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The future revisited: Looking back at *The next 25 years* by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR)

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Abstract

Looking back at futures studies in the past (past futures) is perhaps the second nature of futures researchers. In this article we look back at a study that was conducted by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy in 1977. We considered it interesting to assess its value 25 years later since many changes have taken place in technology, society, economy, and in the science of futures research as well. From our analysis we have drawn the following conclusions: (1) instead of giving every topic the same time horizon more diverse time horizons should be included because of the different dynamics, (2) more attention for people and opinions outside the mainstream discourse, (3) more attention for thinking in multiple futures instead of predicting just one future outcome, (4) do not only look at the (possible) future of a specific topic, but assess if this topic in its whole will be relevant in the future important (meta-forecast), and (5) more attention for integrating topics for futures studies, but not fulfilling the impossible ambition to link everything to everything.

1. Introduction

'De komende vijfentwintig jaar. Een toekomstverkenning voor Nederland' [11] was published by the Nederlandse Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid in 1977 (WRR—Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy, see Box 1). In English,

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Box 1

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) is an independent, policy think tank, serving the Dutch government. The WRR provides long-term advice on a wide range of issues, at its own initiative and at government's request. While these reports focus on policy they do not automatically mesh with the official line. The themes cross-sector and relate to current and upcoming social issues confronting government. Recommendations by the WRR are issued in the public domain as advisory papers

the title translates as 'The next twenty-five years: a survey of future developments in the Netherlands', although it is best known under the Dutch acronym ATV (Algemene Toekomstverkenning) standing for General Survey of the Future. This was a Dutch first in the then youthful field of future studies. The study involved an exploration of developments in Dutch society over the next 25 years. A number of experts provided background studies in a total of 18 subsectors (see Box 2) and these formed the basis for the study.

Since it was established in 1972 one of the WRR's explicit tasks has been to provide information on developments potentially impacting on Dutch society in the longer term. 'Thinking big'—later 'holistically'—was nothing strange in those days. This was evidenced by the name of one of the committees that gave founding advice for the WRR—the Commissie Voorbereiding Onderzoek Toekomstige Maatschappijstructuur/Preparatory Committee for Studies into the future Structure of Society; the 1970 recommendations suggested that the new body should provide a cohesive insight into potential long-term development, of society *as a whole*. Not only does this phraseology demonstrate remarkably 'big thinking' in terms of contemporary outlooks, but it also suggests high hopes as to the recognition factor around the future, whereas the current tendency stresses its uncertainty. Also, one has to see this against the background of the 1960s with the upsurge of social sciences, among which the sciences of policy. And, if the policy makers had high hopes around the contribution of these sciences to solving complex policy issues, the actual sciences were hardly modest as to their potential. Hence, in the 1960s, this country was not once but several times urged by its Sociaal-Wetenschappelijke Raad/Social Sciences Council to increase the social-science input in policy. This

Box 2

ATV topics Mass media, information and communication	Education
Work up from present to the year 2000	Energy consumption and resulting environmental pollution
Healthcare	Public order and crime
Leisure	Traffic
Environmental impact of energy consumption	Nature reserve and the natural environment
Climate changes: causes and potential consequences	Two perspective sketches of the Dutch economy up to the year 2000
Assumptions for a surprise-free survey of the future	Steering, organisation and participation
Social services and social aid	Housing, housing conditions and spatial planning
Organisation and participation in interaction with steering of Dutch society	The future availability of energy to the Netherlands

contribution was seen as gaining better insights into the main lines of society's development 'in their totality and mutual linkage' [8].

It was against this background that the WRR started the ATV in 1972, seeking to arrive at an *integral* survey of the future in the Netherlands, having carefully digested the criticism in the report by the Club of Rome. Although 'only' focusing on the Netherlands, the WRR study would be broader in design, while also particularly covering developments at the political administrative and social levels. The plan to shed light on the *likely* future of the Netherlands was very much in line with scientific optimism around recognition in society, now and in the future. The starting points here were a 'surprise-free' approach and the assumption of continuity in developments. These were translated into a series of presuppositions which were imposed on surveys into 16 subsectors.

Twenty-five years after the publication of the WRR report the idea of evaluating these subsector surveys and examining what methodological and substantive lessons could be drawn, came about at the NTV [3]. The NNTV or Network on Future Studies is a cluster of individuals and institutions in the Netherlands, all of which focus on the future and come from the academic, governmental or business communities.

This article looks at the various background studies and asks the following questions:
*Have the predictions and/or expectations of 25 years ago actually worked out?

- In how far do the world views of then and now differ?
- Which methods were used in the study?
- What can we learn from this study of the future?

As noted, this article will evaluate the background studies rather than WRR's report entitled 'The next twenty-five years: a survey of future developments in the Netherlands', of which they formed the building bricks. Self-evidently the report is more than a summary of these monographs; indeed, in particular it is also an attempt to forge these into an integrated whole. The various contributions did, however, come about within the methodological plan of the ATV. Hence, in the next paragraph (par. 2), we briefly examine this ATV and place it in its historical context.

2. The project

When the WRR took the initiative to carry out a general survey of the future, back in the early 1970s, the attempt seemed somewhat over confident. Indeed, the WRR was a newcomer in the area of surveying the future, albeit, no one in the Netherlands at that time could boast a meaningful track record. However, 1972 saw the *Limits to Growth,* the first report of the Club of Rome, which drew attention worldwide; the report married-up global developments in five areas, namely population, natural resources, capital, agriculture and the environment [10]. These developments and their interaction were calculated with computer models, and shown in graphic form. The results were shocking: if policy remained unchanged economic growth would come to a halt. Among other things this would make it impossible to supply a growing world population with sufficient food. The report made short shrift of the idea that progress was self evident.

In general, this report by the Club of Rome won considerable plaudits in the Netherlands. Certainly, there was some criticism and the report was said to differentiate too few areas, while underestimating government's potential to counter the issues. Much more than is now the case, society was thought—to a degree—to be make-able, not withstanding a mix of ideas on the government-assisted design-route for society. A large number of progressive movements were also active in the 1960s and 1970s, Provo and flower power being the most vocal and colourful. While their social criticism covered a broad terrain, part of it ran parallel with—and was hence reinforced by—the message of the Club of Rome.

Four years later, in 1977, the WRR's final report was considerably more modest than the original integral ambition. Indeed, rather than 'integral' it talked in terms of 'general', and 'an image of the future' was presented rather than 'the probable future'. Moreover, this image partly comprised two variants, an A and a B variant. The A variant worked on the basis of ongoing economic growth, and the B variant showed a gradual shift to a zero-growth society. Among other things this demonstrated the effect of thinking along the lines of the Club of Rome.

The ATV was the WRR's first survey of the future and the final report generously evidences experience gained. The failures are also there, such as initial attempts to craft an integral model, or the only partially successful integration of surveys in subsectors, where there was a shortfall in interdisciplinary knowledge around linkage. The limitations in the eventually selected pragmatic, trying-to-learn-on-the-job approach led to a modest presentation of results. Quite possibly this limited the carry-over effect of the ATV, despite seeking a cohesive—more sectoral than government-wide—image.

At the time the general reaction in the small world of surveyors of the future tended to the sceptical. The study, it was felt, was not sufficiently trail blazing, with too few policy leads and over-emphasis on prediction rather than scenario-building. As regards the latter, the sceptics were served hand and foot: following the ATV in 1980 and 1983 WRR issued a two-part Beleidsgerichte Toekomstverkenning/Policy-oriented Survey of the Future, explicitly based on scenarios, from the very start.

The main significance of the ATV was a greater focus on the future in political, government and policy-science circles, plus an enhanced realisation that knowledge of the future is always partial and flawed and that one has to learn to live with uncertainty. Concepts such as Simon's 'satisficing principle' [9], whereby one has to take decisions based on incomplete information, and Beck's 'risk society' [2], where the attention focuses on uncertainty, have become common property in the Dutch discourse, indirectly and in part due to the ATV.

3. Findings

This article looks back at how the future has been surveyed in the past, in the specific case of the WRR's 1977 General Survey of the future. *The next twenty-five years.* The stake here goes beyond a methodological description. We also seek to draw conclusions on what we would do differently and better, today. Did we learn anything? Have we moved foreward?

Looking back to the way *past futures* were once surveyed is educational as well as providing moments of entertainment. The amusing side of 'looking back' is seeing just how far we were off course with certain developments. Anyone allowing themselves to be carried away by this diversion might conclude that the high percentage of misses largely detracts from the scientific status of future studies, and that they are of little use in governmental or corporate strategy or policy forming.

Incidentally, predictive studies may tend to have a high entertainment factor because they stand up best to verification (read: are most accurate), which makes them most vulnerable. Today, however, most future studies focus on *surveying* potential futures. In general, they are more conditional, cautious and manageable, but less verifiable in that they present a palette of possibilities, rather than 'point-by-point assessment'. Indeed, surveys of the future are more suitable for drawing lessons on how to improve future studies. This brings us to the main that is the educational function of 'looking back at the future'. After all, who said that the history of the future offers no lessons for later?

Box 2 shows the subtopics on which WRR has in the past conducted surveys. Not all these studies will be dealt with in this article, but we shall seek to trace clues for the design of possible subsequent future surveys. Hence, subsequent surveys of the future can learn from their counterparts gone by. Then, we go on to deal with the lessons to be drawn from the various contributions and which, in our view, are the most valuable for subsequent future studies. These relate to the method, time horizon and topics of survey of the future, as well as accuracy. Self-evidently the conclusions are ours, and may well show differences from those of other parties: the future is and remains an open debate.

3.1. ATV method: analysis of bottle necks

At the time of the ATV the WRR opted for surprise-free extrapolation; this was later detailed in an A variant (continued economic growth) and a B variant (economic growth halts at the end of the prediction period). The two variants were meant as the upper and lower limits of a plausible scope for development. The purpose of a surprise-free approach was to illustrate developments that could lead to *bottlenecks.*

At the time this approach spurred much discussion, both in and outside the WRR. A subsequent finding by the ATV's authors was that its set aim of providing an objective, consistent and plausible image of the future was scarcely attainable. Hence, a large number of outcomes were to be seen more as the result of intersubjective group processes, than as based on purely theoretical considerations (which happened to be the original presumption). It transpired that ideas around the plausibility of the developments were quite diverse. Among other things this was manifest in the later introduction of a B variant in regard to potential economic growth, alongside the A variant. Hence, contrary to what had been foreseen at the start of the ATV, there was a large scope for subjective and normative arguments, while a theoretical basis that is required to arrive at a consistent picture, was absent.

The continuity of social development assumed by the authors on methodical grounds, also spurred considerable debate at the time. Reactions showed that there was also a call for information on the potential and impact of divergent developments—to ranges of

standards and values, or government's role in society. Or, more generally: divergent factors that can be viewed as socially and politically controversial.

With this in mind, the lesson the WRR drew from the ATV experience, as long as a quarter century ago, was to work with various scenarios based on 'characteristic visions' in its next major future study; this would be *Beleidsgerichte Toekomstverkenning or BTV/*Policy Oriented Survey of the Future in 1980 and 1983 [12,13].

The various background studies certainly had to conform to the ATV's general starting points, but apart from this they do not give the impression of using, or being in a position to use 'fixed' methodologies for surveys of the future.

At the same time, the fact that many reports fail to mention the methods used does not automatically mean that they were *not* used—albeit the lack of mention would certainly suggest this.

Indeed, the question remains whether or not the explicit application of methods of future studies and/or increasing the role of the *process expert* would have significantly enhanced the quality of the surveys; moreover, the 'problem' then was not so much how to go about the accurate—to a degree—prediction of future developments in various subsectors, but more a matter of how all these developments in subsectors would eventually marry up. And notwithstanding a significant focus—methodological and otherwise—for a topic such as 'system thinking' or 'system dynamics', and the relevant Club of Rome study mentioned above, where the method is applied, at the time it appeared to fall short of realising the WRR's ambitions here. The number of possible relations and links between all the variables in all the subsectors was simply too great to be processed in a single model.

But although formulating a single all-embracing model for the future has proven a bridge too far both then and now (the original pretence of an *integral* survey of the future having been allowed to drop along the wayside), it has to be said that the description of separate trends on various subsectors, as presented in the reports, is another extreme.

We conclude on this point that it makes sense to take a line marrying both approaches. Or, not to treat the future as one big system, but rather as a cluster of subsystems, albeit while concentrating on the mutual influences among the various trends.

3.2. Time horizon

WRR's background studies were meant to look 25 years ahead. What is striking about this time frame is its length and that it is applied to *all the* reports. Although 25 years was hardly strange for the time, the Club of Rome had done this back in 1972 and the year 2000 was inspirational—it was certainly significant for several topics, like energy, the climate and environmental pollution; having said that, in other areas it was overly long and unverifiable. Inevitably, surely, this would set authors romancing—willy-nilly expanding on personal images, preferences and tales. This is a common process in science fiction.

We conclude that from the angle of relevance and significance in policy for, and feeding of, strategic government policy, shorter periods of 10 or no more than 20 years, can in many cases be more significant.

An important factor in determining the ideal 'time horizon' is the level of dynamics in a given policy area. It is so that the pace of development and changes in the area of

information and communication moves faster than with energy. Not only now, but the same applied back in the 1970s. Hence, in the future, greater attention will have to be devoted to determining the time horizon of a study, whereby holding on to one and the same time horizon will be undesirable; indeed, we think that a certain sector-dependence in specifying time horizons is also a learning moment.

3.3. Selecting themes for the survey of the future (meta-forecasting)

Alongside the actual substance and level of precision in the reports, at meta *level* one can also look at the collected reports. Why then did the choice fall on these 17 themes? Indeed, it is quite possible that, at the time, a given report sketched a telling image of the future, but that the actual theme is now considered less relevant.

Looking at the list of themes it is fair to say that given the large number it was hardly likely not to have included important future themes. Moreover, the formulation of some themes was broad in the extreme, an example being the study into 'Mass media, information and communication'. Moreover, it is not easy to cite contemporary themes *not* appearing on the list. Even so, one can point to a number of 'mega' topics which now would probably take the status of an independent theme for a background study; these would include technology, migration, national and international security. The mirror image question is whether all the themes of those times, like participation, social services and social aid, would again enjoy the same status in a comparable future study, with a similar portfolio.

It is often the case that both the content of the survey of the future and the selection of themes are products of the time in which they came about. Hence, the surveys of the future are couched in the common terminology of their time; and this often means that truly new situations, spurred by a breach in trends, are not or cannot be cited. This gives us 'the future paradox' whereby what you do not know—namely the future—cannot be expressed in words.

And yet, we are not totally helpless; creativity can provide a weapon to hunt potential new developments that would colour the future otherwise than our logic would suppose. There are also benefits to be gained by not merely describing a selected topic, but by having the selection of that topic depend on a survey of the future. So, it is not merely a question what will happen in the future in the area of—say—leisure, but whether leisure will be of any importance in 25 years from now. By conducting a survey of the future on meta level, as well as ensuring that one is *doing things right* (i.e. conducting a good quality survey of the future), and *doing the right things* or grasping the right themes by the horns, i.e. the future-proof themes.

3.4. Accuracy

In character, the sub-reports occupy the middle ground between the two types of future studies. This makes verifying the accuracy of the reports problematic. Insofar as the reports' pronouncements come in the form of a prediction, the problem is not so great and one compares that predicted with the actual reading. This cluster features a mass of such comparisons.

In contrast, it is trickier to make a statement about the quality of an explorative pronouncement. Measuring the quality demands different criteria, as for example the level of new insights enabled by the survey, or enabling insights into the linkage between potential future developments or—from the policy maker's perspective—the utility of the survey of the future. In any event, validating the survey studies is no simple task given the absence of a detailed set of criteria—just as with predictions. Indeed, not for nothing do the various contributions to this compilation say so little about the way the reports are used.

Looking at the general accuracy of the series of reports, and bearing in mind the above remarks, it is fair to say the following about the general accuracy of the series of reports, albeit that in a number of cases we are obliged to differentiate between the A and B variants. Rather than perfection, the objective here is to advance the most pregnant conclusions. First and foremost, the estimation of economic development was actually quite respectable and at the end of the day nearer to the A- (relatively high economic growth) than the B-scenario (tendency to zero growth). It transpired that the potential of zero growth was very largely an image to be confronted or looked forward to in the 1970s.

Looking at future energy suppliers, one can state that the price of oil—a significant economic variable—was estimated far too high at the time. This could well have been because people were so overwhelmed by the might of the OPEC cartel during the oil crisis. Apparently, they failed to realise in the longer term that the price and market mechanism would give rise to a whole slew of accommodations (new energy sources, more economic use, etc.) and that this would undermine OPEC.

Mobility shows a mixed picture. Hence, variant A over-estimates the use of the automobile and underestimates use of public transport; meanwhile, variant B incorrectly estimates car ownership in the year 2000 at the same figures as in 1972. Variant B was also off target in estimating the future volume of slow-mobility options (walking, bicycles, light motorbikes and mopeds), whereas variant A was on target. Looking at overall accuracy the authors have this to say: 'It can be concluded that total mobility realised in 2000 virtually takes up a middle position vis-à-vis variants A and B from the main report.' [3]

The report at the time on climate change and the relevant analysis shows that accuracy not only relates to forecasting, but also to the nature of the potential future issues in the policy area. Apparently, WRR's 1977 report, even back then, correctly put the theme on the (Dutch) agenda, although at that time it was not yet able to establish linkage between two elements that had a major influence on climate development, namely energy, food and the supplying of food.

Just as with the energy theme, and the relation with environmental pollution, reference is made to the lower than expected price of oil which, notwithstanding failed to have such a great impact due to the low price inelasticity. Reference was also made to lower than predicted energy use, right across the line.

Lastly, in a general sense, one can point to the great influence of a correct prediction of population levels and/or growth of various variables, such as mobility, energy and the environment. Hence, looking at mobility, the approximately 10% underestimation of population levels in the year 2000 had an effect on the underestimation of overall mobility in variant B, whereas the overestimation in variant A would have been higher. In the area

of healthcare demography is only seen in terms of population increase, and not interpreted in any wider sense than that, whereby the changing composition of the population (e.g. by ageing) and the expected effect of this on demand for care show an increase.

4. General conclusions and recommendations

Just as a footballer is judged by goals scored, so the name of a surveyor of the future is built on the accuracy with which he or she described the future. At least, that is the case if future prediction is his/her aim. As we have already seen, there is a greater nuance to *surveying* the future in that one does not seek to describe the specific status or end-situation of a given variable. For that matter, in this context prediction and surveying should not be seen as mutually exclusive categories; much rather, they are the opposite poles of a continuum.

Given the manifold absence of methodical accounting in the various reports, the following question arises: were there, at the time, meaningful methods available to study the future? Indeed, the non-existent is non-employable. And, sure enough, the first year of the ATV study saw the WRR, newly established in 1977, toiling to develop a methodology before embarking on the substantive future study into a slew of policy areas; the ATV [11] is quite frank in describing this challenge.

Although there were already a number of publications available by the 1970s, or even later 1960s, offering an overview of methods available at the time, not a little energy was devoted into rediscovering the wheel.

An example of a contemporary and known publication into relevant methods was Jantsch [6], which describes almost 100 forecasting methods. Shortly after the ATV outcome this was followed in 1978 by the *Handbook of futures research*, edited by Jib Fowles [4].

Looking at the various background studies we see nothing or little by way of use of standard methods—insofar as these had been developed. Quite likely this has to do with the fact that the reports' authors were, to borrow the terminology of futurologist Joel Barker [1], mainly *content experts*; this is to say experts on subsectors, who by virtue of their expertise-livelihood not only know a lot about what's happening in a given area, but for this reason are deemed capable of providing a motivated opinion on its future course. These *content experts* can be separated from the *process experts* whose substantive expertise is far less, but who, in contrast, have greater process-type skills for the production of a survey of the future (at the ATV the role of the *process experts* is taken by the ATV Committee). Mutual relations between the two types of experts are expressed by the application of the Delphi method whereby the 'facilitator' acts as *process expert* and the separate experts provide their input as *content experts*. The increasing use of *process experts* for the various sub-reports could also have resulted in a greater focus on the application of methods of survey of the future, or, at the very least, in openness on its use … or not. As it happens, it is so that several of the background studies are now somewhat personalistic by nature; nowhere is this more so than in the education report; indeed, ATV says so itself.

Indeed, within the ATV it is recognised that there is a hazard whereby the various sub-studies are dependent, or overly dependent, on a single author. However, with the pressure of time there were no other options open.

Lastly, we would like to make a number of suggestions for methodological improvements. First and foremost it is reasonable to urge a more systematic use of the scenario method, and we go into this in more detail in the follow up to this paragraph. At the same time great attention should be given to a discourse analysis. Hence, a discourse analysis can be tasked with detecting *weak signals* on the periphery of dominant scientific and other thinking. To this end, within the process of surveying the future more space must be enabled for people who are not part of the *mainstream.* Indeed, it might be better to entrust surveys of the future to people in a marginal position who do not identify with any given interest [5].

Continuing onward and upward from this one can point to influence of various consecutive 'discourses' as evidenced by pivotal concepts on the lines of 'post-industrial society' in the 1970s, the neo-liberal discourse of the 1990s, and now, as the 21st century gets underway—the 'knowledge society'.

At the same time, while attention for non-dominant ideas is certainly important, so too is the presence of a major diversity of ideas, both dominant and non-dominant, that is essential for conducting a debate around the future in which all these ideas compete together.

Possibly the most important outcome of a discourse analysis is that many surveys of the future and other studies painstakingly reconnoitre the future in the light of the present. They are 'imprisoned' within a dominant discourse. And it is very much so that if insufficiently aware of this, one's eyes can remain shut for new, still inconsequential, developments, that may play a major role in the future.

On the other hand, this is not to say that one can turn on the automatic pilot by simplifying forecasting down to the rejection of the current dominant discourse as beacon for the future, but to view noises from the periphery as such. History is a source of evidence that the future often communicates more slowly than expected or occasionally hoped for [7]. And indeed, not everyone is a tele-worker, and it will be a while yet before we all drive cars with *fuel cells*. Having said that, critical examination of every development, whether or not dominant, remains mandatory for good surveying and forecasting.

How would we go about improving the ability to audit the 'contentions' and/or 'accounts'? When making the ATV this was done via a number of systematic feedbacks to and via the ATV committee. Another solution would be to ask the authors (also) to present *different* 'accounts' or developments alongside each other. If they then find A more plausible than B, they must be able to defend and motivate that. This would avoid an author nailing his/her colours too much to a single mast. An alternative here would be to commission several authors for a single theme, preferably people with very different views; and hence the spectrum maintains the broadness from which the future will be viewed.

Implementation of a scenario analysis or the scenario method is also urged here; this obliges authors—as it were—to describe several possible, plausible directions. The added value entailed in comparison with a singular forecast is that it enables greater insights into actually and potentially upcoming 'dependences'. Greater insights are enabled into the future; precisely by naming those upcoming uncertainties one can expect to substantially impact on the policy area at issue.

A scenario study provides a number of options and future options and emphasises on how these arise. In contrast a, forecast only delivers a single future, final situation. Hence, by indicating the key intervention points, a scenario study gives more direct linkage with government policy.

Having said this, there is no absolute certainty that scenarios can visualise the future any better than a forecasting approach. Indeed, in practice governmental scenario studies often—too often—panned out into nothingness and were not actually used in policy making. At the time the ATV's stance on the upcoming scenario-mindedness was rather half-hearted. The starting point here was to produce a single comprehensive, 'surprise-free' picture of the year 2000, designed to identify potential bottlenecks. However, as we have seen, as the progress evolves—in a time of a sudden, structural stagnation in economic growth—a B scenario was added; this showed economic growth gradually coming to a complete halt. Even so, taking a single variable, namely economic growth, as time switch for future developments across a rich mix of social territory, remains dubious

Important though they may be, economic developments are not the only factor impinging on the future.

It is safe to conclude that evaluating background reports is a tricky business. This probably has to do—in part—with the absence of a concrete definition as foundation for the ATV project. The working assumption was a surprise-free future, and problematising had to come from the issue of how and where given developments would lead to potential logjams.

Looking to subsequent future studies this argues in favour of a more explicit definition of the problem and the prior assignment of an audience or target group. The questions arising here are: why do we do it, for whom, what problems do we foresee? In project management it is usual to have a client and other stakeholders; and, indeed, governments and its units now also commonly think in these terms.

Thought will also have to be given to developing a framework for evaluation of the explorative surveys of the future. This type of framework will have less focus on the accuracy of a survey, but will aim at issues such as: the quality of the process in which the survey of the future is generated, the application of the selected method, the scope of the survey (time horizon, actors involved, geographic spread of the survey), plus interaction with clients.

Despite the much sought after objectivity the ATV was a creature of its time, a time marked by enthusiasm and pretences, a time when people tried to get a grip on developments in the long term. Now, in contrast, the idea of having the future in one's palm, be it even such a little bit, appears once more to have receded far away. Present and upcoming surveys of the future may be more advanced, it is true, but compared with the ATV they have or will show more of an exercise in the unpretentious. Here to us appeared to have learned a lesson.

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