

IDSC International Think Tank Conference
Session "Factors influencing the performance of Think Tanks"

***„The Time Dimension
as Challenge for
Think Tanks“***

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IDSC-CFS Cairo, January 18, 2009

1. Time as Challenge: Why Future Studies?

2. Concept: What is Future Studies?

3. Methodology: How to conduct
Future Studies?

4. Perspectives

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Core Problems of Global Change

in the Sphere of Nature

- Climate change
- Loss of biodiversity
- Soil degradation
- Shortage of drinking water
- Pollution of the oceans
- Man-made natural disasters

inside the Anthroposphere

- Population development and migration
- Endangered health
- Risks for nutrition security
- Increasing global development disparities
- Expansion of non-sustainable life-styles

(Source: WBGU)

INCREASING COSTS

Assessment-Report

„*Natural Catastrophes in 2006*“:

- Damage for national economies:
200 billion US\$ (in 2004: 145 billion US\$)
- Insured damages: 75 billion US\$
(in 2004: ~40 billion US\$)
- More than 100.000 persons died

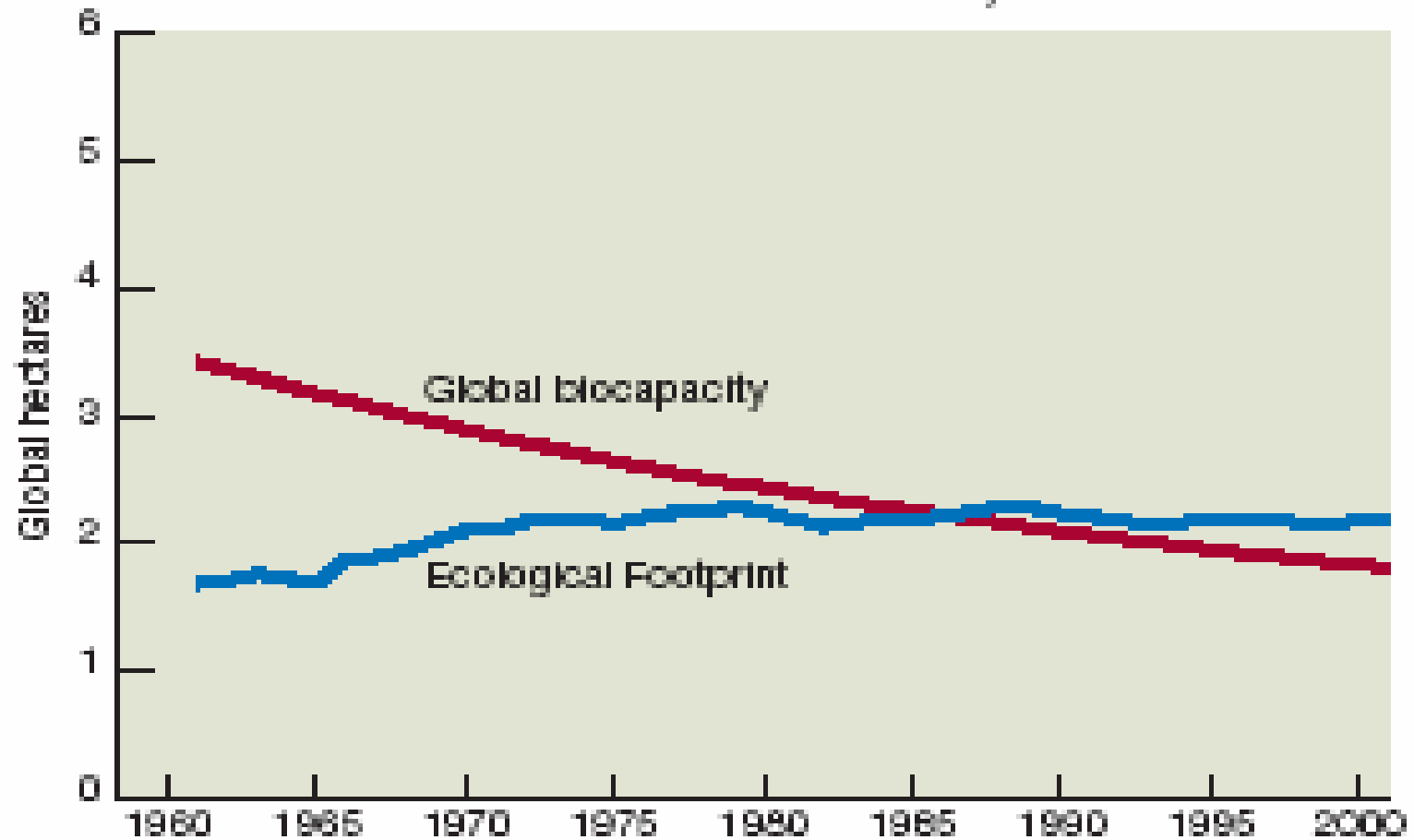
[www.munichre.com]

More than 600 years ago the great Arab social historian **Ibn Khaldun** defined **„politics“** in his famous *„Al-Muqaddima“* in the following way:

„It encompasses the management of the home and the community according to morale and wisdom, in order to induce the people to a behavior which guarantees the protection and preservation of the species.“



Fig. 1: HUMANITY'S ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT AND BIOCAPACITY PER PERSON, 1961-2001



Source: Global Footprint Network 2005

„Overshoot“

Meadows/ Randers/ Meadows (2004): „Limits to Growth. The 30-Year Update“

Central Result: „overshoot“ – we are already beyond the Limits of our Natural and Social Systems

Options:

- **Uncontrollable Collaps** (see: Jared Diamond)
or
- Deliberate Reduction of Energy- and Resource Consumption and Emissions, Transformation to **Sustainable Development**

Growing **needs** for Future Studies

- Increasing **complexities** and **dynamics** of modern globalized societies
- Expansion of the effects of human activities in time and space (i.e. climate change, nuclear waste, space travel)
- Influence of competing advertisement and mass media images (consumption, materialism etc.) – diffusing negative effects and consequences (information overdose, conflicts)
- Many traditional strategies and policies (economic growth, neoliberal policies, central planning etc.) do not work any longer, new ways have to be detected and constructed
- The survival of civilisations is at stake (we only have one planet, it's the base for our lives and future generations)

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FUTURES RESEARCH

Definition

Futures Research is the **scientific work** on

- possible
- probable
- desirable

future developments (Futures), their realization options, as well as their preconditions in the past and the present.

(Rolf Kreibich)

Basic Characteristics

- There is not only one future, but potentially many (“Futures”)
- Futures can not be completely prognosed
- Futures can be **influenced and managed**
- Futures studies have an explicit focus on action and implementation
- Intuition and **creativity** for proposing alternative futures
- Based on criteria for scientific quality



Salvador Dalí *“The Persistence of Memory”* / *“Camembert of Time”* (1931)

FUTURE IS ...

- **... not predictable.** The only thing we can do is to build images and ideas on the events ahead of us – here we speak of many alternative futures.
- **... not predestined.** We can only consider the probability of events and things, when we think about the possibilities.
- **We can affect the future with our actions and choices.** Therefore it is important to know what is possible, what is probable, and what is preferable. The meaning of values and value discussions is thus unavoidable, when the alternative futures are considered.

(Anita Rubin)

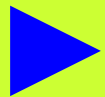
Think Tanks could use Future Studies for ...



... detecting possible and probable changes



... understanding their effects and impacts
(opportunities and risks)



... preparing for early action and desirable changes
(instead of increased costs by waiting too long – i.e. Stern-
Report on Climate Change)

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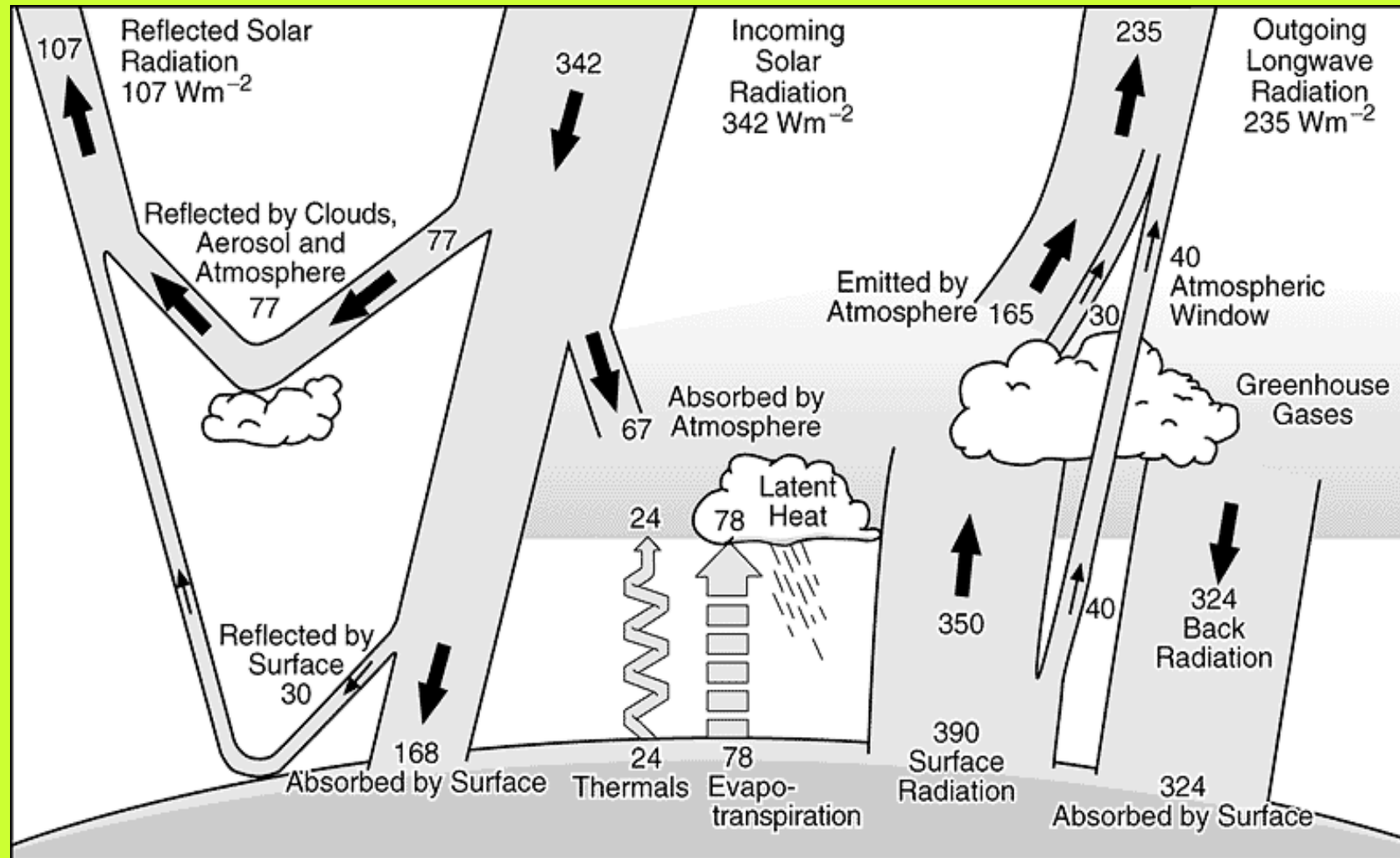
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CRITERIA FOR SCIENTIFIC QUALITY

- Logical consistency
- Control / test (Überprüfbarkeit)
- Terminological clearness / precision
- Simplicity
- Declaration of the scope
- Explication of the premise and the context conditions
- Transparency
- Relevance
- Practicality (Handhabbarkeit)

Climate Model on Radiation




Source: Internet Copyright © 2002-2006 climateprediction.net



Differences to „*Hard*“ Sciences

1. Future Research has to struggle with the same scientific problems as other social sciences (quantitative – qualitative, human beings and collectives as „chaotic“ elements and systems, non-linear change)
2. Future Research has to struggle with not yet existing systems (society, city, community, institution, product etc.)

TENDENCIES IN METHODOLOGIES

1. Quantitative  qualitative / creative-communicative
2. Using single methods  combination / mix of methods
3. Passive / reactive  pro-active (anticipating and creating options)

How to do Futures Studies ?



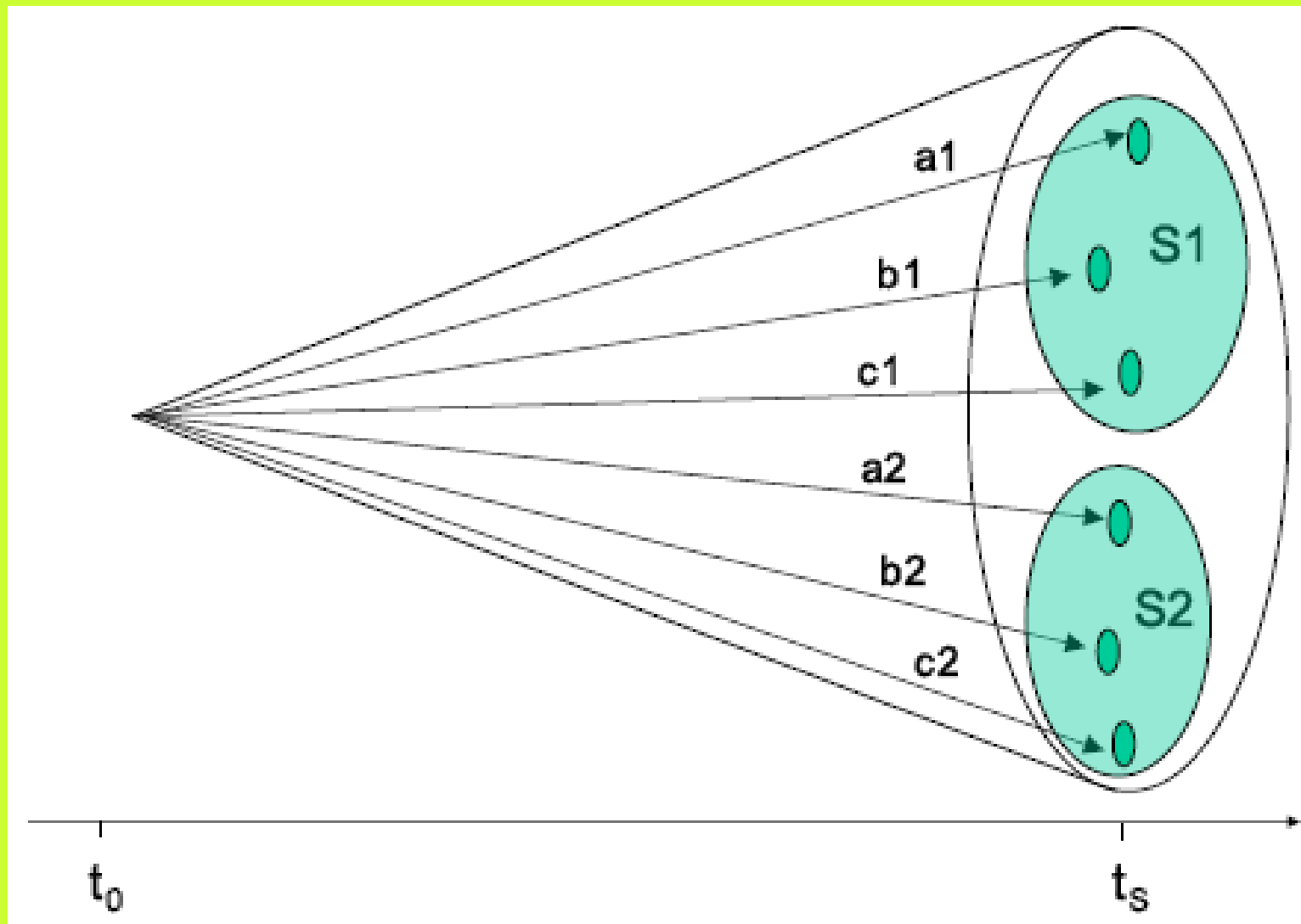
METHODS – TECHNIQUES – PROCEDURES (I)

- Trend extrapolation
- Analogy technique
- Multi-variant regression
- Cross-Impact-Technique
- Model building and Simulation procedures
- Expert interviews
- Delphi-Method
- Foresight-Process
- Road-mapping

METHODS – TECHNIQUES – PROCEDURES (II)

- Mediation procedures
- Future Workshop
- Focus group
- Future Conference
- Visions / perspective workshop
- Scenario - Methods
- Wild Cards

Future Scenario Funnel



(IZT 2008)

SCENARIO-METHODS: FUNCTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

1. Description of future **views** (possible, probable and desirable)
2. Elaborating alternative futures: knowledge for **orientation** (weighting parameters)
3. Spectrum: Best Case (ideal scenario) – Worst Case („Horror scenario“)
4. The **Management** of complex problems, challenges and tasks
5. Reduction of complexity, enhancement of transparency
6. Identification and description of **alternative development** paths
7. Clarifying decision points, options for managing and activities
8. Illustration, communication, motivation **for future action**
9. Actors: decision-makers, experts, scientists, stakeholders, citizens
10. Supporting a long-term strategic thinking and acting
11. The **evaluation** via indicators, effect assessments
12. Consideration of intervening events, breaks in trends and structures
13. Projective (forward) scenarios, retrospective (backward) scenarios

WILD CARDS

Economic Wild Cards

- Crash of the global financial system
- Explosion of prices for oil or other strategic resources

Social Wild Cards

- Subsistence revolution (sustainable life styles)
- Mass migration
- Terror attack and war

Technological Wild Cards

- Cheap technology for energy storage
- Gene technology for longer life (slowing process of aging)

Ecological Wild Cards

- Climate catastrophe
- Regional water pollution

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We can not define the future ...

... **but we can** produce and use scientific future knowledge in order to comprehend (possible, probable and desirable) **futures**, in order to act by means of participatory-democratic processes on minimizing risks/catastrophes and to produce the best future.

(Rolf Kreibich)

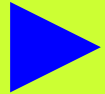
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**Think Tanks should strengthen their
capacities for Future Research and use
Future Studies expertise**



Shukrran