

Origins of the World Futures Studies Federation

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The World Futures Studies Federation actually started in 1968 as an idea. There was a meeting in Oslo, which was sponsored and initiated by Johan Galtung, Robert Jungk, and James Wellesley-Wesley, the main soul of the meeting. In this meeting, many people from different parts of the world participated, among them John and Magda McHale from USA, Hidetoshi Kato from Japan, Igor Bestuzhev-Lada from—at the time—USSR, Andrzej Sicinski from Poland, and many others. The meeting was called “Mankind 2000” and a book with the same title was issued.¹ The idea of getting a group of people from different parts of the world to think about the future and to start a dialogue between different visions of the future was the aim of that meeting. It is important to note the date, as it was the year when many things started, including the Club of Rome that was founded in the same year.

In 1970, Hidetoshi Kato, sociologist and futures interested person all his life and who had also participated in Oslo, organised the first meeting—we could call it the first meeting in Futures Studies—in Kyoto. He called it “Challenges from the Future”, and it was attended by many people from all over the world, mainly from the US, Richard Meier, Jim Dator, John and Magda McHale, from Japan. Robert Jungk from Austria was also there. It was the first time that I participated and was able to meet many of the people present. The conference was a great success and there was an internal meeting during which it was decided that it was important to create a World Futures Studies Federation, with the aim of putting people from different parts of the world with different visions about the future to discuss them together.

The idea was thoroughly discussed in Bucharest in 1972, in another meeting, sponsored this time by Mircea Malitza—at the time Minister of Education—and organised by Pavel Apostol, philosopher. Also in that occasion many people came and were able to be together and debate. It was called the Second World Conference on Futures Studies but could have been called the Third after Oslo and Kyoto and had as theme “The Common Future of Human Beings”. There were people from the East and the West of Europe, of the two sides of the Berlin Wall. This was hence a very special event in which the people in futures studies had a very important role in initiating a dialogue. The participation was very interesting: people from Rumania, Poland, Hungary, many from US, such as Harold Linstone and from England such as John and Magda McHale. I was there with rather a large group of young Italians.

In that occasion there was an evening meeting that I will never forget, in a beautiful garden (this was held in September 1972) where actually the decision was taken to create a World Futures Studies Federation. Mahdi Elmandjra, who was then Deputy Director of UNESCO, took the issue back to UNESCO in Paris. In Paris there was *Futuribles* and Bertrand de Jouvenel, its President. Future thinking (prospective, futuribles) had been developed in France since the late 1940's with people as Bertrand de Jouvenel himself, Gaston Berger, Pierre Massé and many others.²

In 1973, the World Futures Studies Federation was officially created in June at UNESCO in Paris with the presence of Bertrand de Jouvenel, who became the first President, Johan

Galtung from Norway, Serge Antoine and Pierre Piganiol from France, Mahdi Elmandjra who had been the person to support WFSF with UNESCO, and many others. I was there, in that meeting also. The Federation was founded under French law with its official “sieve” at “Futuribles” in Paris where all documents of WFSF minutes of Assemblies and Executive Councils etc. were held.

In this same year, September 1973, the so-called “Special World Conference”, of the World Futures Studies Federation was held in Rome and I organised it, with the sponsorship of Italian funds. James Wellesley-Wesley, at the time living in Rome, gave great support. It was a very large conference, with many people, and this time a great effort was made to have people from developing countries. Romesh Thapar from India came for the first time, Samir Ghabour from Egypt and many others. Of course many people from Eastern Europe, this was also a great effort: from Rumania Pavel Apostol and Mihai Botez (later candidate to the Rumanian Presidency after the great change, he unfortunately died in his own country after a time of exile in USA); from Poland Andrzej Sicinski, Ian Strezelecki (who later died from a violent attack in his own country) and Ian Danecki (all these sociologists of the great school of sociologist of Poland and belonging to the very productive group of Poland 2000 at the Polish Academy of Sciences); from Hungary Maria Koszegi Kalas and Erszebet Gidai (belonging to the already existing Futures Research Committee at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences); Igor Bestuzhev-Lada from USSR; many from US, like John and Magda McHale, Elise Boulding, Harold Linstone; from Japan, Magoroh Maruyama; from Israel, Yehezkel Dror; from Canada, Ran Ide; and from UK, Ian Miles and Sam Cole, who had just began their research at SPRU (Science Policy Research Institute), Sussex University.

It was organised in Frascati, near Rome, in a convent transformed into a hotel. There were also visual parts to the presentations; Jim Dator brought with him videos from Hawaii. There was also Roberto Rossellini, the Italian filmmaker, presenting one of his films and debating about the future, as he was also very interested in future thinking and education towards the future. Many Italian intellectuals of high level were there, such as Bruno De Finetti, mathematician of international fame; Francesco Alberoni, Sabino Acquaviva, Giuseppe De Rita, all sociologists; and many others. It was inaugurated at *il Campidoglio*, the prestigious location of the Rome municipality. I would like to add that Fred Polak was also present, he was the writer of the beautiful books *Prognostics* and *The Image of Future*, (REFS); Ossip Flechteim, the German philosopher first to use the concept of *futurology*; as well as Bertrand de Jouvenel, then President of the newly born WFSF; with Peter Menke-Gluckert as Secretary-General. The Pope, Paul VI, also received the participants and this meeting remained very much in the memory of many of the people present.

The meeting was worked in plenaries and in groups, and many future groups around the world were in a way initiated in Rome; like the one on “Art and the Future”, which was held by Alishabana in Indonesia; and in Canada the group on “Communication and the Future” by Ran Ide. Jim Dator and Marshall McLuhan also participated in this group.

The meeting in Rome had the title “Human Needs, New Societies, Supportive Technologies”, and the proceedings were published in an extended form by IRADES (Istituto Ricerche Applicate, Documentazione e Studi), the Institute which organised the meeting in Rome and

where I was working at the time, and which had a centre for Futures Studies, which I co-ordinated.³ There followed also a selection of papers presented at the conference published by Futures, IPC Science and Technology Press Limited, by the title “Needs-Societies-Technologies”⁴ The volume includes some still pertinent articles by Lewis Mumford, Bertrand de Jouvenel, John McHale, Jim Dator and Yehezkel Dror as well as Harold Linstone, that are still a very good guide for futures thinkers and practitioners.

At the Rome meeting, when Bertrand de Jouvenel was President and Peter Menke-Glückert was Secretary-General, a General Assembly was held which discussed many features of WFSF.

In 1974, a meeting of the Executive Council, which was very large, met in Berlin, at the Wissenschaft Centrum. A request was put to me in that occasion to become Secretary-General, with Johan Galtung as President.

The same year, a proposal came from Johan Galtung to hold a meeting in Dubrovnik—in what was then Yugoslavia—at the Inter University Centre, at the end of the course in Futures Studies, which was initiated by Johan Galtung himself and later held for a time by Bart van Steenberg and myself jointly and later by myself. The course lasted till 1990 and was held yearly with participation of many members of WFSF who came always on their own expenses. The Inter University Centre was founded by different people from universities of Northern Europe and Austria, Johan Galtung was the main person behind the idea to have a university centre which would collect faculties and students from the Eastern and Western parts of Europe, and possibly the world, based on academic freedom, and holding courses which were borderline courses, such as Jurgen Habermas' courses in Philosophy and Sociology, or in Future Studies. The course was connected to the World Futures Studies Federation. Other courses were Women's Studies, Peace Studies, Mediterranean Studies, Futures of Religion—still at present held by professor Rudolf Siebert—, as well as many other courses.

The World Conference was held at the end of the Future Studies course in 1976 and its title was “World Alternative Systems versus Needs”⁵ and many members from the World Futures Studies Federation came from many parts of the world (all on their own expenses) because there was a spirit of interest, we can say, and the meeting was held with US\$ 2,000 with about 150 people. To be said is that from this conference on, Anna Arista was my great help and was such also for WFSF, until I was President that is till 1990. (The Dubrovnik conference was called the V World Conference of WFSF considering that Rome was the IV, but was called the Special World Conference, and it has also to be noted that the Oslo, the Kyoto and Bucharest conferences were all held before the formal foundation of WFSF in Paris in 1973).

A General Assembly was held in Dubrovnik, and Johan Galtung was confirmed President and myself Secretary-General. The proceedings of the conference were also published with the same title as the conference. It was decided at the same meeting to hold the next World Conference in Cairo in 1978.

It has to be added at this point that before the Dubrovnik meeting, in 1975, the IRADES Centre in Rome—which had supported so well the Rome conference—had changed hands and as I was Secretary-General of WFSF—on consultation with the executive members and

specially with Aurelio Peccei, who was in Rome and knew the local situation—decided to take the Secretariat away from IRADES, where it had been since the Berlin meeting in 1974. At the same time, I took with me all the data and addresses of members away. It was a hard choice and I took WFSF into my own personal home, and sent a letter to all members to say that the address was not in IRADES anymore, but from that moment on it was in a P.O. Box.

The Cairo meeting decided in Dubrovnik in 1976 took place in September 1978, with the title “The Future of Communications and Cultural Identity”. The Conference was very much supported by Ibrahim Abdel Rahman, who had been Minister of Planning, and supported the organisation and gave hospitality to all the members of the World Futures Studies Federation, not only at the conference but also in a Cairo hotel. We only had support of UNESCO, US\$ 20,000, to bring people from developing countries and Eastern European countries to participate, and these were all the funds we had at the time. There were about 100 participants and it was very successful. A General Assembly was held with the presidency of Mahdi Elmandjra and myself as Secretary-General. A proposal was put then by Rajni Kothari, from the “Centre for the Study of Developing Societies”, in New Delhi, to hold the next meeting there. The proposal was accepted. Serge Antoine, who was responsible for the respect of Statutes of WFSF under French law, at the meeting presented a set of by-laws to complement and amend the Statutes approved in Paris in 1973 at UNESCO. Specifically the creation of a scientific council and a smaller Executive Committee, as well as the nomination of four vice-Presidents to represent all regions of the world: John McHale (North America), Abdel Rahman (Africa), Romesh Thapar (Asia), and later Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Latin America) were elected.

The proceedings of the Cairo Conference were published in Romania because of the expenses, and after that the preparations for the meeting in New Delhi were started with our counter parts in India, that is “The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies” to which Rahni Kothari and Ashis Nandi with others belonged.⁶

The preparations for the meeting to be held in 1979 were stopped by a series of events: first, a request came personally to me from the Indian Ambassador in Rome, who visited me in my home to say that the Indian government was very happy about the meeting which was going to be about technology and the future, but that we should change the local organising committee, that is the “Centre for the Study of Developing Societies”. I called by phone all the members of the Executive Council (no faxes or e-mail at the time!); including Romesh Thapar from India, Abdel Rahman in Egypt, Johan Galtung (maybe in Norway at the time, I cannot remember); and of course the President Mahdi Elmandjra; and many others. All agreed that it was not possible for an international NGO, which was free from any government, to accept any order from any government. I gave this information to the Indian Ambassador in Rome and the meeting was cancelled. This event was given ample news in the local Indian media. The World Futures Studies Federation and the “Centre for the Study of Developing Societies” lost the UNESCO funds that had already been sent.

In 1979, a regional meeting was held in Berlin (in Cairo it had been decided that World Conferences were to be held every two years and in between regional meetings could be also

held), with the title “Science and Technology and the Future”. In Berlin, Mahdi Elmandjra was the President and I was Secretary-General, in that occasion we were both confirmed.

After this event, the Futures Studies Centre in Stockholm offered to help and support for the next World Conference, in place of the one in New Delhi that had not taken place.

Before the Stockholm World Conference, in January 1980, a meeting of the Executive Council took place after consulting by letter all members to elect President and Secretary-General, as Mahdi Elmandjra had expressed the wish not to be President any more. It was held in Saint Vincent, in the Aosta Valley in Italy. I was elected President and Goran Backstrand, from Sweden, Secretary-General. He offered to organise the World Conference in Stockholm, as the New Delhi one had not taken place as previously said.

In the Statutes of the World Futures Studies Federation it was possible to have consultation by mail, which had not been done before, everything had been done through the assemblies, to elect President, Secretary-General, and Executive Committee. The Saint Vincent election took place with a meeting of the Executive Committee on the basis of the letters (letters, not faxes or e-mails, but letters), and as the World Conference in New Delhi had not taken place and there were no more funds at the moment, it appeared to be the only solution.

In 1982, the World Conference (the VII World Conference of WFSF) took place in Stockholm on the topic “The Futures of Politics” and it was very well organised by Goran Backstrand who later left the WFSF Secretariat and became a high official of the Swedish Red Cross, and after, of the International Red Cross. The Stockholm Conference was very successful and had the participation of many members of WFSF. It was opened by Alva Myrdal, the participants were received by the Government of Sweden, and many side activities were organised. Frances Pinter, in London, published a selection of the proceedings in association with WFSF in 1983. The title of the book is “The Future of Politics, Governance, Movements and World Order”,⁷ edited by William Page. I think it is important to read carefully both the title and the contents that were certainly anticipatory. The articles are by Romesh Thapar (India), Yehezkel Dror (Israel), Ali Mazrui (Nigeria), Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Mexico), Richard Falk (USA), Jim Dator (USA), and myself. All papers underlined not only the different aspects of the topic but also the important role of Futures Studies. I am talking about twenty years ago!

After the meeting, Goran Backstrand informed he would not continue as Secretary-General, so Jim Dator accepted to become the next Secretary-General, and I was confirmed President by the General Assembly.

In 1984, WFSF organised the World Conference in San José de Costa Rica, with the title: “The Futures of Peace. Cultural Perspectives”, with the support of the local University, where Luis Garita, member of the Executive Committee, had a chair. In Costa Rica there was also the Peace University, supported by the United Nations University. The Peace University at the time had as President Rodrigo Carazo. Many members of WFSF participated, Jim Dator was Secretary-General and I was President.

The Conference still remains the only meeting held in Latin America by the World Futures Studies Federation. There were many members and people coming from different parts of

Latin America, especially from Central America—which was in that moment extremely in turmoil, as the Nicaragua and Panama issues were very serious. The Chinese members were present and it was the first time that Chinese people were allowed into Costa Rica. WFSF had the privilege of having the meeting being opened by Oscar Arias, later Nobel Prize for Peace. There were very interesting presentations. The proceedings were published by the Universidad de San José, both in English and Spanish and edited by Luis Garita.⁸ Many papers were presented: including articles by Richard Falk (USA), Henryk Skolimowski (Poland and USA), Ibrahim Abdel Rahman (Egypt), John Fobes (USA), Sam Cole (UK), Roberto Vacca (Italy), Alvin Toffler (USA), Roberto Stavenhagen (Mexico) who had greatly helped in the preparation of the conference and Jim Dator (USA).

There were many meetings with people from Latin and Central America especially. On that occasion, the women of Central America—including Guatemala (where I was born)—had a special meeting. At the meeting the women of Guatemala requested me personally to be their voice, for all of them that were not heard. From that moment on, I decided to work on women and the future.

A General Assembly was also held, where Jim Dator was confirmed Secretary-General and I as President. Also the topic of this meeting can be considered anticipatory of the years to come, as peace and culture are still at the basis of world problems today in the year 2002.

In 1986, a regional meeting was held in Hawaii, hosted by Jim Dator, at the University of Manoa, Institute of Political Sciences. An Executive Committee at the same time was held and, Jim Dator was confirmed Secretary-General and I as President. The topic of the meeting was: “Who Cares and How? Futures of Caring Societies”, the proceedings were issued with the same title in Hawaii.⁹ Once again, I would like to stress the anticipatory meaning of the topic, which foresaw the need for a caring society in a world where State care was decreasing.

To this meeting many members participated, such as Magda McHale (USA), Andrezej Sicinski (Poland), Romesh Thapar (India), Uvais Ahamed (Sri Lanka), Mihailo Markovich (Yugoslavia), Milos Zeman (Czechoslovakia, he is at present the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and had been a member of WFSF for many years), and Chandra Kapur (India).

The decision had been taken sometime before that the World Futures Studies Federation should have a World Conference every two years and in between to have what were called Regional Conferences. As a matter of fact, quite a few were held as intermediate conferences, in Hungary and Rumania and one in Morocco, during the period between 1976 and 1990, including the one in Hawaii in 1986. These were mainly related to interests of the region or the country where they were held together with an the Executive Committee giving members an occasion to meet people involved or interested in futures studies in the hosting country or coming from the same region.

In September 1988 the World Conference was held in Beijing. This Conference took a long preparation and a great effort on the part of the hosts and of WFSF. It had been proposed in Costa Rica by the member of the Executive Board from China, Qui Linzhen, who operated from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences—where Futures Studies were, at that time, very

strongly supported. Qui Linzhen had come for the first time to the WFSF meeting in Cairo in 1978 with some colleagues, and we were all very surprised at how much reading the Chinese had in Futures Studies. During the preparation of the World Conference, I went many times to China for different commitments, and met with all the people involved at the Academy. Jim Dator also visited China during the preparation. Qui Linzhen was the crucial person but as communications were yet not so easy, we also received the support of my son, Federico Masini, who was at that time at the Italian Embassy as information attaché, and was able to help us with the faxes from and to the Embassy.

The Conference had the participation of about two hundred people from outside of China and about double that from China. Hence, it was a very large conference and many people from the WFSF were able to see China for the first time. I was President and Jim Dator was Secretary-General. In the Conference, a plenary as well as many group meetings was held, and all had young students from Beida, the Beijing University as very committed secretaries. WFSF was received by the Prime Minister Li Peng and was able to visit all the famous places in Beijing.

In the conference great scholars from China, such as the sociologist Fei Xiaotong and the philosopher Zhao Fusan were present and gave presentations.

The topic of the conference was “The Futures of Development” and had meant to look at all aspects of development, not only economic, but also social, cultural and political. It hence was very daring. Many members were present; I wish just to recall some as Radmila Nakarada (then Yugoslavia), Tony Judge (UK), Ana Maria Sandi (Romania), Raimondo Cagiano and Antonio Golini (Italy), Jordi Serra and the entire group from Catalonia, Johan Galtung (Norway), Robert Jungk (Austria), Yehezkel Dror (Israel), Magda McHale (USA) and many others. The proceedings were published in Hawaii by UNESCO, with the support of the Canadian Development Agency, and edited by Eleonora Masini Jim Dator and Sharon Rodgers.¹⁰

I think the Beijing conference will remain in the memory of many futurists for a long time. We must remember that Tien'an-men square's events took place only six months later. The spirit of the conference was very future oriented but ... events changed many hopes.

A turbulent General Assembly was held and it was decided that Jim Dator would be proposed as President at the next World Conference in 1990 and Pentti Malaska Secretary-General. On suggestion of Yehezkel Dror, I was asked to chair the Executive Committee, after Jim Dator's nomination, for continuity, which I did from 1990 to the next World Conference, which was held in Turku in 1993.

The World Conference was held in Budapest in May 1990, with the title “Linking Present Decisions to Long Range Visions”. The title was suggested by Professor Juzsef Bognar and was organised by Erzsebet Gidai, Erzsebet Novaki and Maria Kalas Koszegi (member of the Executive Committee of WFSF from 1986 to 1997 followed by Erzsebet Novaki). The two official bodies in charge of the conference were the Futures Research Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Futures Studies Centre of the Budapest University of

Economic Sciences and Public Administration. The above Committee had existed for many years and it was one of the oldest groups in Eastern and Central Europe.

It was a very interesting conference also because it was just at the beginning of the change in Eastern and Central Europe, and many people from these countries were present including colleagues from ex-USSR as Igor Bestuzhev-Lada and Gennadi Dobrov. The proceedings were cared for by the Turku Centre for Future Studies, as during the general assembly held in Budapest, Pentti Malaska was elected Secretary-General and at the same time Jim Dator was elected President.¹¹

I would like to add at this point that in March 1998 I had the honour of receiving the Honorary Doctorate from the Budapest University of Economic Sciences, which is something I cherish. The rest of the history has to be filled by Jim Dator and Pentti Malaska, followed by Tony Stevenson and Cesar Villanueva.

I just wish to briefly recall the meeting held in Barcelona. The title of this World Conference was "Advancing Democracy and Participation Challenges for the Futures", and it took place in September 1991. It was organised by the "Centro Català de Prospectiva", particularly by Felix Martí—its Secretary-General and also member of the WFSF Executive Committee—and Jordi Serra, who was a very active organiser. The Conference's proceedings were edited by B. Van Steenberg, R. Nakarada, F. Martí, and J. Dator, and published by the Centro Català de Prospectiva and UNESCO, Catalonia, in 1992.¹²

I would like to end this part of the WFSF's history (1968-1990), in which I was involved from 1970 on, by saying that working with so many people of different countries and different visions of the future for so many years has been a great enrichment, and it has made me feel that I have participated in somehow to the building of a world society, which I still hope may be democratic and capable of dialogue among so many differences. I wish WFSF to be still a bridge between people towards building a future not only based on economic power but on a human perspective, which was the intent through all its history to which I have participated.

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Note

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