Ignorance and politically correct worst case scenarios of sociopolitical phenomena

The presentation is a draft of a broader project and of publication(s)

Quotations after the consent of the author
Assumptions

1. Prediction (scenario making) is a cognitive individual and collective (intersubjective) process – reflections and discourse about the future

2. The constructivist approach is most relevant theoretical approach social studies in the era of information overload

3. All kinds of impact upon the prediction (scenario making) process should be taken into account, from cognitive to political

4. The discourse about the future must include both qualitative and formal narratives

5. Mathematics is treated as a language and not as a reflection of the “essence of being”
The aim of the paper is to present the conditions how variously defined sociopolitical constraints force the actors involved in making predictions (scenarios) to avoid elaboration and publication of the scenarios unacceptable according to those constraints.
According to Kahn and his colleagues, scenarios are “attempts to describe in some detail a hypothetical sequence of events that could lead plausibly to the situation envisaged”

Peter Schwartz defines scenarios as “stories about the way the world might turn out tomorrow, stories that can help us recognize and adapt to changing aspects of our present environment”

Scenario-building - a means by which people can articulate different futures with trends, uncertainties, and rules over a certain amount of time. Showing all plausible and possible stories and clarifying important trends, scenario thinking enables decision makers to make an important decision at the present time (Dong-ho Han 2011)

Scenario planning – a specific methodology in management (van der Heijden – Scenarios…2005)
Worst case scenario

Usually applied in risk analysis. Scenario in which the most severe consequences for a given unit are included. Its character is usually independent from probability of its occurrence.

Worst case scenario by definition has a normative character.

Worst case scenarios are applied in policy-oriented areas (management, security, finance, banking), engineering, environmental studies.

Political correctness - a classical, dominant definition

The term political correctness in modern usage, is applied to describe language, policies, or measures that are intended to avoid offense or disadvantage to members of particular groups in society.

In political discourse and in the media, the term is sometimes used as a pejorative, implying that these policies are excessive.
Political correctness - an extended definition

In an extended sense, the term political correctness is used to describe language, policies, or measures which impose limitations upon cognition and behaviour of groups and individual members of society.

The limitations are imposed in formal and informal ways by dominant ideology, opinions and behaviour of superior policy makers as well as peer individuals and groups. The suppression may be complete or partial.

Political correctness - an extended definition, cont’d

The limitations may influence the actors in a conscious and in an unconscious way. They affect all stages of human cognition and behaviour. The limitations can be also consciously and unconsciously self-imposed since they are embedded in the mindset of the actors involved.
A preliminary decomposition (hermeneutic approach) to political correctness - an extended definition

Political – deriving from an existing power system in which the scenario-makers are embedded

Correct – a normative approach. The meaning of norms is promulgated and imposed. It can be negotiated but under the conditions of a stronger bargaining position by a dominating political structure (mechanism of the domination and of its roots – beyond these considerations).

Correctness – in a normative sense may refer to norms taken from ethics, rationality, pragmatism (utility). They are treated as arbitrary or are imposed in the processes of persuasion and negotiating in the intersubjective meaning creation.
A preliminary decomposition (hermeneutic approach) to worst case scenario

Worst case – a normative sense associated with changes in the environment leading to negative behaviour of a system (unit) under scrutiny and necessity to undertake activities preventing, eliminating, insulating. Norms applied as a reference also are socially constructed.

Process of development of scenarios

1. Presentation of the issue (formulation of the problem) – internal decision making (selection) and communications
2. Discussion – a collective communicaton and decision making (groups and larger collectivities)
3. Final discussion and decision making
4. Publication (internal, public)
5. Development of policy measures and implementation
Normative sources of suppression (relevant to all stages)

1. Conscious and unconscious
2. Imposed directly or indirectly (dyadic interactions, collective behaviour)
3. Collective behaviour – formal norms, awareness of group thinking, unaware collective thinking, epistemic communities
4. Limitations imposed upon collective thinking and collective behaviour

Types of norms applied in suppression of specific scenarios

1. Claims for observance of ethical norms
2. Norms aiming at prevention negative course of events predicted in scenarios
3. Efficiency-oriented norms

The above norms are applied in all the above stages of scenario-making proces (imposed structured methodologies and in the learning processes)
Specific norms influencing publication of scenarios

- ethical norms
- negative practical consequences, especially possibility of “self-fulfilling prophecies” (also self-defeating prophecy and self-refuting ideas)
- special interests of the authors of scenarios and of the others affected directly and indirectly by publication of scenarios

The main question – creation, application and emergence of norms of suppression of specific scenarios (prediction)

1. Spontaneity of norms - emergence
2. Proponents and imposers of restrictive norms – conscious and unconscious of their consequences
3. Level of knowledge of proponents/imposers of restrictive norms (level of awareness of the consequences of imposition (suppression))
Meta-prediction – definition

Meta-prediction – suppression (elimination) of predictions (elements of scenarios) according to the set of specific norms

Meta-prediction – topics left for further considerations

1. Mechanisms of creation of norms of suppression – emergence, conscious selection
2. Superposition of both mechanisms
3. Methods of application – imposition
4. Sources of „superior knowledge” („better knowledge”) stimulating suppression (I/we know better)
5. Patterns of selection of norms (meta-norms)
Meta-prediction – consequences of applications of norms of restriction

1. The names for „meta-knowledge” - „superior knowledge”, „better knowledge” have to be elaborated. Herein „meta-knowledge” is proposed (temporarily)
2. Hidden assumption of knowledge of consequences of elimination of alternatives – „I/we know better”
3. Knowledge of consequences of application of „meta-knowledge” in predictions/scenarios

Meta-prediction – a clarifying example

Individual set of alternatives (scenarios)

Internal conscious and unconscious filtering

Initial set of proposed alternatives (scenarios)

Filtering of alternatives according to the meta-knowledge („negative worst-case scenarios”)

Elaboration of final alternatives (scenarios)

Filtering of alternatives according to the meta-knowledge („negative worst-case scenarios”)

Publication of alternatives (scenarios)
Filtering as meta-prediction

1. Meta-prediction - functionally similar as prediction at the "lower levels"

2. Theoretically – similar proces of elaboration as at the "lower levels"

3. Discrepancy – unknown proces of elaboration of meta-predictions

4. Meta-prediction – possibility of additional multiple-levels

Sources of meta-prediction

1. Classical proces of prediction but at a meta-level

2. Information from predictions of superior effectiveness

3. Information from the long term predictions

4. Ignorance of the proponents

5. Political position of the proponents
Meta-prediction and ignorance

1. Classical challenges of ignorance in prediction – absence of information about the future (uncertainty) as the key barrier in prediction at the first level and at other, higher levels of prediction

2. Justified meta-prediction – a result of unbiased, well-grounded methodology

3. Meta-prediction deriving from „meta-ignorance” and solely from the political position of the proponents

Conclusions & directions for further research

1. Proposed ideas – an introduction of the study of meta-prediction and (meta) ignorance

2. In all cases of suppression of worst-case scenarios (or of any kind of normative scenarios), a deepened analysis of processes of meta-prediction should be analysed

3. Meta-prediction and meta-ignorance as the field of future studies
Conclusions & directions for further research, cont’d

1. Result – „justified politically correct worst case scenarios”
2. Result – rejection of any kind of approach „I/we know better” what should be the „politically correct” scenarios
3. Multi-level analysis of knowledge and ignorance
4. Result already achieved – two levels of knowledge and two levels of ignorance are sufficient
5. Second-level ignorance – absence of knowledge of ideas and methods

Thank you for your attention!
Kiitokset mielenkiinnostanne!
Dziękuję za uwagę!