospects”, *Population and Development Review* 12 (supplement), 1986).

My own research group has been developing this idea, examining by way of laboratory experimentation to determine what kind of voting behavior ensues when certain voters vote as proxies for a future generation (“Hearing the Voice of Future Generations: A Laboratory Experiment of ‘Demeny Voting’” by Yoshio Kamijo, Yoichi Hizen, and Tatsuyoshi Saijo, Working Paper, SDES-2015-8, Kochi University of Technology; “Voting on Behalf of a Future Generation: A Laboratory Experiment” by Yoshio Kamijo, Yoichi Hizen, Tatsuyoshi Saijo, and Teruyuki Tamura, Working Paper, SDES-2018-2, Kochi University of Technology).

A group comprising mainly university students was supplemented in part with participants from the general populace and brought into a laboratory. They were divided into two groups representing, hypothetically, the current generation and a future generation. A vote was then held by the current generation group only on how to best divide money between the current and future generation. The participants were given a financial motivation in that the amount of money received would comprise the actual fee paid to them for participating. Two elections were held about how to divide the money: one based on the conventional rule of one person, one vote, and the other on the rule of certain voters being given an extra, proxy vote on behalf of a future generation (proxy voting).

The voting behavior of those who, because of the proxy voting rule, did not get to vote on behalf of a future generation (i.e. those not given preferential voting rights) was scrutinized. In voting based on the conventional rule, there were those who voted to allocate the money equally between the current and future generation. However, it was observed that some of the same people, in voting where the

proxy voting rule was in place, voted to reduce the amount of money allocated to the future generation and increase the amount allocated to the current generation.

Even if the trouble is taken to introduce voting on behalf of a future generation, voters not given this preferential voting right can change their voting behavior in a way that weakens the effectiveness of such an electoral system. However, encouragingly, it has also been observed that an explanation of the purpose of proxy voting can ameliorate this change in voting behavior.

Importance of the Process of System Change

A brusque change in the system can provoke resistance among rights holders who do not enjoy preferential treatment under it in its new form, and hinder achievement of the original purpose of the system change. For this reason, the design of such a system must extend even to the process of change. Mechanisms must be in place that prevent counteraction between the effects of the system, along with mechanisms that, from the outset, ensure that the system changes meet with approval. Considering that all system changes take place in the context of current systems, then, of course, they require the support of the current generation. It therefore follows that futurability must be mobilized.

Finding solutions for the macro-issue of social system architecture (an election system that includes future generations) requires micro-research into human qualities (futurability). FD must be promoted in an all-out mobilization of every discipline. We look forward to the participation of researchers and practitioners in various fields. **JS**

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