Alternative futures of youth and work in South Africa (2050)

Presentation to ECSECC seminar
24 November 2021
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Crystal ball grazing?
Systematic study and exploration of possibilities?
A note about futures research

• Futures studies is based on the principle that the future is open, unknowable, and futures are referred to in the plural, i.e., there are always multiple futures.

• The field of futures studies lies between “the essential unknowability of the future and the effort to use the future for decision and strategy making in the present” (Poli, 2017, p. 59).

• Futures research also needs to take into account futures in the making: “actions [that] have not yet materialised into symptoms” and have “not yet congealed into fixed, empirical facts” (Adam and Groves, 2007, p. 196).
Presentation purpose

Explore alternative futures for youth and work towards 2050 in South Africa through a multi-layered analysis:

i. Identify and critically analyse the drivers of change for the future of work for young people in South Africa.

ii. Identify and critically analyse the prevailing images of future of work and youth in South Africa.

iii. Explore alternative scenarios for futures of youth and work in South Africa to 2050. Scenarios are images of the future, or images of alternative futures.

2050: Far enough to experiment with the imagination? Can we see beyond crises as recurring phenomena? Can we imagine the start of a new era?
Approach and paradigm

The study is approached from a critical futures paradigm and will provide a layered analysis integrating multiple perspectives using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) both as a theory and a method.

Critical futures work aims to probe beneath the surface and draws on insights from the humanities that allows for questioning, critiquing and interrogating the foundations of social life (Slaughter).

Critical futures research aims to disturb power relations through challenging categories, making the present peculiar and evoke alternative scenarios (Inayatullah).
Work and its futures

- Work in this study is understood as constituting a link between the individual and the economy (Granter, 2008) and serving three main functions.
  - As a socio-cultural value work is part of the moral core of life.
  - As a social function, work orientates the present and the future and is central to social organisation.
  - As an economic function, work is related to the organisation of labour and capital in production processes at micro- and macro level. At the most basic individual level, work is an activity performed to gain the necessities of life.

Ref: Applebaum, 1992; Gorz, 1999; Cloete, 2015; Macleavy and Lapworth, 2020; Casez, 1976; Bindé, 2005; du Toit, 2003; Granter, 2008; Senker, 1992; Davidow and Malone, 2019;
Work and its futures

• Work is understood as something that people ‘have’, but also something that people ‘do’.

• The concept of the 'future of work' is understood as structural changes in the economic and social functions of work.

• While changes in the socio-cultural value of work are noted in the literature, Macleavy and Lapworth is quoted stating that "the enduring importance of the structure and experience of work is testament to the hold that its imaginary, or set of values, as over society" (2020, p. 310).

• Understanding work as integral to human existence and social organisation, questions about the future of work become questions about the future of humanity and social organisation.

Ref: Applebaum, 1992; Gorz, 1999; Cloete, 2015; Macleavy and Lapworth, 2020; Casez, 1976; Bindé, 2005; du Toit, 2003; Granter, 2008; Senker, 1992; Davidow and Malone, 2019;
Youth, work and futures

- From youth studies literature, the concept of youth transition provides a conceptual frame for the relation between youth and work.

- However futures of youth are increasingly of extended 'waithood' rather than traditional school-to-work and dependent-to-independent transition.

- In developing the concept of youth as a ‘social shifter’ Durham (2004) argues that invoking youth is political and pragmatic. As a ‘social shifter’, youth shift discourses into the meta-social domain, and places questions about power, agency and moral configurations of society at the centre.

- Youth is thus selected as a focus of this study not only due to high rates of unemployment among the youth age group, but rather as indicative of the meta-social.
The futures of work literature and imagery
Arguments in the global literature

- Davidow and Malone outline three factors that affect the "death of the good job" (2019, p. 88): Structural transformation where people are no longer required to perform a wide range of functions; Substitutional equivalence results in new forms of business replacing older forms. Jobs are lost and not replaced, and downstream/upstream jobs in e.g., service and construction will never be created; and AI tools make it possible to forecast workloads and schedules instantly, increasing task-based part-time work.

- Broadly, literature can be classified as either falling in the ‘it is different this time’ (the autonomous revolution) or the ‘the economy may stabilise and correct’ (capitalism stabilises and power of countervailing forces) category.

- The latter category has a largely economic conception of work.
**Arguments and predictions in the Future of Work literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of change.</th>
<th>Job capture and displacement by autonomous workers (robots and computers). Human-machine cooperation likely temporary before more permanent replacement.</th>
<th>The employment effect of automation is temporary, and the labour market may stabilise in the medium term with new tasks. Growth may offset displacement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling work process at the micro-task level and data-enabled platforms where labour is competing for micro-tasks.</td>
<td>A dismal labour displacement scenario is not inevitable as countervailing forces may cause a reinstatement effect for labour and the growth process is balanced (Acemoglu &amp; Restrepo, 2018).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-monetized productivity increases.</td>
<td>Heterogeneity of tasks and resistance provide a countervailing force.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exponential technology development prevents education from providing solutions.</td>
<td>Technology does not advance independently of human agency, is an exogenous force, and policy and resistance may serve to slow down development. Skills and technology mismatch may slow down technology development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The labour working hours needed for production decreases (Allegri &amp; Foschi, 2020).</td>
<td>State regulation, worker power, and agency of platform workers have the potential to exert influence (Woodcock, 2019).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure time is turned into work time by turning consumers into workers who test, use and consume. In this trend of prosumerism, working consumers perform work traditionally done by employees (Ritzer, 2019; Allegri &amp; Foschi, 2020).</td>
<td>Education will remain important, though there are concerns over the relevance of the formal education system and qualifications (Wilson, 2013)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future of work prediction</th>
<th>Permanent technological unemployment.</th>
<th>A dismal displacement scenario is not inevitable.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour market polarisation; hollowing out the middle class/mid-wage occupations; the Amazon effect.</td>
<td>Gig work trajectory is not inevitable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The future trend is towards monotonous, weary and underpaid gig work in a digitising economy.</td>
<td>Polarisation may reverse.</td>
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<tr>
<td>More continuity than rupture can be expected (Wilson, 2013).</td>
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## It’s different this time (the autonomous revolution)

The economy may stabilise and correct. Power of countervailing forces.

### Changes in the value of work

- Work will seek out new spheres to colonise, commodify and monetize in a digital and data-driven economy, leading to new frontiers of work. (Granter, 2008).
- Changes challenge the protestant work ethic and the value dichotomy between idleness and work (Allegri & Foschi, 2020).
- The socio-cultural value of work will simultaneously wax and wane among the different sectors of the population (Granter, 2008).

### Policy proposals and alternative visions

| Universal Basic Income, an unconditional periodic transfer of money to every individual. (Bruun & Duka, 2018; Allegri & Foschi, 2020; Gorz, 1999). |
| Government programmes and direct subsidies (Davidow & Malone, 2019; Gorz, 1999). |
| Use freed up time to perform socially useful work that today has no monetary value. (Davidow & Malone, 2019; Gorz, 1999). |
| Build infrastructure for a transforming society (Davidow & Malone, 2019). |
| Non- or post-capitalist visions and de-commodification of employment, such as green or eco visions (Williams, 2008a) |

| Reducing the cost of labour in the least complex tasks may discourage automation and generate self-correcting forces as a medium-term measure (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2016). |
| Ease the scope for capital accumulation (Peetz & Murray). |
| Basic skills, lifelong learning; ICT/Digital, self-directed learning, cultural diversity; addressing social exclusion and inequality. |
| Policy focus on easing school-to-work, and work-to-work transitions. |
| Convert information into useful intelligence to guide institutions and individuals. (Wilson, 2013) |
Arguments in the African and SA literature

- Choi et al. (2019) focus on the current state and potential of digital skills infrastructure and technology, the human capital needs of the young workforce, the ongoing need for social protection and the prevalence of informal economies. Overall, the report argues that lower-skilled workers could benefit from digital technology adoption as the anticipated displacement effect is low in a region proceeding from a low base.

- Cilliers (2021) notes the tension between employment-intensive and productivity-intensive growth in the face of technology development but argues that widespread automation substitution risk is lower due to the less formal structure of employment on the continent.

- “Only if one views employment in Africa through the lens of self-employment (much of which occurs within the informal sector), digitisation and the fourth industrial revolution, does it become possible to think differently about the future of work in Africa.” (2021, p. 216).

- Del Sol and Joyce (2020): Study of occupation- and task-level assessment of automation and displacement risk in 10 countries show higher than anticipated automation risk. Automation risk in developing countries is comparably higher than in OECD countries
## SA Future of work scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors/Publishers</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Economic and Labour Advisory Council and Institute for Futures Research (2019)</strong></td>
<td>Futures of work in South Africa (2030)</td>
<td>Four scenarios were generated as part of a research and participatory process and they reflect assumptions about how futures of work may unfold in South Africa. The scenario axis centre on skills development in the population and social values. Four scenarios were developed: Demand and control; Accomplished game-changers; Missing the mark (for now); and A dead-end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South African Board for People Practices (2016)</strong></td>
<td>People and Work – How will the South African Labour Market Change over the next 14 years? (2030)</td>
<td>Four scenarios were generated as part of a research and workshop process with members of the SABPP. The scenario axes centre on employers’ and employees’ technology adoption attitudes and practices; and the extent of social compacting between government, labour and private sector. The four scenarios were Lone wolf; Pride of Lions; Blind Sheep; and Squabbling vultures.</td>
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<td><strong>Matschke (2020) PhD Study</strong></td>
<td>Youth Employment Scenarios for South Africa in 2035</td>
<td>This PhD study follows an interdisciplinary approach combining anthropology, economics, and systems theory. “Number of available jobs” is set as the driver with the highest impact and “perceived inclusion” as the more uncertain driver, and four scenarios are generated around these. Four scenarios are named after the four seasons: Scenario 1, the South African Spring; Scenario 2, Summer, lets bright sunlight shine on the youth employment situation; Scenario 3, the Fall, reflects on the fall of the economy and a reduction of jobs, but also the fall of red tape and inequality; and Scenario 4, the Winter, is a season of despair. The narratives draw on anthropological fieldwork.</td>
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Drivers of the futures of work and youth in South Africa

- Environmental scan conducted to identify trends, events, trend-breaks, weak and strong signals of change.

- Environmental Scanning (ES) is a process of knowledge creation, through seeing, perceiving and making sense of information to create a holistic meaning structure.

- As a methodology, ES is a process of acquiring and using information about the external and internal context of a given field to discern the signs and drivers of change.

- Zaidi (2020) warns that trends are by nature a reflection of the past. They may simplify and compartmentalise data, encourage extrapolation, may emphasize noise over knowledge and are not all equal.

- Zaidi recommends focusing on the trends that “significantly impact what is means to be human, how we relate to each other and whether or not we survive to the next century” (2020, p. 96).
Drivers of the futures of work and youth in South Africa

• **Artificial intelligence** (encompassing connectivity, data, automation, smart technologies, algorithmic organisation of work).

• **Climate transition:** Global temperature increases exceeding 1.5 degrees/2 degrees, climate related transformation of ecological, energy, industrial, urban and settlements systems.

• **The socio-economic and health status** of an urban(ising) youth population.

• Politics: **Organisation, ideology and activism/power** across the main forms of political organisation: political parties; worker organisations; and social movements – as well as capital and state power.
Images of the future

• “Society is at once pulled forward by its own magnetic images of an idealised future and pushed from behind by its realised past” (Polak, 1973, p. 1).

• Causal Layered Analysis: Litany; System & structure; Worldviews; Myth & metaphor.

• Discourse analysis or official policy material; political party material on economic development; policy documentation from the four largest trade union federations.
Future images

- ‘Work and security’ for all.
- The future is carried from the past in the form of hope and a promise not yet fulfilled.
- A rallying call and mobilising tool.
Future images

• ‘The future delivered’

• The future as a ‘better’ version of the present.

• Government has ‘delivered’ effective services, extreme poverty and inequality has been addressed through programmes and projects, and society has been ‘transformed’ through implementation of policy measures.

• Technology driven growth and maintenance of the power status quo.

• In this image, South Africa plays catch-up with the used futures of others.
Future images

- Decolonisation.
- Just transition.
- Re-learning and reinterpreting history and tradition to create a new future.
- Afro-optimism is noticeable, agency and the responsibility for own and others’ future is palpable in the proliferation of community organisations and initiatives.
- In these images, the future is different because it must be, and it is yet to be defined.
- Work is visible as acts of community building, as acts of self-realisation.
Scenarios

• “Scenarios [are] not forecasts but images of the possible that critique the present, that make it remarkable, thus allowing other futures to emerge” (Inayatullah, 2004).

• In the scenario method used in this study, scenarios emerge from different world views and future images.

• Scenarios are narratives created based on the images, world views and intersections of the four drivers of the future of work.
Three possible futures of work

• Work and security redefined
• Senzeni na?
• Decolonise! Decarbonise!
Work and security redefined

• “Now, in 2054, it looked very different. There are few who still think of work in the form of a job that someone pays you to do. For most young people in their group and generation work was constant and part of every activity. In their discussion they now agree that work takes two main forms: payment for the data traces they leave and the work that is embedded in their activities in the metaverse; and then the work they do in their community and the eco-warrior group they are part of. They receive a basic amount of credits every month to use for necessities, though they never know exactly how much, as it is dependent on rationing for example for water, the season, the tax contributions they made on their activities in the previous month, as well as their community service work, waste management habits, consumption patterns, transport use and so on.”
Senzeni na?

• “It is a mass funeral of 35 people, with ministers preaching and asking “Senzeni Na?” (What have we done? / What did we do to deserve this?) while mourners are humming the refrain of a song. Sung at funerals, vigils, and peaceful protest for over a hundred years, this song has now taken on a new meaning and the Boers are replaced with the forces of the weather, the police or other forces threatening people’s lives and freedom. Politicians are hogging the podium and insurance company men and women in grey suits speak platitudes about their latest weather surveillance technology. No one listens, the crowd is agitated and heckles the speakers”

• “The post-work age was supposed to be one of freedom and liberation from want and need, but the basic grants provided from the government are just too small and come at a very heavy price as you submit to a total surveillance regime, there is no freedom of choice, and the algorithm prescribes for you how to use the credits. The government claims that it is ‘data driven’, but the lobby groups have fought for years for the distributive algorithm to be made public and be open for debate.”
Decolonise! Decarbonise!

• “It is 2050, and Jabu is 20 and Zaza 25 years old. Zaza joined the co-op a few years ago and Jabu grew up in the co-ops. His parents were pioneers of the coop movement in the 2030s. They were inspired by the post-colonial thinking of Ujamaa and reinterpreted it in the context of their time. Their parents were of the generation who fought for free education, decolonisation of education and for what they then believed to be economic freedom. In the 2020s the call for decolonisation moved from the education sector to society as a whole and gained traction. New forms of political mobilisation took root in the late 2020s and visions and plans were re-drawn as young people replaced the struggle generation, the transition generation and even the born-free generation who refused to renew themselves. The power balance shifted, economic freedom became more than a codeword for pillaging the public purse and structural reforms took place. “
Conclusion

• The literature on futures of work thus tends to be centred on the segments of the workforce that are already working or are participating in formal education. However, in South Africa, two thirds of young people are not working, and many may never find formal employment.

• By using critical futures methods and proceeding from a broader understanding of work, this study expanded the future of work to include those that are not working and locate futures of work in futures of social organisation.

• The drivers of futures of work identified extend beyond the focus on technology, education and skills that prevail in the South African, and global, literature.

• This study shows how policy choices made on energy transition and decarbonisation may impact futures of youth and work.

• Drawing on Gorz (1999) and Zahidi (2020), the study focused on the work that may need to be done in future from a meta-social perspective. By taking this perspective, work is not understood as jobs to be created or delivered, but as social activity ‘beyond the wage relation’. The study explored what work may need to be done in a future South Africa, particularly in terms of ecological reconstruction, circular economies, and learning and knowledge practice.

• This exploration opens up possibilities to re-think the future, and thus the present, of youth and work.
Thank you

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References

Image references

Slide 18

South Africa’s Trade Union Federation to Split | Council on Foreign Relations (cfr.org)

SAHA - South African History Archive - THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS AFRICA MAYIBUYE THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN

Slide 19

South Africa’s new mega smart city – Here is what it will look like (mybroadband.co.za)

Call for SRD grant to be extended as last official paym... (dailymaverick.co.za)

The National Development Plan: a vision for 2030 | Brand South Africa

Slide 20

Pick your protest: SA climate action gets personal (dailymaverick.co.za)


Ndumiso Nyoni - Afro-Futuristic Big 5
Optional slides
## Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research objective</th>
<th>CLA Layer</th>
<th>Research method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall objective: exploring alternative futures for youth and work towards 2050 in South Africa through a multi-layered analysis.</td>
<td>All layers</td>
<td>Literature review&lt;br&gt;Environmental scanning&lt;br&gt;CLA&lt;br&gt;Scenario development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary objective: Identify and critically analyse the drivers of change for futures of work for young people in South Africa.</td>
<td>Litany&lt;br&gt;Social Causes</td>
<td>Environmental scanning&lt;br&gt;Emerging issues analysis&lt;br&gt;Cross functional analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary objective: Identify and critically analyse the prevailing images of future of work and youth in South Africa.</td>
<td>Litany&lt;br&gt;Social Causes&lt;br&gt;Structure, discourse and worldview&lt;br&gt;Metaphor and myth</td>
<td>Textual analysis / Discourse analysis&lt;br&gt;Futures workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary objective: Develop alternative scenarios for futures of youth and work in South Africa to 2050.</td>
<td>Reframing of all layers</td>
<td>Futures workshop&lt;br&gt;Scenario development</td>
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