

EVALUATION REPORT

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The Budapest Futures Course 2001 organisers have consciously aimed at making the evaluation of the course in a continuous way and from many aspects. The assessment guide that was handed out (see Appendix 3) on arrival introduced all participants to the programme and the structure of the course. We asked all guests to carry the booklet during the week and to fill it out day by day so that all remarks could reflect the first impressions as well as all have the chance to prepare an overall evaluation.

The assessment booklet contains three main parts. The first is a pre-course evaluation on arrival and living circumstances as well as about the motivation of participation and its expectations. The second part assesses all morning and afternoon sessions of each day. The third part checks if the course programme and its environment met the expectations; the outstanding topics and lecturers; the suggested improvements; as well as an overall satisfaction.

1. Participants

The Budapest Futures Course 2001 has accepted the attendance of 40 participants from 13 countries. The majority represented less developed and transition countries: the Philippines, India, Venezuela, Russia, Slovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary.

Average age was 26, which is in accordance with the course aims: those future oriented young people are invited who actually transform future studies ideas to practice, either in education or in research work, non-governmental movement, business, etc. They all have the ability and chance to dissipate BFC message and spirit to the wider layers of youth.

The Budapest Futures Course has also created the chance to express and integrate different fields of interest, hence giving a comprehensive approach to futures visions and activities. Participants represented a wide range of fields such as cultural identities, corporate communication, history and philosophy of science, futures education, social forecasting, psychology, ecology, economics, knowledge management, diplomacy, technology-culture and future, civil society initiatives, futures studies methodology, women studies, gender issues, education for empowerment, education trends, consumer studies, etc.

2. Motivations and expectations

Participants have articulated a great number of motivations and expectations, and these can be summarised in three main groups:

- a) Most participants have underlined that they want to meet like-minded people from other parts of the world. An academic course may support networking these people. Similar way of thinking, however, does not equal with homogenisation of thoughts. The course was expected to offer an intercultural communication between international, open-minded, future oriented people. Another purpose was to share knowledge and get inspiration from other ideas with different background values.
- b) Many have pointed out to deepen knowledge on futures studies. These expectations have varied along a wide range from simple introductory futures studies knowledge base to most recent ideas and methods. Futures studies orientation included a need for new paradigms in order to explore future as well as for the renewal of techniques. Finally, how to apply futures studies and its methods to investigate changing values and to use them in order to vision new societies.
- c) Some motivations were much more content and output oriented. In the core civil societies have taken place – this indicated a kind of hypothesis: forming new societies is the way to *civilise* societies and make them self-organising, nature friendly and human. In this respect another issue was how cultures as well as different age groups articulate their visions towards civil societies, and what kind of actions they are manifested in. The visions and aspects of young generation have received highlight since this social layer should express and realise future opportunities. The motto of the course itself, the youth for a less selfish future incorporates all these expectations.

3. Fulfilment of expectations

- a) All participants have underlined that their similar orientation and aims have created a powerful and inspiring company. Although the way different people thought to meet these aims were divergent in many cases, working groups, discussions, presentations, social programmes etc. have created the frameworks to communicate different approaches and to make a better understanding of each other. Some expressed their surprise that diversity in the world is so great even within a basically tolerant and respectful company. All in all these are the people as one wrote that they want to see in the future courses.
- b) Futures studies methodology incorporating theories has been partially fulfilled. The first day introductory presentations have covered a methodological background to some extent; however, there was no special attention paid to this issue. Even if the BFC programme had not aimed at giving either an introductory or an advanced course on futures studies, the background of participants were so much diverse on this field that a more efficient outcome of some workshops would have called for a brief methodological overview. Consequently as the course content is concerned, for many the programme has been logical, varied and a good choice of aspects, while others offered an improvement in both the aspect and the sequence of topics.
- c) Participants have welcomed social environment and civil society issues. Driving attention of different aspects to social outcomes has received high satisfaction. As far as the composition of participants are concerned, some have drawn the attention to the fact that economic study backgrounds as well as lower age generations were relatively over-represented. More experienced from more diverse disciplinary and work background are needed in this programme. This critique is very much in accordance with the notion and the participation conditions of the BFC course and has to be kept an eye on in the future. As for younger generations visioning their wishful futures, according to some opinions opportunities for flexible learning are to be celebrated.

Among satisfaction participants have expressed some issues that can improve future success of the Budapest Futures Course. These ideas are as follows.

First, the content and the discussions have received some contributions. Too general terms and problem raising make discussion groups too much divergent and ineffective. Visioning workshops were sometimes too general and lacked thorough frameworks. Some offered to include more real life case studies and Hungarian issues, although case studies may easily link visions to past

experience. It seems that a balance between case studies and visioning has to be found. Concerning generalisation another problem was concrete professions. Some missed the connection to given professions or suggested combining all issues with future technologies. Others, however, have pointed out that in some cases where visioning aimed at outlining a future structure of environment, for most participants academic background and knowledge base of the given area was lacking. This kind of problem can make visioning empty and useless.

Second, many underlined the lack of futures studies methods, techniques and analysis. As futures studies in general terms are concerned the Budapest Futures Course is consciously a post-graduate course and assumes all applicants to have some futures studies basis. A one week programme cannot undertake to introduce all methodological directions and issues. On the other hand, concerning given presentations, all lecturers should give a clear identification of tasks as well as an outline of methodology and terms (s)he wants to explore. Scenario building workshops and visioning have a certain framework and different techniques; a lecturer or facilitator should always make clear how each group has to carry out the given task. These problem are tightly connected to education, another issue one has highlighted. The changing values – forming new societies programme needs more than just an international discussion: in order to transmit the output its application in education calls for more attention.

Finally, some remarks were addressed to lecturers. These make an inherent part of their assessment, so to be included in the next chapter.

4. Presentations, discussion groups and workshops

The assessment of the programme was manifold, so were lecturer-participants and facilitators. Their evaluation was rather controversial: there was no one sided opinion, in most cases the aspects differed and hence the advantages and disadvantages. One example was *Ervin Laszlo* whose participation has received only satisfaction and appreciation. On the other hand according to most opinions the connection between values and architecture could not come to the surface. The technical support of the presentation was attractive; however, the lecturer has failed to bring out the link.

The most common remarks on the execution of the presentations and workshops were as follows. Participants underlined those presentations that were understandable, enlightening, challenging and thought provoking. They preferred participative discussions to lectures, however, required introductory frameworks and theoretical backgrounds in most cases.

Those discussions were the most popular where the topic managed to be not too general, practical and up-to-date. Creative exercises that were collaborative at the same time have received the highest appreciation.

Some underlined that the discussions were helpful to take people out of their usual mindset. Regional-cultural grouping of the last day, the synthesis of the different approaches of the course as well as connecting the BFC 1999 and the BFC 2001 were unique according to the answers.

Participants have pointed out that the relevancy of presentations to abstracts were sometimes problematic. An important issue of the future is how to keep lecturers to the topic and within this to the overall aspect of a course.

Limited relevancy has connected in some cases with time management problems. Some performances were too long or wanted to cover too many aspects for one time. Meetings with little interaction or too much information one way were dispreferred. Management of future courses call for a better balancing between talking time and questioning, as well as between presentation and discussion.

Some remarks have addressed workshops and discussions. Even if presentations did not take most of the time, discussions sometimes lacked focus or remained open-ended. Output orientation is one of the main characteristics of the Budapest Futures Course, hence articulation of message in all workshops should be more emphasised.

An important issue is the correct use of methods. One has drawn the attention to the fact that any creative visioning such as drawing may lead to false output or unreasonable future option in case of misuse of the given technique. Another reason why all workshops should make clear their theoretical-methodological background.

Finally assessments have reflected an interesting, controversial issue. While in some cases those approaches have received support that were created by regional groupings or the articulation of a future option reflected a characterised cultural background, in other cases a regional-centric, namely European presentation got criticism. In a multicultural world a Euro-centric approach cannot monopolise the future of the world; however, it deserves an equal judge to all other cultures (not to tell that Europe itself is multicultural). The notion of Budapest is just to express multiculturalism of the continent and its optional co-operation.

5. Most favoured topics

Participants of the Budapest Futures Course most favoured the connection between futures studies and social development and its relationship with civil society. Both topics were underlined basically for their integrating frameworks. They could best express that values and their changing are socially-culturally embedded. Social development seems to have a preferred direction that is civil society. High attention followed its term, defining and categorising civil societies.

Ervin Laszlo has been mostly highlighted, because he could make an overall approach without being too general. Some mentioned wisdom appearing in his practice, and another important feature that is necessary for making future orientation a movement: he speaks to the heart. *Cesar Villanueva* and *Rakesh Kapoor* were appreciated for making their topic well structured, detailed precise and respectful. In both cases discussion has got into methodological frameworks and presenters were touching.

Another approach from the programme that received much emphasis was that of technology and environment. Both were appreciated for their realistic examples and for the practical action they called for. Provoking setting of *Bruce Tonn's* cases deserved appreciation. An interesting comparison is the complementarity of natural and artificial environment. While *Merrill Findley* focused nature, the widest human environment to practical problems, *Ferenc Vidor* has enlarged constructed environment, a practical issue to symbolic while discussing the difference between planning and forecasting.

In some cases the assessment writers mentioned other than a topic or a presenter-facilitator. The *Philippine* way of handling and presenting issues has fascinated many. A gentle but firm performance in discussions as well as the way they combined deep-thinking with brain storming has become a general methodology for the final workshop.

6. Organisation

Participants have articulated their respect and thank to the organising team for the much attention they paid to different aspects of the whole week. They emphasised not only hostility but the general notion of combining academic work with socialisation. The first day programme has received much support and approval. All who took part felt that getting acquaintance with the spirit of Budapest is a methodology for the whole course. At the same time participants expressed a kind of unification, making a real company during the trip, which

they characterised as warm, friendly and well organised. Some mentioned they would have visited the Ethnographical Museum as one tightly connected to the course topic.

Arrival has been evaluated as having a warm welcome in all cases. Registration was fast and accommodation comfortable or ok. Many expressed that it was good to keep people together at the same place, not far from the course site and the city centre. Although rooms were offered in a students' hostel of the university, there was no remark on its quality or hygiene. One comment regarded the reception that paid little attention to identification when serving room keys.

Food was assessed as tasty and enough. Many supported the voucher system, which enabled to satisfy different tastes, different meal timing and different quantities. A problem was that many from the outhanded list of restaurants and shops accepting the voucher all over the city have closed down in the meantime.

A general praise referred to the coffee room. Nicely presented fresh fruits, snacks, mineral water and coffee waited for course participants in each break next to the conference room. Its cosy atmosphere inspired participants to continue academic talks.

7. Overall evaluation

Participants assessed the course as a real success. They used the terms professional and perfect for organisation, even if contributed with many ideas in order to improve it. The course has been taken as a nice mix of science and socialising. It was underlined that the course had one basic idea, i.e. values, that we all tried to discuss from different aspects and in different fields. Participants felt that their limited number and selection became fruitful as they could work well together and could found the basis of future co-operation and networking.

As *Tony Stevenson*, outgoing president of the WFSF, a lecturer-participant has expressed in his evaluation:

*“A great learning experience in a friendly,
supportive context conducive to intercultural understanding.”*