

# *futuribles* - no. 418 - May-June 2017

## **A New Grammar of the General Interest**

*Yannick Blanc*

Since 2017 is a year of important elections in various Western countries, *Futuribles* has decided to look into the lack of vision in political life, so regularly condemned by commentators, by publishing a series of articles on the subject. Is there a real deficit here? If so, what are the reasons for it, and how might it be remedied? After two initial articles published in the March-April 2017 issue, we pursue the theme with this analysis by Yannick Blanc, which shows the extent to which the institutional system, as it has developed in France, is outdated and ill-adapted to the way society operates. What the author terms the “tutelary matrix”, in which politics was made — and institutions made to operate — from the top down (by prescribing rules in phase with society’s values to regulate its usages), is at odds today with citizens’ growing propensity to organize themselves into action groups along very different lines, in which user requirements are to the fore. Should the state fall in with this “bottom-up” logic to orchestrate its strategic vision and the means of implementing it? However one views that question, it is the establishment of a new grammar of the general interest around this rules/values/forms-of-use triptych that Yannick Blanc is calling for here.

## **Reforming Social Security: A Return to Social Insurance Principles**

*Jacques Bichot*

With each new French national election, the question of Social Security reform rears its head. Admittedly, the Social Security account has been in deficit for many years and finding a way to balance its funding is a headache for those responsible for its management. However, though the deficits in the general account have been falling continuously since 2010, Jacques Bichot does not see that as providing evidence of a return to financial health, since the funding and management systems of the French Social Security

system have become warped over the years.

After demonstrating the “absurd” state into which France’s Social Security system’s accounts have fallen, Jacques Bichot suggests that its operation should be revised by restoring to it the status of social insurance in the strict sense, a status it has lost over time due to the Welfare State’s interference in its management. He proposes seven basic principles: the insurance-style, financial nature of Social Security should be guaranteed; it should be returned to independent management and responsibility should lie with those who run it; the schemes for different categories should be superseded by a system of universal cover; the rules on pension rights should be brought into phase with reality; it should be allowed scope to use revenues from capital to finance investment in youth (though not in pensions); Social Security should be governed by a transactional logic once again; it should be made explicit that the contributors to, and beneficiaries of, the scheme are individuals, not companies. On the basis of these principles and the restoration of the scheme’s managers — whom the state would no longer seek to override — Social Security could, as Bichot sees it, recover the foundations of fair and financially balanced operation.

## **Measurement of the Digital Economy at the National Level: Do we Need to Redesign our Accounting Tools?**

*Didier Blanchet*

In its last issue (no. 417, March-April 2017), *Futuribles* initiated discussion on the question of the slowdown in productivity gains and the consequences for the countries concerned. After that first instalment, which assessed long-term productivity trends in the developed countries, the role of technical progress and intangible factors, we are continuing our reflection on this question with an examination of economic indicators — is the decline in productivity gains real or is it the product of statistical indicators that are not well-suited to their accurate measurement?

In this article, Didier Blanchet shows how the national accounts evaluate the French economy by measuring Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and how that particular measure copes with the spread of digital technology. Are the many innovations produced by the ICT revolution adequately measured in terms of their effective contributions to the economy and to the well-being of consumers? To tackle the question of a possible mis-measurement, Blanchet examines three points in the debate that seem essential to him. The first concerns the scope of GDP: what does it aim to measure and why? The second relates to issues around the volume-price split: how can price changes at constant quality be measured in a context where some economic activities are undergoing a marked transformation as a result of the digital revolution? Lastly, he raises the question of factoring well-being into economic indicators, stressing its importance but reminding us that the national accounts make no claim to measure it. The debate on this last issue extends well beyond that around GDP and how GDP takes in the effects of the digital revolution: it is a far more complex area of controversy and the national accounts are just one (admittedly, essential) element in it.

### **What Progress on the Idea of a Carbon Price-Signal?**

*Alain Grandjean and Mireille Martini*

In December 2015, the world's leading countries signed an agreement in Paris that committed them to action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, so as to limit the scale of current global warming. If this is to be done, action is required to improve energy efficiency, but also to genuinely "decarbonize" production systems. Now, as Alain Grandjean and Mireille Martini emphasize here, the transition to a decarbonized economy has very little chance of coming about as long as there are no costs attached to emitting greenhouse gases. Hence the importance of establishing a carbon "price-signal" that encourages countries to re-design their economic model.

After rehearsing the various conceivable arrangements for taxing carbon and the way its price might be set, Grandjean and Martini look more specifically at France, Europe and the European emissions-trading market. They show how that market is still imperfect in its operation and stress the need

for complementary provisions. Lastly, they examine the question of a carbon price-signal at the international level, where such a scheme must necessarily be designed on a differential basis.

### **Manifesto for Decarbonizing Europe**

*The Shift Project*

A month before the first round of the French presidential elections, on 21 March in Paris, the Shift Project, a think-tank on energy transition headed by Matthieu Auzanneau, presented a Manifesto for Decarbonizing Europe. The manifesto, signed in late March by more than 2,500 people — the majority being directors of companies of all sizes and professional organizations, though many are personalities from the French academic world — calls on European states "to introduce policies capable, by 2050, of reducing greenhouse gas emissions as near as possible to zero." It also effectively invites candidates in the presidential elections to commit to this course of action.

Beyond the borders of France, at a time when President Donald Trump is sending out more than troubling signals to the rest of the world regarding US involvement in the campaign against climate change, the initiative has the virtue of encouraging European states to take a clearly proactive stance on their commitments to the Paris Agreement of late 2015. That proactive attitude is essential to preserve our planet's climate and limit the disruption future generations will have to face. It is also an important signal to the other signatories of the Paris Agreement to honour the commitments made. This is why *Futuribles* has taken the decision to carry this manifesto for its readers.

### **Towards a Universal Subsistence Income? (Futures of Yesteryear)**

*Hugues de Jouvenel*

Looking beyond the noxious political climate that has tainted the presidential campaign of 2017 (the second round of the election takes place a dozen or so days after this issue appears), we can see that a number of basic subjects have come to the fore in debates, including the question of a universal income. Advocated by the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, this idea of an allowance paid unconditionally and without obligation to all citizens, so as to guarantee

them a minimum income each month, isn't a new one and *Futuribles* has aired it on many occasions over the last 30 years or so. Hugues de Jovenel reviews the way the concept has developed historically and the attention it has received in this journal, particularly in a special issue on the subject published in February 1994.

### **Towards the End of Free Trade?**

*Jean-François Drevet*

The growing success of populist — and, very often, sovereignist — rhetoric, both on Left and Right, the triggering of Brexit and the accession to the US presidency of a Donald Trump who is intent on putting the interests of his country above all others, have rightly given cause for anxiety over some months now. There is particular concern with regard to trade, where existing agreements are being cast into doubt, protectionist meas-

ures initiated and trade deals currently under negotiation rejected. Above and beyond the media commotion over these developments, are we actually facing a genuine risk to multilateralism and the regulation of international trade?

Jean-François Drevet examines this question through a presentation of the arrangements that currently apply with respect to free trade, particularly from the standpoint of the EU and its member states. He warns of the dangers inherent in any waning of trade multilateralism or return to protectionism, while stressing the technical difficulties of reversing developments in the field. Though it is more than necessary to establish fair competition rules and measures that respect citizens, democracy, the environment etc., those regulations should be achieved within the framework of the international free-trade agreements constructed since 1945, not by states turning their backs on them. ■

*Futuribles* is a bimonthly independent transdisciplinary policy oriented journal (6 issues a year), also available in electronic form on the *Futuribles* website.

*Chief Editor: Hugues de Jovenel*

Futuribles: 47, rue de Babylone, 75007 Paris, France. - Tel.: + 33 (0)1 53 63 37 70  
Fax: + 33 (0)1 42 22 65 54 - E-mail [revue@futuribles.com](mailto:revue@futuribles.com) - Website [www.futuribles.com](http://www.futuribles.com)

# NUMÉROS ET DOSSIERS SPÉCIAUX RÉCENTS DE FUTURIBLES - TOUJOURS EN VENTE - 22 € LA REVUE



## Dossier spécial Productivité, croissance, emploi N° 417, mars-avril 2017

- ➡ Croissance économique et productivité sur longue période
- ➡ La troisième révolution industrielle : un mythe ?
- ➡ Le ralentissement des gains de productivité
- ➡ Les métiers de l'assurance face au numérique



## Numéro spécial Futurs possibles 2030-2050 : tendances lourdes, signaux faibles, incertitudes N° 415, novembre-décembre 2016

- ➡ Population ➡ Ressources naturelles
- ➡ Croissance économique ➡ Éducation
- ➡ Entreprises et travail ➡ Santé
- ➡ Sociétés et modes de vie
- ➡ Science ➡ Géopolitique



## Numéro spécial Renouveau des utopies urbaines N° 414, septembre-octobre 2016

- ➡ Comment une terre devient créative
- ➡ Fablabs urbains versus think-tanks
- ➡ Comment les pays du Sud réinventent l'urbanisme
- ➡ Villes intelligentes : utopie ou réalité ?

Commande en ligne : <http://www.futuribles.com>

Informations / commande : Hélène Vioujard • Futuribles

Tél. + 33 (0)1 53 63 37 70 • Fax + 33 (0)1 42 22 65 54

E-mail : [hvioujard@futuribles.com](mailto:hvioujard@futuribles.com)