

Major Trends Shaping Canada's Future  
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From a project undertaken in 2005 by Foresight Canada<sup>1</sup>. The mandate was to identify (1) the complex and swampy strategic opportunities and challenges facing Canada and the world in the early 21st century and (2) the science and technologies required to meet these challenges and sustain success. Here's a list of issues the Canadians believe will shape our medium to long term future.

**Major Trends that have Gone Critical that will Intensify Further by 2020**

- **Globalization:** We find it helpful to distinguish between two different senses of 'globalization.' The first refers to what might be called the raw phenomenon of globalization. Short of disaster, it is unstoppable. The second refers to the human project that is advocated in light of the fact of globalization. Both the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum exemplify the latter sense.
- **Education Levels:** The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, not the 20<sup>th</sup>, will be the great century of education. For the first time, learning will become the norm. Lest we celebrate too soon, the evidence to date is that education increases psychological independence, feeds alienation from inherited traditions and authority and contributes to the conditions in which terrorists thrive.
- **The Big Generation:** The societal influence of the Big Generation – those born in Canada between 1952 and 1966 – will greatly increase as it becomes Canada's psychologically dominant generation. By 2020, they will be in control as they will range in age from 54 to 68. Some will be retired, but most will still be working. This generation is the first in history in which a majority was educated through high school. As such, they have a greater capacity for 2<sup>nd</sup> order thinking than any before them. Given the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, they will need this skill.
- **Resource Constraints:** The facts suggest that the 21st Century will be the very first resource-constrained century for Industrial societies. For understandable reasons this new reality has not yet sunk in, but it will.

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<sup>1</sup> *Strategic Opportunities and Challenges Facing Canada and the World In the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century and The Science and Technologies Required to Sustain Success, a Research Paper, Foresight Canada, July 2005*

- **Human Security:** In the 21st Century, human security will become a 24/7, 360 degree civilian, as well as military, concern. Evidence to date suggests we will handle it badly.
- **Inappropriate Organizational Forms:** In the 21st Century, huge investments will be made in transforming the essential cultures, structures and functioning of our organizations in every sector. The shift will be from our hierarchical bureaucracies – forms that fit the conditions of earlier centuries – to new global, networked value ecologies – forms that fit and can cope with the emerging conditions of the 21st Century.
- **Canada's Place in the World:** Historically, trade in resources and industrial goods has anchored Canada's prosperity. Our internal market has never been large enough to consume what we can produce. The percentage of our GDP that is dependent on trade is higher than any other OECD nation. Superficially, success seems assured as the demand for resources grows. However, the risk of resource wars is increasing, as are threats to our sovereignty.
- **Courageous and Insightful Leadership:** The need for courageous and insightful leaders who are able, competently, to exercise the new function of leadership is already extreme. We suffer from the fact that few of our formal leaders in any sector have a non-trivial grasp on how and why our world is changing. Few could give a sound, worthwhile and spontaneous briefing on the forces that are at work within and among us and their implications for future strategic directions, core roles and goals of their organization, much less the whole society.

### Major Trends that may well Go Critical by 2020

- **A Return to Domination by Big Powers:** The trend is back to the future – a world that is dominated by a few truly large Superpowers. But the lineup is changing. The USA, UK, USSR lineup is giving way to a new grouping – the USA, China and India.
- **Further Decline of the US Dollar:** The status of the US dollar will likely become even more precarious in the next fifteen years. It is in the interest of Europeans, OECD and OPEC nations and the holders of USA dollars to nurture the Euro as an alternative global currency. Such an achievement would greatly increase their leverage on the USA, which cannot afford a currency meltdown. And the USA, with its flood of debt, is increasingly dependent on the goodwill of these players.

- **An Emerging Culture of Knowledge-in-Strategic-Use:** In one sense, of course, every culture and economy has been *knowledge-driven*, i.e. dependent on and driven by the knowledge then existing in the culture. However, the new phrase '*knowledge-in-strategic-use*' adds a new perspective – *sustained success now requires the reflexive capacity to determine whether or not the knowledge that one is routinely putting to use is (a) adequate to the task at hand when compared to the best knowledge that is available to others and (b) being used strategically; and then to act accordingly.*
- **Climate Change:** In our view, it is entirely likely that the 21st Century will be marked by dramatic changes in the earth's climate. We make no attempt to predict what the combination of heating, cooling and extreme events will be. But that the climate will be experienced as extreme we have no doubt. The implication for us is that, compared to the present focus on efforts to slow global warming, much more energy and effort needs to be devoted to anticipating and mitigating the effects of these changes. Increasing our capacity for adaptive action is essential.
- **Societal Change and the Disintegration of Identity and Community:** The reality is that profound societal changes are taking place everywhere. In large part, this is a result of globalization. All cultures already show significant signs of stress and dysfunction in the face of relentless pressures from late Industrial persons, institutions and markets – pressures to abandon the myths and values of Traditional cultures and begin to measure the value and quality of life primarily by dollars per quarter. These pressures will intensify, as will the turmoil that such erosion entails.
- **The Centrality of Societal Issues:** The realization that the question is not, "*What can we do?*" but, "*What do we want to do?*" will have dawned on large numbers of us and gone critical. Ironically, our new S&T capacities will have shifted the fundamental issues raised by science and technology from technical issues to those that are human and societal – "*What kinds of people do we want to be, in what kind of society and what kind of world?*" This is a sobering thought in light of the fact that there is not a government in the world that puts a priority on, let alone makes serious investments in, the new work of developing an integral understanding of the evolution of human cultures and consciousness.
- **Struggle Over Late Industrial Market Capitalism:** Defence of late Industrial market capitalism by many who benefit most from it will increase in sophistication and volume. It will be argued, following Margaret Thatcher in 1982, that *there is no alternative*; that market capitalism is a necessary feature of any conceivable future. However, the

evidence is growing that market capitalism has passed its peak, is vulnerable and will be attacked.

- **Struggle over a Closed View of Reality:** Defence of a closed view of reality with absolute (invariant) values will greatly intensify as those whose personal and organizational identity is now tied to this view feel themselves to be losing the *culture war*, e.g. Roman Catholics and fundamentalists of all kinds – Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and ethnic nationalists from pre-Industrial cultures. The ferocity of this struggle will surprise and befuddle modern secularists, thus compounding the conflict.
- **The Use of Fear as a Motivator:** The use of fear as a motivator to gain support from potential followers for both political and civic causes will greatly increase in Canada, as it already has in the USA.
- **The Hunger for a Coherent, Convincing and Grounded Story of Our Society:** The above trends can be read as signs that many societies are already having trouble setting and keeping to a clear societal course in the midst of times that are as confusing and conflicted as our own. Inherited ways of making sense of the cosmos are less and less efficacious. Without a clear and convincing cosmic story to guide one's trajectory, it is too easy to get distracted. Big Picture Goals are forgotten and small wins are settled for.
- **Changing Human Consciousness:** In our view, the 21st Century will be marked by changes in the patterns of human consciousness that are more dramatic than any in history. Of course, the pace and scope of such change will vary with location, education, and situation. However, the drift is unmistakable – it is slowly dawning on us that social realities are and always have been socially constructed; that we are now required to become conscious architects of our future; and that the quality of our actual future hangs on the quality of the work we undertake over the next very few generations. In short, we had better learn to live as co-creators of our lives and societies or life on this planet will roll on without us.