

The importance of looking at the other side of the coin – the un-futures expanding the scope of tomorrows

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Futures4EuropeConference2026 *'Daring to think otherwise'*

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Structure of Presentation

1. Introduction
2. Concept of Un-futures
3. Conclusions



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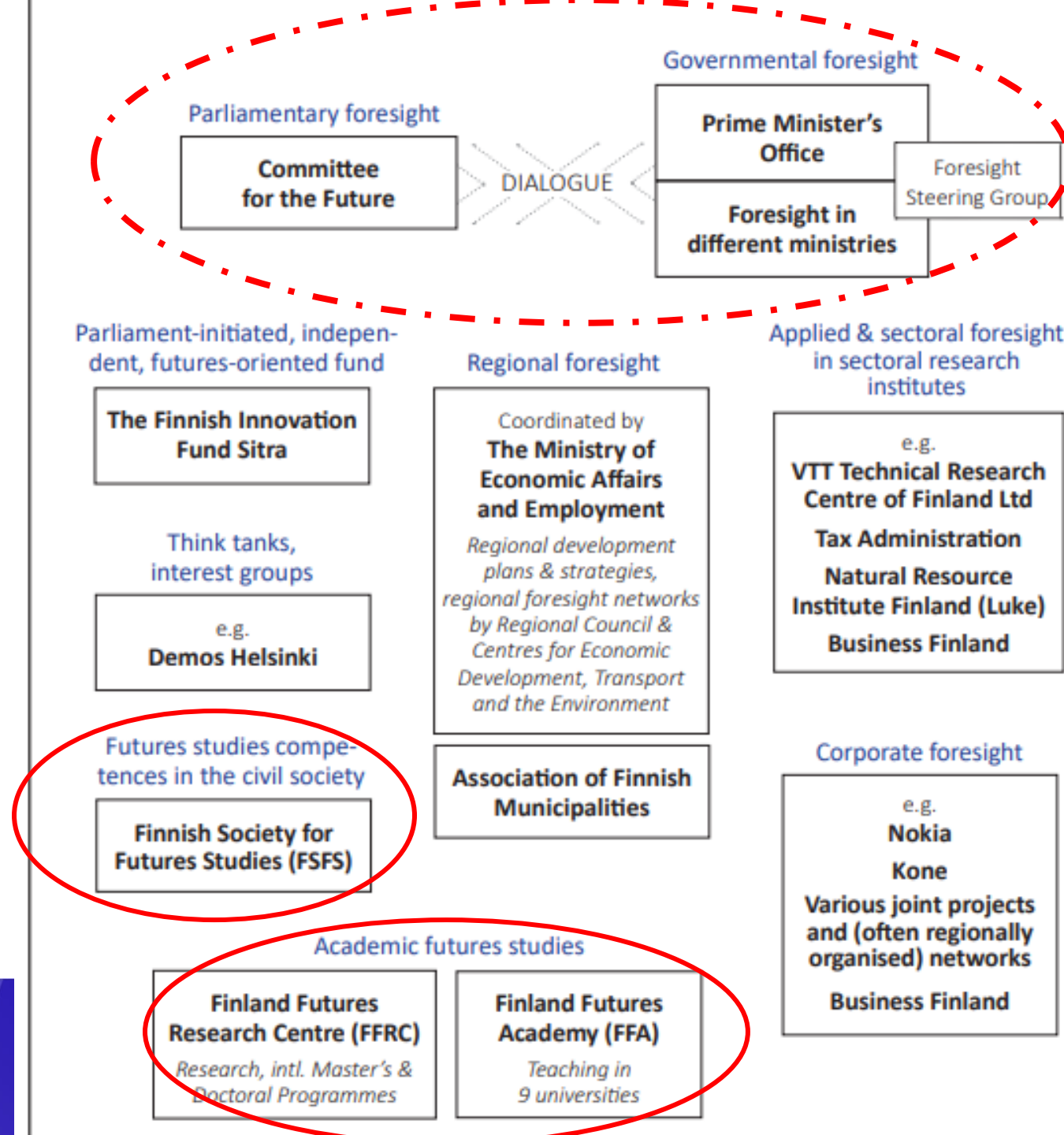
Finnish National Foresight System

See

<https://www.tutuseura.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Our-World-of-Futures-Studies-as-a-Mosaic-part-one.pdf>

For the Finnish Mind&Happiness,
see also Benedikt (2025)

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Imagining otherwise – also includes **learning from other futures cultures**

– how futures studies and foresight are conceptualised and being conducted in different countries around the globe

Futures Series 10

OUR WORLD OF FUTURES STUDIES AS A MOSAIC Part 1

Edited by Tero Villman • Sirkka Heinonen • Laura Pouru-Mikkola



Part 1 <https://www.tutuseura.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Our-World-of-Futures-Studies-as-a-Mosaic-part-one.pdf>

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Our World of Futures Studies as a Mosaic

Part 1
&
Part 2

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OUR WORLD OF FUTURES STUDIES AS A MOSAIC Part 2

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2. Concept of Un-futures

According to the canonical principles of futures studies we should explore and anticipate **possible, probable** and **preferred** futures (Amara 1981).

This **three-fold claim** is valid today, but too frequently only the **probable** futures are being sought for.

The future is plural and there are **multiple alternative futures**. The scope of tomorrows should be **expanded still further**.

If we want to explore futures openly and yet not to be crippled by the shocks therein, more attention should be given to the other side of the coin – i.e. '**un-futures**' (Heinonen et al. 2022).

Not only what is likely/probable should be thought of, thus **unlikely/improbable** is an area worth exploring.

An ever expanding space of possible futures

A wider field of **possible** futures can also be stretched to probing the **unthinkable**, the **unimaginable**.

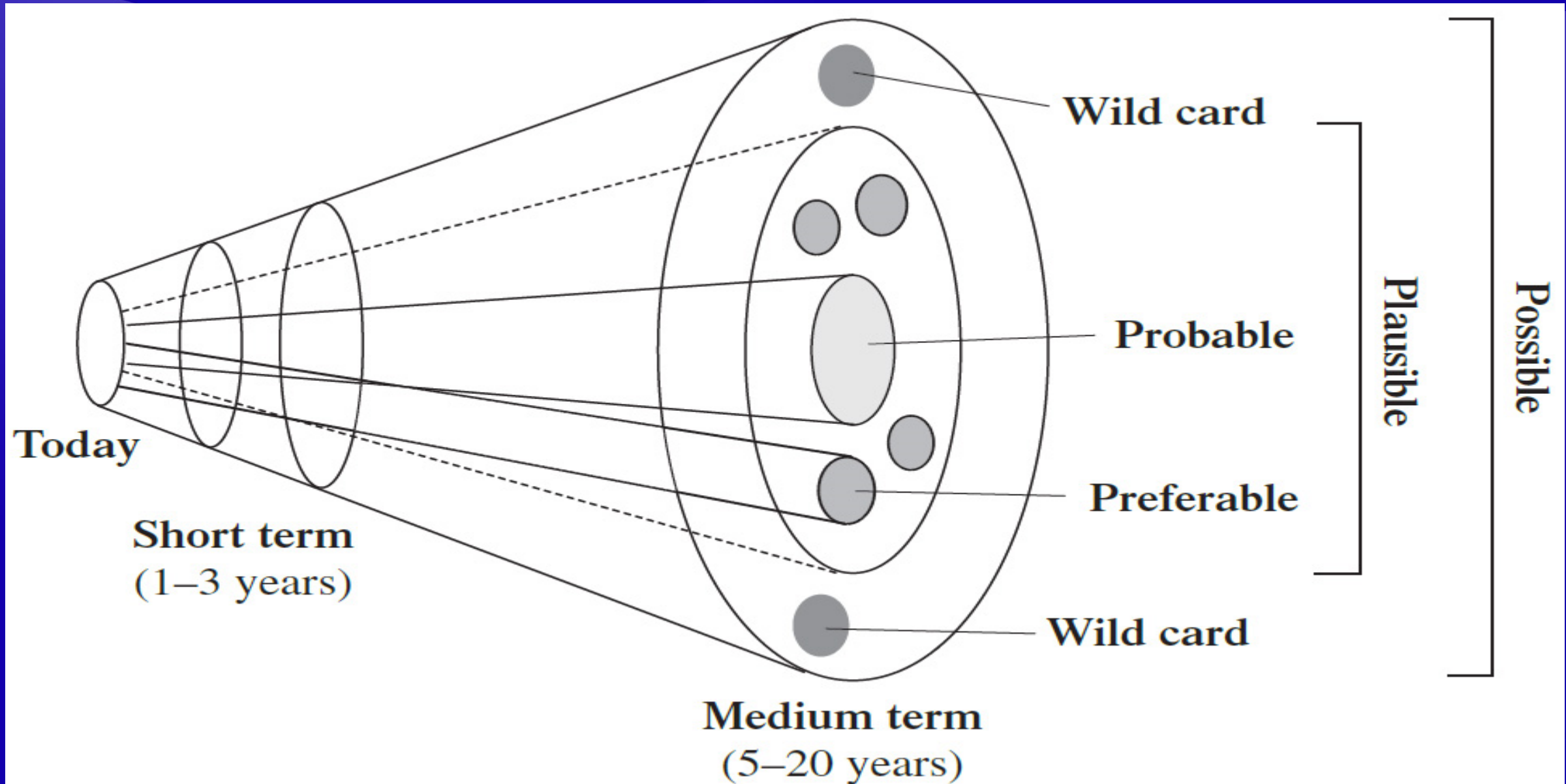
What is considered **impossible** say within ten years' horizon, may become possible.

Questioning the concepts

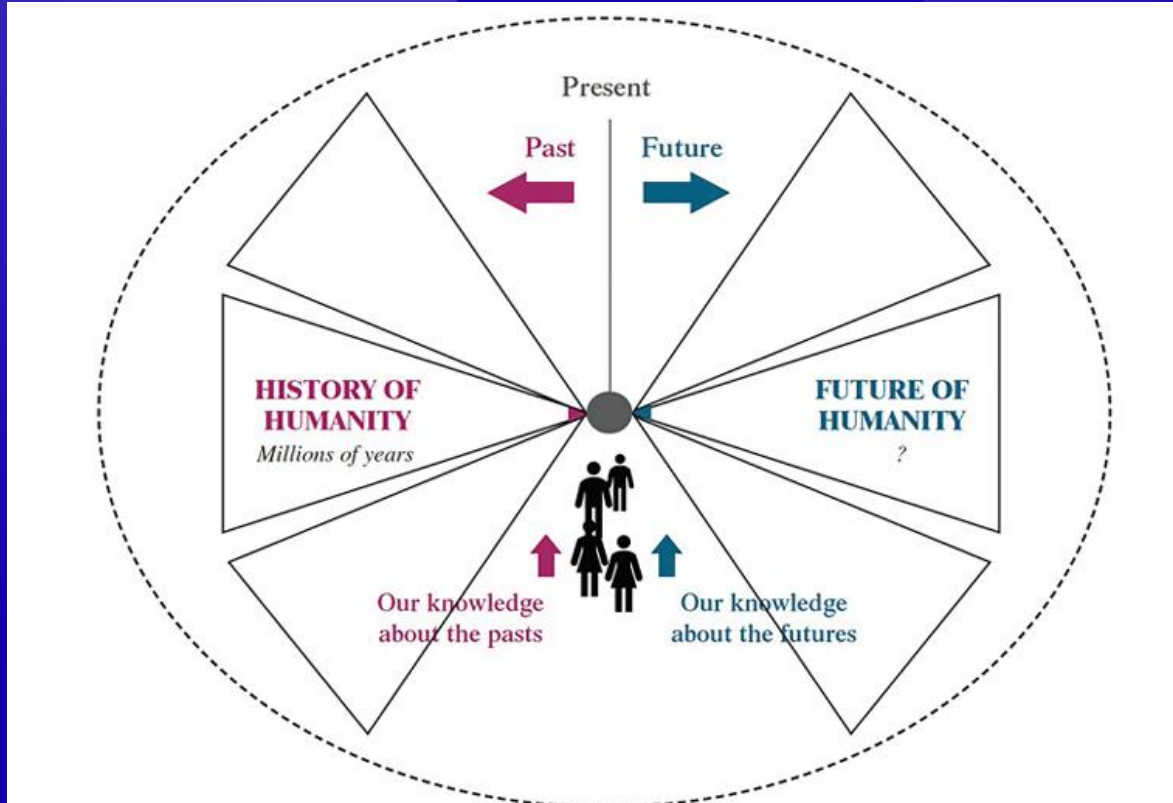
Possible

- within which time frame?
- for whom?

Futures As A Cone (Hancock & Bezold 1994; Voros 2003)

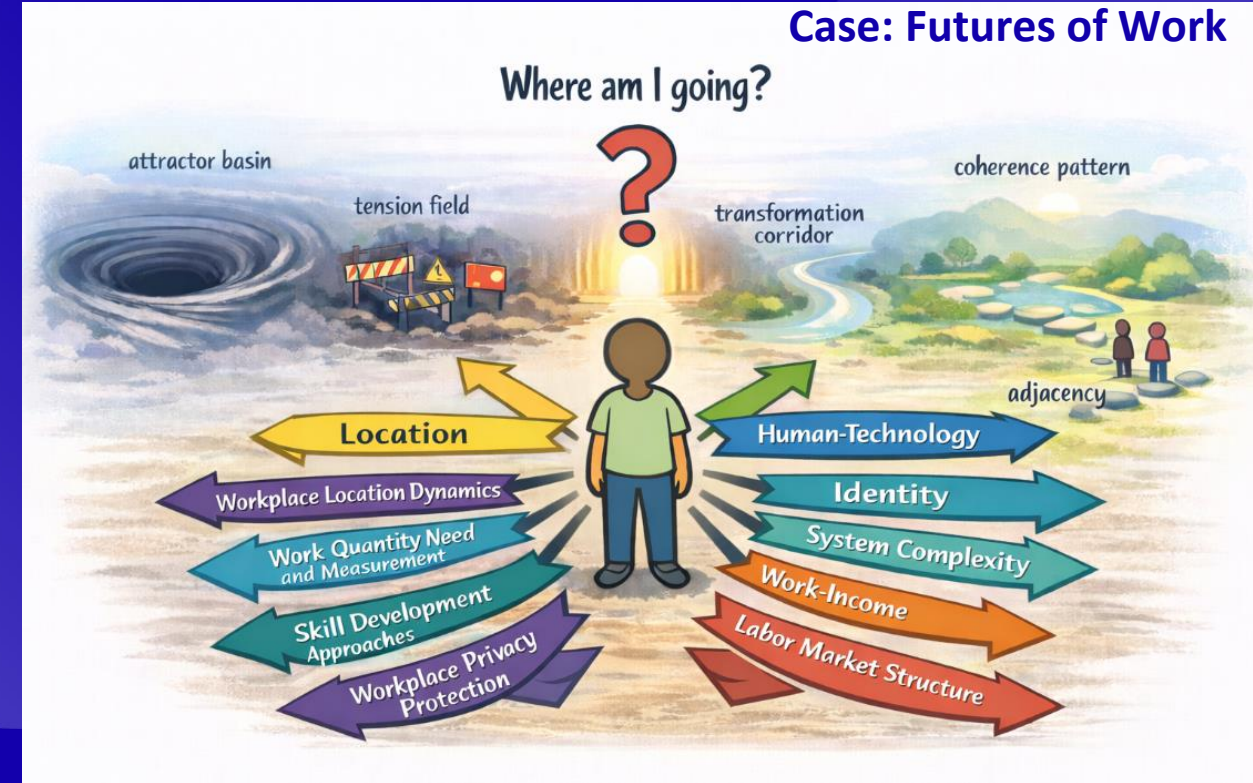


Futures As A Sphere



(Heinonen 2025)

Futures As A Space of Possibilities & Dimensions



(Heinonen & Virmajoki 2026)



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FUTURES OF WORK

A Framework to Understand
the Directions of Change

SIRKKA HEINONEN and VELI VIRMAJOKI

Moreover, in **normative school of futures thought**, preferred **futures** are being sought after.

However, the opposite of preferred futures – **undesirable futures** – should also be studied and anticipated.

It is the only way not to be excessively surprised or shocked. More foresight and insight of undesirable futures makes us **aware** of them and **prepared** to look for measures and **actions to prevent them from happening**.

Preferred & Desirable Futures (e.g. Flechtheim, Bell, Dator)

Preferred

- by whom?
- whose voices were heard?

Desirable

- more commitment, emotion

(Heinonen & Viitamäki 2025)



3. Conclusions



Seeds for both desirable and undesirable futures are located in these invisible 'un-futures'.

They are often ignored, hidden or forbidden futures. Neglecting their existence may give rise to sudden **surprises, discontinuities, disruptions and crises.**

Uncertainties and the above described un-futures may also harbour **strategic threats.**

My recommendation is that the **un-futures are more closely explored in futures studies** – they can be part of ‘imagining otherwise’ when looking at the other side of the coin.

‘Imaginari aude!’ could be the motto for Futures Enlightenment! -> Dare to imagine!

cf. ‘Sapere aude’ Horace's First Book of Letters (20 BC)
Immanuel Kant took it as motto for the Enlightenment ->
Dare to know!

Questioning the Concepts on two levels

- 1) the use of possible, probable and preferred futures only
-> **need to look at the other sides**
- 2) the use of possible, probable and preferred futures in a philosophical sense
-> **need to specify** e.g. Possible in what time frame? Preferable to whom?

Hidden presuppositions, interests, and values must be revealed.

Benefits from looking at un-futures

‘Dare to look at un-futures’ – they contain **opportunities** for better futures that may, if not addressed, remain unnoticed and unused.

Most of all, they build up our **futures resilience** – capacity to see further ahead and to think wider to cope with crises and even learn about them – while taking the **opposites into equal consideration**. (Heinonen 2024)

Foresight = equal **combination of reason and imagination!**



Thank You!

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