

## Trends and Drivers of Change

This collection of blogs reflects our thinking on current trends and drivers of change.

### Polycrisis – The View From Davos The New World Order Changes....



*Image by Kanenori from Pixabay*

The World Economic Forum has reconvened in Davos this week, after the Covid-19 pandemic led to its postponement in 2021, and a shorter meeting in 2022, which Russia did not attend. Once a key date in the calendar, there are questions over the relevance of the Davos event in a multi-polar and increasingly fractious world.

However, Davos does see the publication of the WEF's 18<sup>th</sup> Global Risks Report.

As ever, the report provides a useful opportunity to try to see the world in a global, strategic context. But this year's report is also alarming. And perhaps what it doesn't quite say is even more alarming than what it does.

“Polycrisis” is the key word. The report shows how the effects of different risk factors triggers reactions in other parts of the world, and other sectors. Between 2019 and 2022 we



saw the impact of the pandemic on global trade. It distracted from efforts to deal with existing global problems, and highlighted other problems, for example unequal access to vaccines and other essential supplies. The effects rumble on. Data released this week show that China’s economy grew by 3% in 2022 – which would be enviable for a post-industrial Western economy, but is the lowest GDP growth since 1976, except for 2020, when the pandemic began.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had “polycritical” impacts that have been as far-reaching if not more so: precipitating steep rises in the cost of energy and other natural resources, and rises in the price of staple foods, coupled with a loss of availability. And it has led to a further polarisation of diplomatic relations between regions, or individual countries – in particular, the West versus Russia and its allies. The impacts of polycrises affect most heavily the world’s poorest, least resilient in the face of shortages of food and other essential commodities, and with the worst access to health and education.

The research for of the Risk Report highlights a prevailing air of gloom. It states that 80% of respondents anticipate “consistent volatility” in the future – a far cry from the New World Order of the post-Cold War Age, as previously noted in our November blog, which reported on the discussion of the same issues at ESPAS (The European Strategy & Policy Analysis System).

## The Risks

The Report sets out the key risks over the next two years and ten years, up to 2033. There is consistency over the two periods, although the order of severity changes in the two lists. The lists are as follows:

	Short Term (Two Years)	Medium Term (10 Years)
1.	Cost of living crisis	Failure to mitigate climate change
2.	Natural disasters and extreme weather events	Failure of climate change adaptation
3.	Goeconomic confrontation	Natural disasters and extreme weather events
4.	Failure to mitigate climate change	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
5.	Erosion of social cohesion, and social polarization	Large-scale involuntary migration
6.	Large-scale environmental damage incidents	Natural resource crises
7.	Failure of climate change adaptation	Erosion of social cohesion, and social polarization
8.	Widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity	Widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity
9.	Natural resource crisis	Goeconomic confrontation
10.	Large-scale involuntary migration	Large-scale environmental damage incidents

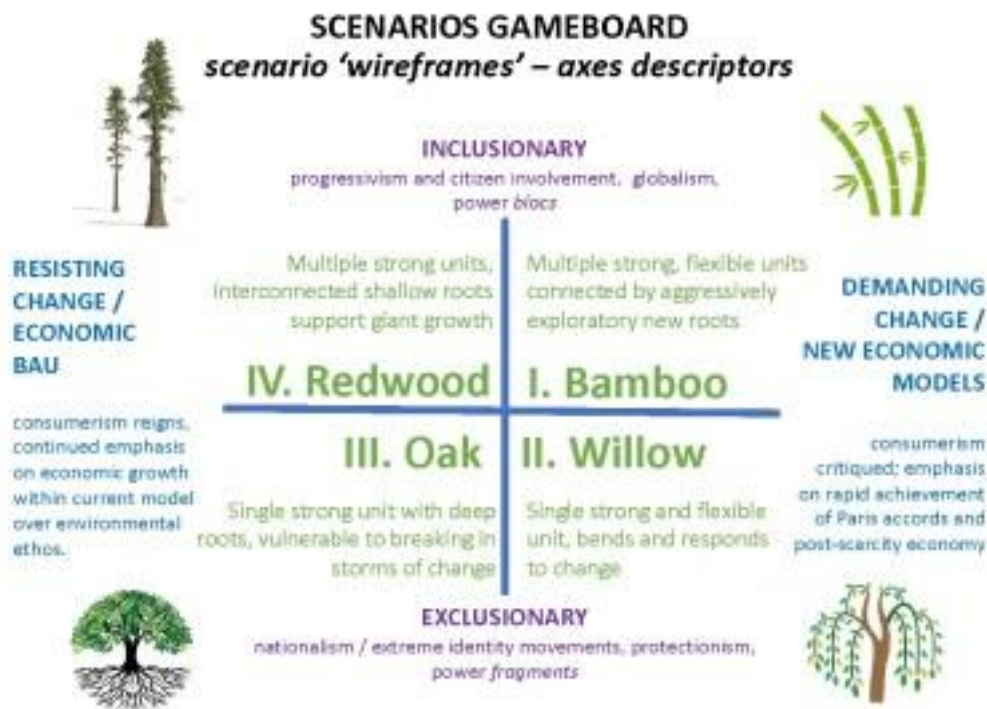


The short-term list has a mix of environmental (green), economic (blue) and social (red) risks at its head, whereas the longer term has four environmental risks at its head.

## The World in Oak

In 2021, the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation published a strategic foresight report. The Report included four scenarios for the World in 2040, and applied those scenarios to ten Regions, encompassing most of the rest of the world. The report is available at the link here.

We wrote a series of blogs setting out the highlights of the scenario exercise, which we led as a workstream within the wider Foresight Project. An overview is at the link here. The four global scenarios are presented in graphic form below.



In developing the scenarios, we discussed them with delegates from around the world, as well as the Commission itself. Overwhelmingly the consensus was that all the Regions were either in Oak, or very close to it: resisting change, preferring to cling to “business as usual”, and exclusionary. The WEF Risk Report confirms this.

This helps to explain the emergence of polycrises. The maintenance of a stable global system of governance, finance and trade, and the management of global challenges, such as global warming, is best served by global co-operation. The world in Oak runs counter to



this. Countries and/or blocs pursue their own interests; there is distrust between them, and sometimes outright hostility.

## Is there any hope?

If this sounds gloomy, that is because the challenges ahead really are daunting. This week, scientists from around the world warned that the continuing rise in global temperatures has added to the risk of unprecedented temperatures, possibly exceeding 1.5 degrees C in 2024 – i.e. within the two-year “short term” period in the WEF Risks Report – and at a time, according to the report, when other global risks will compete for attention and for the resources to mitigate them. How long can the climate wait for us to catch up?

Such a serious situation demands global resolve and urgency. With the war in Ukraine likely to continue for now, and with continuing tensions between Russia and the USA, the sort of global co-operation and innovation envisaged in the “Bamboo” scenario seems as mythical as a herd of unicorns.

But despair, like doing nothing, is not an option. There are “weak signals” of positive action on which to build. Recent personnel changes in China have signalled at least the hope of greater collaboration – although we do not yet know the American response.

The planned creation of the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) may become a vehicle for wider co-operation in the Pacific Region. Its members include:

- Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Australia, New Zealand and Brunei; the UK is in the final stages of accession.
- Other candidates that have applied, or signalled a wish to join, include Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica.
- China has indicated it would like to join, although there are practical hurdles to be overcome, in particular questions about China’s approach to intellectual property, and towards its own minority populations.

Even without China, the current membership accounts for some 16% of global GDP. It could be an important player as the World seeks to evolve from polycrises (and Oak) towards a more constructive and collaborative future. It will not have the heft of a superpower, but it will carry influence, and be able to lead by example. The US position on CPTPP is unclear. It was strongly supported by Barack Obama during his Presidency, but Donald Trump showed no support. Other initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will help small and medium sized states to work together for better terms of international trade.

Climate too will drive us. Even if we ignore it, its impacts will not reciprocate, and they will increase demand (even among countries that have “dragged their feet”) for action to reduce the risks and mitigate the harms already done. Moreover, the spike in energy prices, and the supply constraints caused by the war in Ukraine should give the rest of the world a strong



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stimulus to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. In the absence of sustained, global action at present, we can but hope.

Written by David Lye, SAMI Fellow

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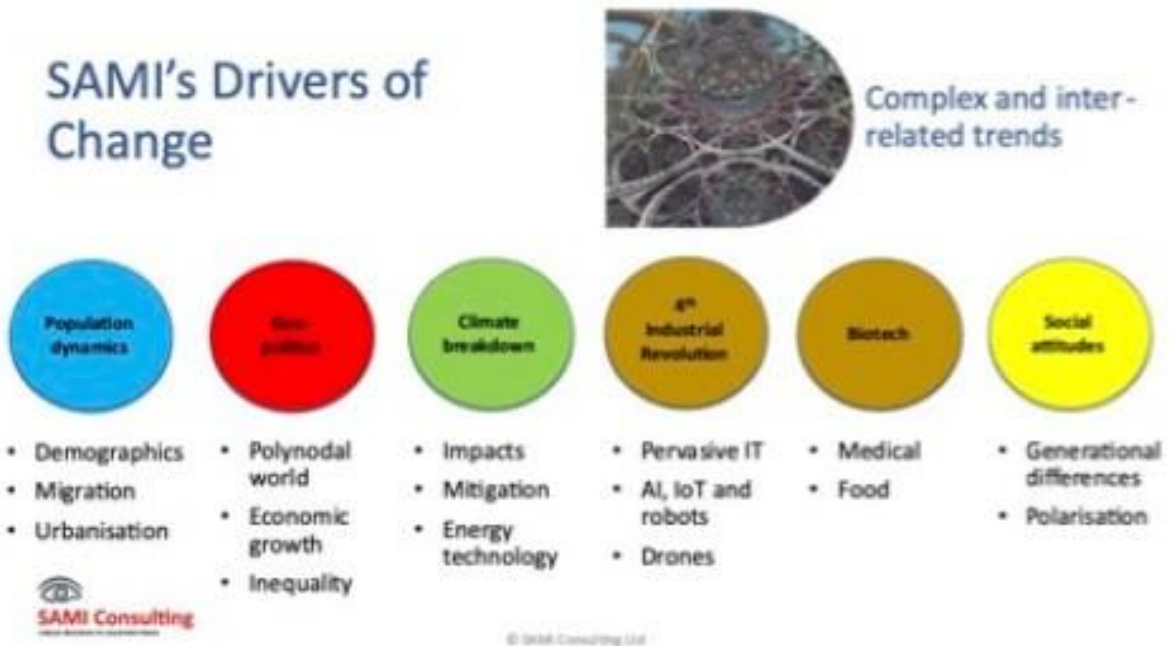


## Drivers of change – on fast-forward?



*Image by ooceey from Pixabay*

We've noticed recently how SAMI's six Drivers of Change seem to be super-charged, on fast-forward. We identified the major areas of change some years ago and still think they are the most relevant. But what were once novel thoughts about future developments are rapidly becoming part of the mainstream discussion, and we may need to think further about less obvious implications.



Under **Population Dynamics**, we flagged the coming peak in population growth mid-way through the century, and declining fertility rates leading to major reductions in populations in many Western societies. The recent peak in the Chinese population, being overtaken by India, with its own peak coming by 2060, was widely reported. Migration remains high on the political agenda, though we are seeing signs of the push-back that we suggested, where labour shortages (in future caused by the rapidly ageing population) start to create a competition for migrants.

**Geo-politics** has become an even worse challenge for than we originally thought, with the Ukraine war and Chinese posturing over Taiwan. Economic growth remains largely stagnant and inequality rife. None of this is now a surprise. Whatever the outcome of the Ukraine conflict (now probably down to two main scenarios of Russian defeat and frozen conflict/uneasy compromise), the ramifications will continue for at least a decade.

**Climate breakdown** is also now widely acknowledged – there are very few climate sceptics left. Remedial action remains beyond the reach of most governments, and the 1.5C milestone seems likely to be breached imminently. There are continued advances in energy technology, but if we are to avoid run-away heating we need to be using technology that already exists.

**Artificial Intelligence** hit the headlines with ChatGPT, and is now becoming totally pervasive, for example with BT planning to cut customer service jobs with its use. “Artificial General Intelligence” still appears a long way off, though several leading scientists have argued we need to start preparing now (see our blogpost). **Drones** are a major feature of the Ukrainian war.



**Bio-technology** was our way out of the pandemic with new vaccine developments, now opening up many other new opportunities. AI analysis can help point to new opportunities more rapidly.

Awareness of changing **social attitudes** has become common, though much of this is centred around “culture wars”. The Welsh Government’s “Minister for Future Generations” opens up new areas of debate.

So where do we look beyond these immediate critical concerns? We have always said there were many “complex and inter-related” trends. It seems likely that this is where we need to focus for the 20 year horizon.

Geo-political conflict and climate breakdown will both create significant challenges as migrants flee afflicted areas. The lack of a commonly agreed global framework for migration and health will lead to major tensions. As we have argued, far-sighted governments in advanced societies with falling fertility rates will begin to see migrants as an opportunity – fit, young, entrepreneurial people joining your economy could be a huge boost. Social attitudes seem likely to change in favour of this approach.

Alternatively, AI could become the solution to a labour shortage. The difficulty here is that it is the relatively low-paid roles in the care sector and agriculture that are the least amenable to being replaced by AI, while more white-collar roles may be under threat. Perhaps the “key workers” we needed in the pandemic will become a more valued section of society (can you argue that futurists are “key workers”?).

Radical action on fossil fuels to reduce carbon emissions could have dramatic implications for the global economy – the stranded assets of oil companies would have to be written off. This could also affect geo-politics as petro-states become less powerful. African states with spare land and plenty of sunshine could become the new power sources of the world (in both senses).

The application of bio-technology to climate issues – drought and heat-resistant organisms -has already begun. The interaction of healthcare successes with an already ageing population could go in several directions. We could see longer years of heathy living – or more challenges cause co-morbidities only partially addressed. Bio-technology as a part of geo-political conflict could be frightening.

Social attitudes are perhaps the hardest area to predict, because they are both cause and effect of other global changes. While recent years have seen populist surges being successful in many countries around the world, most polling suggests more liberal attitudes in younger generations. Social dynamics in repressive regimes are even more challenging. China appears to be a monolithic centrally controlled society, but its sheer scale makes that difficult to sustain. Currently it is beset by a wave of industrial disputes; other internal tensions could yet result in catastrophic breakdown.





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You may already be starting think more widely about how today's norm may be disrupted. But you should think beyond what is in the current media to second and third order effects. Futures Wheels could be a good tool to help you.

*Written by Huw Williams, SAMI Principal*

*Published 26 May 2023*



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## EU Joint Research Council – 14 Megatrends



*Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay*

Like many large organisations and consultancies, the EU's JRC maintains and monitors a list of megatrends. In their case they have identified fourteen in their "[Megatrends Hub](#)".

Although mostly these map onto SAMI's own list of Drivers of Change (and subsidiary trends), there are some interesting differences, which are highlighted below. For each of the megatrends, they have found some scenario work that explores potential futures. This itself represents a valuable resource.



## Changing nature of work



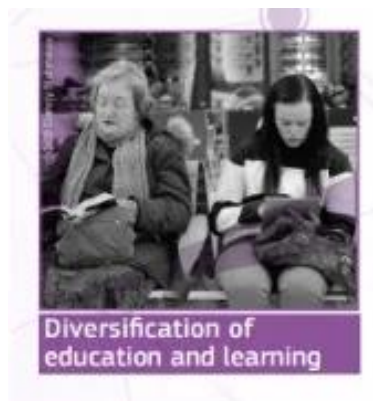
A lot of SAMI's projects look at the implications of the changing nature of work and skills, but this is not highlighted in our own drivers of change, other than as consequences of the digital revolution and the demographics of an ageing population.

Digital transformation is clearly the major trend, particularly in an era of rapid advances in AI. JRC take an optimistic view on “agile” working, which is not only green but “purposeful”. There's little reference to the challenges of a gig economy reaching into white collar work. They reference three studies of the future of work by the Millennium Project, PWC and Demos Helsinki, but choose to give prominence to the most positive scenarios in each analysis.



There's no discussion of the challenges of managing organisations whose employees are from very different generations, with different motivations and values.

## Diversification of education and learning



Another of JRC's trends that we would have addressed under Fourth Industrial Revolution, but is perhaps worth pulling out.

They point out the opportunities of bringing greater flexibility into education, with modular approaches and life-long learning. Personalised tuition is anticipated, as is the need to develop new skills. But similar opportunities have been around for some time (anyone remember MOOCs?) and yet to be widely adopted. The pandemic showed how the social aspects of schooling were as important as knowledge acquisition (especially in Google world). Employers have been calling for better teamwork skills for years, so hyper-individualised learning is going in the wrong direction. There are no doubt funding issues in here too.

## Changing security paradigm



The changing global security landscape is an area that SAMI covers under “geo-politics”. But the JRC review raises some more interesting questions about different dimensions of security challenges. While latterly much of the focus had been on terrorism and cyber-crime, the increasing tensions of recent years have put it back on state actors. Examples are President Macron’s drive to “strategic autonomy” as well as the recent European Political Community Summit in Moldova.

Changes in technology are already having a major impact on battlefield strategies – drones, robots, exo-skeletons. But geo-political conflict has moved into other realms. Exploitation of energy resources and raw materials, control over scarce resources (notably water), deliberate disruption of supply chains, threats to infrastructures (power, internet, low-earth orbit satellites), disinformation and fake news, and migrants are other ways in which states can exert pressure. Space and cyber-space are both ripe areas for contest.

## Increasing influence of new governing systems







This is an interesting megatrend that SAMI does not really address – the JRC’s thoughts however are very speculative. They identify the decline of traditional media and the prominence of digital media platforms, but the conclusion that this leads to more participatory forms of governance and multi-layered governing systems is debatable. In many cases today it seems that this empowers populist, autocratic governments.

JRC suggest that one trend is for “automated decision-making”, a frankly worrying approach to democracy. Another concept they highlight is “liquid democracy”, where citizens vote directly on issues. There are fundamental societal pressures in this area which means a wide range of scenarios are potentially possible.

## Shifting health challenges



SAMI refers to health under population dynamics (ageing populations), the climate emergency (immediate physical risks, more pandemics, pollution), AI and bio-technology (opportunities from genome editing, CRISPR and personalised medicine) and social attitudes (generational differences in smoking and drinking, obesity and mental health). The JRC pull these themes together and throw in resistance to anti-biotics as another threat.



They pull out a wide range of scenarios from the end of sickness through personalised medicine to the financial collapse of health systems. There's certainly a lot to consider here.

Their other megatrends map more closely onto SAMI's Drivers.

## Population dynamics

Three of JRC's megatrends are what SAMI group together under "population dynamics": **Continuing urbanisation, Increasing demographic imbalances** and **Increasing significance of migration**.

As they tend to do generally, JRC focus on positive aspects – possibilities from better technology, local co-design of sustainable spaces, and urban resilience as "the new normal". There may well be those opportunities, but the base line trend must surely be towards more chaotic and challenging megacities. But perversely whereas SAMI tends to view migration as an opportunity for Europe (to counter falling birth-rates), the JRC perspective is more pessimistic.

## Geo-politics and economic growth

For JRC these are covered by [Expanding influence of East and South](#),

**Widening inequalities** and **Growing consumption**

## Climate emergency



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Every set of megatrends has to cover this issue. JRC's thoughts are grouped under [Climate change and environmental degradation](#) and [Aggravating resource scarcity](#).

## Fourth industrial revolution

SAMI's take on the digital revolution is matched by the JRC's [Accelerating technological change and hyperconnectivity](#)

It's always worthwhile looking at different sets of trends. Other valuable ones include the UK Government Office for Science's [Trend Deck](#) (10 sections of between 8 and 14 trends) and the European Environment Agency's 11 "[Global Megatrends](#)". A comparison of the latter with SAMI's Drivers of Change is to be published shortly in the journal of Environmental Science. SAMI has also produced a Research Note on "[Meta-megatrends](#)" comparing different sets of trends.

You will probably want to use these trends to further your strategic thinking. SAMI can help you organise workshops to do this using various futures thinking tools such as Driver Mapping and Three Horizons.

*Written by Huw Williams, SAMI Principal*

*Published 7 June 2023*



## World Energy Outlook scenarios



*Image by Markus Distelrath from Pixabay*

The International Energy Agency recently published its [World Energy Outlook 2023](#) which assesses the evolving nature of energy security and examines what needs to happen at the COP28 climate conference in Dubai to hit the 1.5 °C goal. Published only shortly after the Hamas attacks and the Israeli military response, it clearly cannot have factored in fully the economic implications of that conflict.

Overall, the summary takes a positive tone:

- There are effective ways to improve energy security and tackle emissions – a new clean energy economy, led by solar PV and electric vehicles (EVs), provides hope for the way forward
- All fossil fuels should peak before 2030 – thanks to policies supporting clean energy like the Inflation Reduction Act in the US the projected pace of change is picking up in key markets around the world.



- China's growth rate has huge implications. Momentum behind China's economic growth is ebbing and there is greater downside potential for fossil fuel demand if it slows further.
- Emerging and developing economies are on track to reach their national energy and climate targets, through clean electrification, improvements in efficiency and a switch to lower- and zero-carbon fuels
- Ample global manufacturing capacity offers considerable upside for solar PV

but concludes “we need to go much further and faster, but a fragmented world will not rise to meet our climate and energy security challenges”.

The Outlook explores three scenarios exploring the implications of various policy choices, investment and technology trend. Projections are produced using the IEA's large-scale modelling framework, the Global Energy and Climate (GEC) Model. All the scenarios take into account not only energy and climate-related policies but also consider the scale and location of manufacturing capacity for various components of the clean energy system that have become important variables in scenario construction and design.

The scenarios are:

- The **Stated Policies Scenario (STEPS)** is based on current policy settings and also considers the implications of industrial policies that support clean energy supply chains as well as measures related to energy and climate. STEPS looks in detail at what governments are actually doing to reach their targets and objectives across the energy economy and is now associated with a temperature rise of 2.4 °C in 2100.
- The **Announced Pledges Scenario (APS)** assumes that governments will meet, in full and on time, all of the climate-related commitments that they have announced, including longer term net zero emissions targets and pledges in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and explores what that would mean for the energy sector. The APS is associated with a temperature rise of 1.7 °C in 2100.
- The **Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario (NZE)** maps out a transition pathway that would limit global warming to 1.5 °C. Each passing year of high emissions and limited progress makes achieving the goals of the NZE Scenario more difficult but the recent acceleration in clean energy transitions means that there is still a pathway open to achieving its goals.



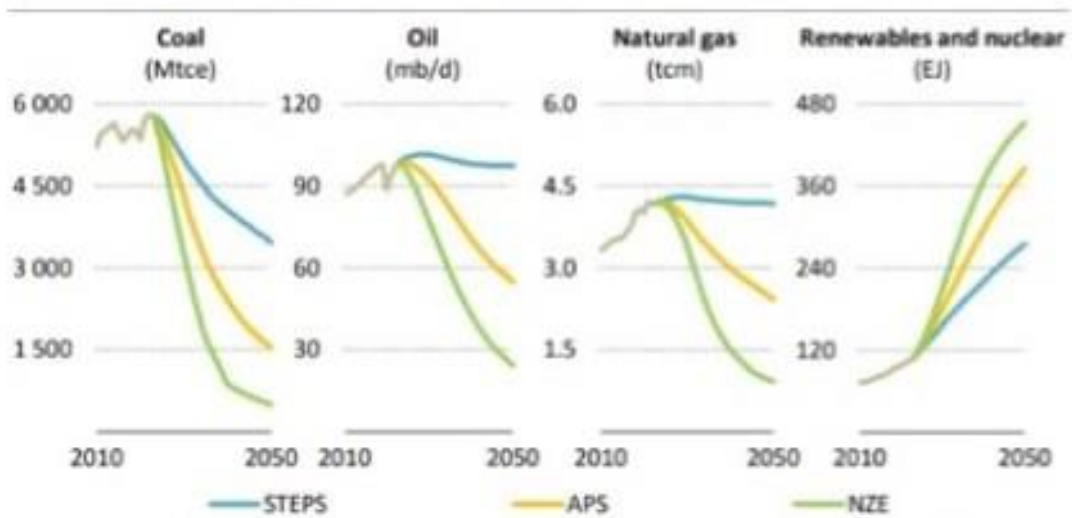


In STEPS, global total energy demand has an average annual growth rate of 0.7% up to 2030, around half the rate of energy demand growth over the last decade. Demand continues to increase from 2030 through to 2050, with a growth emerging market and developing economies more than offsetting a decline in advanced economies.

In the Announced Pledges Scenario (APS), total energy demand declines by an average of 0.1% per year until 2030, thanks to faster deployment of renewables, increased energy efficiency and more rapid electrification than in the STEPS.

In the Net Zero Emissions by 2050 (NZE) Scenario, electrification proceeds even faster, improving the efficiency of the energy system and leading to a decline in primary energy of 1.2% per year to 2030.

**Figure 3.1** > Global total energy demand by fuel and scenario, 2010-2050

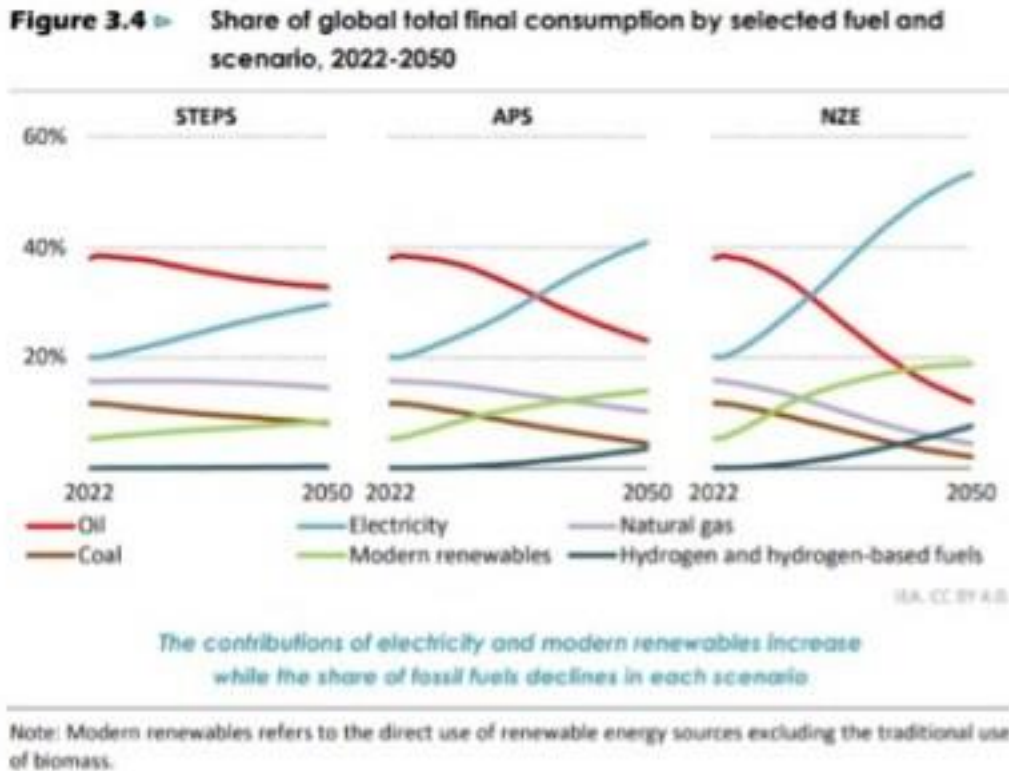


Low-emissions sources expand significantly and – for the first time – all fossil fuels peak and start to decline before 2030 in each scenario

Note: Mtce = million tonnes of coal equivalent; mb/d = million barrels per day; tcm = trillion cubic metres; EJ = exajoules.



Source: World Energy Outlook 2023



Source: World Energy Outlook 2023

Despite the impressive detailed quantitative modelling by the GEC model in the report, the “scenarios” explored are fundamentally variants of a “high, medium, low” approach to futures thinking. There are critical (acknowledged) assumptions underpinning each scenario that could lead to either higher or lower emissions and temperature rises.

- GDP growth: This is assumed to be at an average of 2.6% per year to 2050 in all three scenarios, though the modelling does take into account regional variations. Clearly this is a highly uncertain assumption, as is its relationship to fossil fuel demand. We saw how the Russian invasion of Ukraine drove up oil and gas prices. The “energy security” debate that followed had conflicting arguments of exploiting domestic oil deposits and stimulating renewables. Economic shocks could reduce governments’ willingness to invest in renewables.
- Global population expands from 8 billion today to 9.7 billion in 2050, again with regional variations. Decline in fertility rates could well accelerate, not only in the already challenged West but in higher growth economies too as women’s education continues to grow. Again, the balance of effects on fossil fuels and renewables is a political decision.



But given the projections are looking as far out as 2050, there are many other uncertainties that should be built into scenarios.

## *Society:*

- Extent of social cohesion as opposed to tribalism: likely to severely impact political action on climate change, and hence the swing between STEPS and APS
- Similarly, on a global scale the survival of multi-lateral agreements versus protectionism will affect global trade patterns and economic growth. How effective will new free trade blocks like CPTPP become?

## *Technology:*

- Advances in green technology could accelerate the shift from fossil fuels and the reduction of emissions; battery technology, carbon capture, tidal power are all contenders. NZE relies on this.
- But green developments (EVs etc) may be limited by a shortage of lithium deposits and rare earth metals
- Increasing intensity of computer usage, notably with AI systems, will massively increase energy demand, with the New York Times suggesting demand would equal that of an entire country.

## *Environment :*

- More extreme weather events should be built into all scenarios, as much of the damage to environment has already been done. Breaching tipping points with globally catastrophic impacts is probably becoming increasingly likely.
- The NZE scenario risks creating “stranded assets” in the fossil fuel industry as reserves have to remain unexploited. The impact on the global financial system is potentially huge.



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Ultimately, it is clear that the range of uncertainties is very high. The WEO analysis does provide a powerful base case, but even with all that work, we must still anticipate a wider range of possible outcomes than before.

*Written by Huw Williams, SAMI Principal*

*Published 15 November 2023*



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## The World Futures Studies Federation's 50th Anniversary Conference



*Image by [Oleg Gamulinskii](#) from [Pixabay](#)*

The World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) was founded in Paris in 1973 as a global network of leading futurists, committed to truly global futures and to creating alternative futures that embrace cultural diversity and individual difference. The conference to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary held between 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October was certainly a massive undertaking with two days of pre-conference events and the actual three-day conference not only taking place in person during the working day but carrying on with virtual sessions in the evening and throughout the night. The number attending in person must have been well into the three figures, and the numbers online a multiple of that. (At the time of writing the total numbers of attendees are still being worked out.) With five sessions running in parallel through most of the three days, I can do no more than highlight a few of the events that seemed of most significance to me.





The conference took as its theme “Exploring Liminalities: Creating Spaces for Unlimited Futures”. Liminalities? I’d never heard the word before and had to look it up: not the most promising start. My dictionary gave the following two definitions:

1. “of or relating to the transitional or initial stage of a process”
2. “occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold”

If one paraphrases those to “a space for deciding how to move forward from where we are”, in the context of global futures, that’s more interesting.

Indeed, one of the keynote speakers at the Opening Session, Mariagrazia Squicciarini, Chief of Executive Office, Social Human Sciences, UNESCO said that we should use the future to rethink the present. She stated that forty-six agencies throughout the UN were now being trained in futures and stressed the importance of relating research to policy and knowledge to action. Another opening speaker asserted that futurists were rational optimists, trying to imagine a better future.

However, there was nothing particularly rational about what became the most talked about session of the conference. This took place on the first afternoon, when Alex Fergnani of the Rabat Business School gave a presentation on Metamodern Futures: Prescriptions for metamodern foresight. Professor Fergnani suggested that underneath current problems there was a deep ideological split between modernity and post modernity. Metamodernism would transcend all previous value systems and resolve them into a new integrated system. Data should be gathered on worldviews with the object of working towards establishing it.

Fur flew and passions ran high during the panel discussion which followed it. Such a level of control was impossible. It was “ludicrous that metamodernism could save the world”. Another panellist with experience of serious conflict situations retorted that a “Ministry of Global Values” sounded like something out of Orwell and emphasised the importance of ongoing conversations: we should just be trying to keep the game going: an infinite game. Many people just wanted to be safe. It was left to a further panellist – as it happens a SAMI principal – to make the most sober comment of the discussion in reminding everyone of the importance of foresight in bridging conflicts and establishing



a grand narrative. Professor Fergnani responded that he was only introducing new concepts.

As an audience member, I am always slightly disappointed when things are discussed in terms of “meta” this and “meta” that, or this “ocracy” or that “ology”, because whatever the academic merits of such terms, they rarely have any resonance with the public whom they are supposed to be considering. But while no-one wants the “thought police”, the assimilation of values naturally as societies integrate is a different matter. The central idea of trying to solve man’s differences by transcending them is surely a powerful and important one today.

Following on from this, another use of liminality was explored in a workshop run on the first afternoon by Ted Fuller, UNESCO Chair at Lincoln University under the title “Exploring liminality in human responsibilities for the future.” Professor Fuller referred to a paper contributed to the first WFSF Conference in 1973 by Dario Zadra, Professor at the Gregorian University, Rome describing religious liminality as a space where church communities could gather together to be transformed before re-entering the everyday world. Professor Fuller suggested that for futurists, imaging the future was the space where they were transformed. Thus the workshop was about understanding the challenges of articulating responsibility in futures work and covered questions relating to action and responsibility, responsible actor relationships and the emergence of what responsibility for the future meant. The workshop was a stark reminder of the importance of being clear about what you are doing and why when working in the field.

Ideas about how to transcend man’s problems and what responsibility for the future means are all very well, but what is going to happen on the ground? This topic was taken up by Dr Seren Dalkiran, a member of the Dutch node of the Millennium Project, during a session on Transforming Leadership on the second afternoon. In her presentation (also written up in the October edition of *Compass*) she quoted Peter Drucker who noted:

“Every few hundred years in history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades society – its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures, its arts, its institutions – rearranges itself. We are currently living through such a time.”



What was the story of the younger generation who would take up leadership roles and drive meaningful and lasting change? In exploring a new story there needed to be a new paradigm centred on human and planetary flourishing and sustainability. Her research looked at whether millennial leaders had an inclination to these emerging paradigms. She had conducted field work with youth leadership networks in 28 countries across 6 continents engaging more than 5000 youth leaders. She had collected quantitative and qualitative data in 117 countries representing millennial leaders across diverse backgrounds. New leadership was not developing fast enough, but her research insights emphasised the potential of individuals and organisations to foster such value-based leadership styles and learning cultures. She pronounced:

“For NextGen futurists, foresight is often a leadership capability to navigate global challenges and drive social and sustainable change.”

Leadership was also an implicit theme of the ESPAS Conference which followed two weeks later and which will be considered in next week’s blog.

*Written by Tony Diggle, SAMI Associate and member of the UK Node of the Millennium Project.*

*Published 29 November 2023*



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## ESPAS Conference 2023: Building Europe's Future



The ESPAS (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System) Annual Conference, this year entitled “Building Europe’s Future: Time for Strategic Choices”, was held on 14<sup>th</sup> November and as with the WFSF Conference discussed in last week’s blog, the question of leadership loomed large.

The tone for the day was set by the opening overview session. In his opening remarks, Maros Sefcovic, Executive Vice-President for Inter-Institutional Relations and Foresight, reminded the audience that foresight had to be actionable, had to be linked to decision-making and had to be useful to political leaders. Later, he talked with enthusiasm about how with the support of his colleagues, usually the Ministers responsible for European Affairs, ESPAS had set up the EU wide network of Ministers for the Future. This enabled Ministers to depart for a couple of hours from the daily routine of decision-making and:

“to put their thinking hats on and strategize a little bit what the next year, the next years, the next decade will look like.”



With regard to climate change and the green deal agenda, he pointed up:

“the need to intensify the engagement with our citizens to be sure that we will not lose the support for our policies ... it requires the work and the collective responsibility of the politicians to be ready for that engagement.”

During the session, another of the panellists, Hadja Lahbib, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Belgium, set Europe in the context of the wider world. Power was changing badly. Hard-power politics was coming to the fore. United Nations decision-making needed reform: it was a member of the Security Council itself, Russia, that had invaded Ukraine.

Thus, the poles of the day were set clearly by the first session: foresight relevance, political leadership, citizen engagement and governance at the global level. What follows is a selection of some of the key points that were discussed.

The fourth point was taken up substantively in the next two sessions, “What will power look like in 2040?” and “Globalisation and Deglobalisation: the future of economic power”. The current situation was very bad. Russia was internally totalitarian and externally imperial. Where was China heading? It was internally depressed and globally assertive and saw the EU as a systemic enemy. One speaker asserted, “We cannot do business as usual with China.” Collective leadership in China had gone and ideology would become more important. But China needed to co-operate on global commons despite geopolitical rivalry. States might not all be going in the same direction, but there could be areas of co-operation. On the wider geopolitical structure, the post-World War II system did not benefit many parts of the world. A better offer needed to be made to them. The development needs of some countries needed to be taken into account more.

This was thrown into sharp relief even more during one of the afternoon sessions, “Navigating tomorrow: Socio-economic challenges of the green transition in the face of global climate trends”. There was weak multilateral governance on the climate. There had been too many broken promises from the north, and trust was missing. Valerie Trouet, Scientific Director, Belgian Climate Centre, was particularly stark: the situation



was sufficiently adverse that we should be aiming to cap warming at 2° not 1.5°, but even this was a moving target:

“It’s not because we don’t understand the climate well enough. It’s not because we don’t understand greenhouse gas effects well enough. ... It’s because we don’t understand the people well enough. ...

There were some positive signs: the Inflation Reduction Act in the U.S. had given the private sector a ten-year time horizon to work with and generated public funding of up to \$1.2 trillion dollars. The EU also needed a long-term investment plan. At the same time many vital minerals for electrification were in the south: a way needed to be found to generate shared prosperity. Thomas Pellerin-Carlin, EU Programme Director at the Institute for Climate Economics, asserted that we had all the technologies we needed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 90%, it was a political and governance issue.

To this audience member, the message was clear. We know what to do, but there is a lack of political will and practical civic engagement. The problem remains of how to get action at the species level.

Much else was discussed during the day, and there was an interview with the author of a new book on regulating technology, in which, needless to say, artificial intelligence loomed large: but that is a topic in itself.

*Written by Tony Diggle, SAMI Associate and member of the UK Node of the Millennium Project.*

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