

Andreas M. Krafft

Our Hopes, Our Future

Insights from the Hope Barometer

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Preface

Since 2009, we have been investigating the wishes and hopes of the population in various countries of the world with the annual Hope Barometer survey. Starting from Switzerland, the survey is being carried out in cooperation with universities in Australia, France, India, Israel, Italy, Colombia, Malta, Nigeria, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Spain and South Africa. The approximately 10,000 people from different age and professional groups who participate annually have provided valuable basic data in recent years to gain a deeper insight into what and how people hope in everyday life and enrich their lives. The focus is not on fear and worry, but on the desire and hope for a good and fulfilling future. Many results have already been presented and published in several scientific forums.

When we asked people in November 2019 about their expectations regarding long-term trends and future scenarios, we did not suspect that the mostly gloomy predictions would become partly painful reality in just a few months. The world has not been the same since the beginning of 2020 due to the Corona pandemic. The results from the November 2020 survey, which reports how people coped with the ensuing stressful situations and mastered them successfully, were all the more exciting. While in the first ten years of the Hope Barometer our research results provided basic insights for a better understanding of the phenomenon of hope, the years 2020 and 2021 revealed the urgency and relevance of hope in times of crisis full of uncertainty and profound changes. In many public interviews and lectures, we were able to share the knowledge of our ten-year work with people and, thanks to this, convey courage and a hopeful view of the future. The positive

feedback from all over the world has shown how great the yearning for the constructive power of hope is.

The universal and existential value of hope can be best explored when we make use of various scientific disciplines. In this book, the empirical results of the Hope Barometer are integrated with the individual psychological approaches of Positive Psychology, the social science focus of future research, and the humanities findings of pragmatic philosophy. The key message of the book is not “in the end, everything will be fine”, but “no matter what the future brings, we can always improve”. Hope is not just putting on rose-colored glasses. Hope means that we can and should wish for a better future for each of us, for our families and for the world as a whole, and that despite or precisely in times of crisis and catastrophe, we can engage with others and do a lot of good together so that our lives will be more beautiful and worth living.

I would like to thank all the long-standing members of the international research network of the Hope Barometer for their wonderful and meaningful cooperation and for the empirical data that serve as the basis for this book: Prof. Dr. Alena Slezackova in the Czech Republic, Prof. Dr. Tharina Guse in South Africa, Prof. Dr. Charles Martin-Krumm and Prof. Dr. Fabien Fenouillet in France, Prof. Dr. Elzbieta Kasprzak and Dr. Patryk Stecz in Poland, Dr. Dorit Redlich-Amirav in Israel, Prof. Dr. Carmel Cefai in Malta, Prof. Dr. Maria Valle Flores-Lucas in Spain, Prof. Dr. Helena Águeda Marujo in Portugal, Bertram Strolz in Austria, Prof. Dr. Rajneesh Choubisa and Dr. Chitra Nair in India, Dr. Mark Sinclair in Australia, Prof. Dr. Stella Conte in Italy, Prof. Dr. Eduardo Wills Herrera in Colombia and Dr. JohnBosco Chika Chukwuorji in Nigeria.

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1

Introduction

The results of the Hope Barometer for the years 2019 and 2020 sketch a rather dark future full of crises and show the psychological consequences of such scenarios. If we as individuals and as a society are to flourish, we need images of a hopeful world that will promote our commitment and cohesion. But what does it take to ignite the flame of hope for a livable future together without a naive optimism trivializing and playing down the current problems? Hope contains the belief in a better world but also the recognition of obstacles and the motivation to act. This book presents the phenomenon of hope in connection with individual psychological findings and socially relevant developments. After the psychological basics of future thinking, the general expectations and wishes for the future of around 10,000 people from fourteen countries are presented. The experiences of the Corona pandemic give hope because they show how people can deal successfully with crises. This results in the importance and character of individual and social hope.

1.1 Looking into the Future

Almost every day the media report on some crisis or catastrophe. In addition to the worldwide Corona pandemic, which determined most areas of our lives in 2020 and 2021, reports of natural disasters, ecological disasters and social and human tragedies are increasing. But in times of crisis, new forms of hope and confidence also arise. People show solidarity with the victims, artists encourage the population, and communities engage in new relief and development initiatives.

Since 2009, we have been investigating the future expectations and hopes of the population with the annual Hope Barometer. In the years 2019 and 2020, around 10,000 people from fourteen countries on various continents

took part in this study. A key result of the barometer is the finding that, on the one hand, the majority of people look hopefully into the future for their private lives, but on the other hand, they are mostly pessimistic about social development (Krafft & Walker, 2018).

Most future studies show that the expectations of the population, i.e. what most people consider likely in the future, differ almost diametrically from their ideals and hopes. The coming decades will be seen as an age of crises and problems rather than one of peace and prosperity, especially in the rich countries of Europe. It looks quite different when young people in particular sketch their visions and hopes for desired future images. In the dreams of most young people, the individual, competition and material well-being are less emphasized than community, family, cohesion and environment.

Most people recognize to a large extent what is not going well in the world, be it in the economy, in global politics or in social and ecological areas. Unlike in previous epochs, however, there is currently no common vision of a desired future. Against the background of manifold economic, technological, social and ecological trends, many people complain of a lack of positive future images that could convey hope and enthusiasm.

These findings can be related to the thesis of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1985), who already diagnosed an “exhaustion of utopian energies“, i.e. the end of great social visions, in the 1980s. Milan Simecka (1984, p. 175) once said: “A world without utopias would be a world without social hope – a world of resignation to the status quo“. This would be a world without ideals and without positive future designs. According to Viktor Frankl (1979), cynicism, conformism and totalitarianism (e.g. in the form of nationalism), phenomena that can already be observed in some places today, are the greatest enemies of hope (Halpin, 2002).

How people look to the future, whether with hope, fear or indifference, will influence the way they think and act in the here and now. We cannot change the past, but we have a shared interest in creating a livable and sustainable future. There is therefore a need, especially in today’s time, to develop positive images of the future so that especially young people can think about the world in which they would like to live in the future. If they do not let themselves be infected by the negative reports in the media and the bad mood in their environment, people are quite capable of imagining a better future. This requires not only cognitive abilities, but also people’s feelings, values, attitudes, wishes, hopes and dreams.

1.2 The Value of Hope

Barbara Fredrickson (2013) has placed the function and significance of positive emotions in an evolutionary context. Just as negative emotions like fear and worry were necessary for human survival, positive emotions like hope, confidence and joy are the foundation for the actual development and progress of humanity. While fear and worry narrow our perception, positive emotions expand our thinking to new possibilities.

A positive attitude can help us manage difficult situations in life better. Hope and confidence strengthen us in good times and make us more resilient in bad times. Hope can foster development of a certain calmness in difficult moments. We can distance ourselves from the problems, see the bigger picture, and possibly also find something good in a difficult situation. Hope expands our ways of thinking and observation, and builds positive resources for managing negative situations.

Hope gives the view of everyday life new perspectives and new horizons. Because we also look at the good side of things and do not remain negative, new impressions and possibilities arise in our consciousness. Thus, thanks to a positive view of the future, people become more creative. New ideas arise, and the attitude towards life itself changes. Previously burdensome problems evolve into challenges, the future opens up new options, and previously unknown solutions come into being.

At the same time, hope promotes personal growth. Positive emotions build us up and expand our perception and consciousness. Self-confidence is strengthened, and we develop an open attitude towards new events and other people. The expansion of consciousness causes us to think not only of ourselves but also of others and to feel connected with a greater whole. When we feel confident, we are friendlier and more helpful, want to do good, and work more intensively with other people.

1.3 Shaping the Future Together

If we let ourselves be guided by the ideas of great philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Ernst Bloch and John Dewey, individual goals can be linked to visions of a good life in a better world, whereby a new and more fundamental hope for happiness and fulfillment can awaken in people. Such a desirable future can at least partially occur if we can imagine it mentally today and shape it step by step together. The hope for a better future can best be defined as a greater social process of hope and planning.

Transforming the world goes hand in hand with changing oneself and every individual, whereby the central importance of human values and virtues is automatically addressed (Hicks, 2003). The goal of this hope is the connection of individual and social “flourishing“, which can be translated as “flourishing” in German and denotes the process of personal and social growth. It is about the development and unfolding of one’s own abilities and potentials in connection with the design of a sustainable and characteristically integral way of life with which the whole world can flourish again. Hope is the opposite of fear and worry as well as of apathy and discouragement because it inspires the belief and trust in the achievability of a flourishing future.

This pragmatic hope consists of a series of habits thanks to which we create new possibilities of working together with others and thus making the world a better place. Such hope gives us the motivation, as West (2009, 217) says, “to continue to fight for more love, more justice, more freedom and more democracy”. In order to promote one’s own as well as the collective well-being, we must take a long-term, global perspective and use our personal strengths and abilities to shape a socially and ecologically sustainable society. This does not always mean that everyone has to trigger a great social revolution. Most of the time it is enough if people make a difference in their immediate environment through their empathetic, caring and helpful behavior.

1.4 Structure of the Book

In this book we offer an approach that starts from the possibilities and abilities of the individual and at the same time takes a global perspective as the field of action. Changes and transformations usually do not happen overnight and require the shoulder-to-shoulder of personal and social resources in a medium- to long-term time dimension. The integration of future-oriented social science, positive psychology and pragmatic philosophy combines individual and social flourishing with a view to the hopes of a desirable world in the context of current and future societal trends and scenarios.

The book is divided into three parts: the psychology of future thinking, coping with crises and shaping the future. Part One begins with an introduction to how people think about the future. The psychology of future thinking has dealt intensively with this question at the individual level. This is followed by a discussion of the design of various future images out of the conviction that we should not only adapt to the future, but that we

can actively and responsibly shape it. Based on the research, we illuminate here the diverse modes of thinking about the future and the importance of expectations, trends, and possible as well as desirable future scenarios. Positive future images are closely linked to people's hopes and are generally an important source of hope.

In this context we refer to humanistic future research, which deals less with technological developments than with people's fears, concerns and hopes as well as their behavior as a social science discipline. In addition, it contributes to positive development by helping to design future images that stimulate value concepts, motivation, critical and creative thinking, imagination, a willingness to change and a sense of responsibility.

This first part of the book presents the international results of the Hope Barometer from November 2019, i.e. a few months before the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. Around 10,000 people in fourteen countries were asked about their expectations, hopes and fears for the future in various areas of society, about long-term trends, about the development of the quality of life, about likely and desirable scenarios, and about their assumptions regarding the world.

Part Two of the book deals with the experiences of another 10,000 people during the pandemic year 2020. The Hope Barometer from November 2020 examines the various coping strategies of people in dealing with experienced stress situations, the central role of hope in successfully overcoming the crisis, and the psychological consequences in the form of stress-related growth. It may seem strange that we are not—like so many other studies—concerned with the negative consequences of the crisis, but rather focus on hope, personal and social resources, and positive effects. The years 2020 and 2021 have put almost everyone to a tough test. The key question is how people in general and society as a whole can deal positively with this crisis on the assumption that we can make a bad situation worse or we can improve the situation, learn from it, change and grow through a constructive attitude and our behavior.

With further results of the Hope Barometer and on the basis of philosophical and psychological findings, Part Three is dedicated to the question of how we together can shape a better future against the backdrop of current and future crises. The essential theoretical foundations for this are the writings of classic philosophers such as Ernst Bloch and Gabriel Marcel, of many contemporary philosophers and psychologists, and of authors such as Victoria McGeer, Richard Rorty and Patrick Shade, who, inspired by forerunners of pragmatic philosophy, above all John Dewey, have carefully examined the phenomenon of hope and shown its worth for a successful life

and a better world. On this basis, we develop a model of hope and present the individual elements and concrete practices for a hopeful life.

As part of a master's lecture on the psychology of hope, students at the University of St. Gallen carried out two exercises in designing positive future images, the essential focus of which is presented in Part Three in anonymous and summarized form in order to explain the conceptual basis. On the one hand, the 28 students aged 22 to 41 designed a portrait of their "Best Possible Self" based on their personal preferences and interests. On the other hand, they designed and described individual images of the best possible future world from their point of view. The two exercises are effective interventions for a positive attitude to life and a valuable basis for personal commitment. It is possible to imagine concretely what makes life worth living and what paths can lead to a good life. These images reveal the ideals, values and dreams of young adults. In addition, the essential experiences and reflections on the effect of the two future exercises are evaluated, and valuable insights and conclusions are drawn from them.

The book ends with practical hints for developing positive habits for designing a hopeful life in community with others. The practical value of hope is not only connected to a distant future, but manifests itself in everyday life as we live here and now. Positive habits of hope are based on virtues and strengths such as creativity, openness to new things, commitment, perseverance, patience, humility, trust, determination, willpower, courage, solidarity, helpfulness and a belief in good. If these strengths become habits, they form the basis for a hopeful character and a hopeful society. Crises are also a good opportunity for us to cultivate and further develop these habits.

Part I

Images of the Future