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Futurists and Futurizens

By Michael Lee

As I futurist, I'm in love with the future but you don't have to be qualified in the discipline of futures studies to be a citizen of the future.

I enjoy meeting people who dream of, and think a lot about, the future. Conversations about the future with them are one of the most rewarding and fascinating aspects of the life of a futurist.

And these naturally proactive people happen to be even more important to the future than futurists, not just because they are destined to outnumber us by a massive margin but because they often have influence in spheres of life where they can, and do, make a difference to shaping change in the real world.

This growing army of prescient, future-facing, forward-looking people deserve a name. I see them as futurizens (fu-turi-zens)¹ or citizens of the future. They're individuals who are future thinkers without having been formally trained in what leading scenario strategist Clem Sunter calls the art and science of prediction.

A prime example of a high-profile futurizen is Dr Buzz Aldrin, the great astronaut who walked with Neil Armstrong on the moon but who is much more interested in the future of space exploration than he is in his own historic achievement of 1969. In the foreword to Buzz's latest book *Mission to Mars*, his son Andrew writes, "Over the 40 years of conversations about space, I really can't remember a single time that my dad talked to me about his trip to the moon. Sure, there were brief words here and there, but the conversation was always about the future. He cares about where we are going as a civilization, not where we have been."²

¹ The European Commission has a project about the digital agenda for Europe called the Futurium in which they speak of their Futurizen community. The aim of the project is to enable a collective inquiry into people's ideas and aspirations in order to feed future policy reflections in the context of EU policy renewal. They define Futurium as an e-participation platform to engage citizens to reflect on future policies and to co-create visions to support them. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/futurium/en>

² Aldrin, B. 2013. *Mission to Mars: My Vision for Space Exploration*, p.xiii.

This burning focus on the future, and in wanting to make the world a better place, is the essence of the futurizen's attitude to time. Al Gore has just written a highly illuminating book called *The Future* – he, too, is a leading futurizen. But in every political party, and in every organization, and probably in most families, there are individuals who care deeply and think extensively about our common future.

Can we develop a framework for making the most of the relationship between futurists and these futurizens? What is the potential role of futurizens in disseminating knowledge about the future?

Primarily, they can act as a bridge between futurists and citizens.

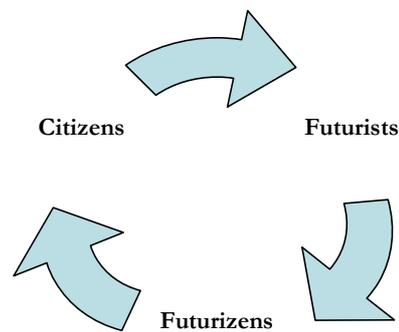


Figure 1: Futurizens bridge the gap between futurists and citizens

Secondly, futurizens can be important agents of change. We can cultivate, in a formalized system, the concept of champions of the future both in the marketplace and in the community. But in order for futurizens to be well-informed champions of the future, we need to open up and extend the channels for communicating and networking with them, through workshops, book clubs and book signings, conferences, lectures, webinars, blogs, etc.

From our side, we need to communicate with them through these channels in real-world, layman's language, not in highly speculative, jargon-infested terminology they don't really understand.

The first step, though, is to acknowledge their existence, and the role they play, with a name.

Then the nature of our relationship with these thoughtful, forward-looking individuals should be fully articulated. After that, a protocol for communication between futurists and futurizens could be established which would stimulate growth in the population size of futurizens while equipping them to be well-informed advocates for futures thinking in multiple real-world contexts.

The future doesn't belong to futurists any more than the physical world belongs to physicists, or the stars to astronomers; rather, the future belongs to futurizens.

Acknowledgements & websites

Aldrin, B. 2013. *Mission to Mars: My Vision for Space Exploration*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic.

Gore, A. 2013. *The Future*. New York: Random House Publishing Group.
<http://www.algore.com>

The Futurium <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/futurium/en>