

## Interview on Futures of Work with Mara di Berardo

Communications Director of the Millennium Project  
Co-Chair of the Italian Node of the Millennium Project



by  
**Sirkka Heinonen**

Professor Emerita  
T-Winning Spaces 2035 project  
Chair of the Helsinki Node of the Millennium Project  
Finland Futures Research Centre, University of Turku



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## Interview On Futures of Work

with **Mara di Berardo**, Communications Director at the Millennium Project

by **Sirkka Heinonen**, Professor Emerita at Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC), University of Turku and Chair of the Helsinki Node of the Millennium Project for the /T-winning Spaces 2035 Project

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Q: We are here in Italy, Bologna, in a co-working space Luogo Comune with Mara di Berardo, who is chair of the Italian node of the Millennium Project. Welcome to this interview and thanks for the opportunity to be here. For the T-Winning Spaces project I would like to ask you some questions concerning futures of work. What do you consider as the **most important skills in the future of work**?

A: Well, many people are wondering about skills that are needed to improve our perspectives for the futures, especially in period in which unemployment is increasing. If you ask a futurist, you usually say **futures thinking and futures literacy**, because this type of composed skills allow us to widen our perspective to face the increasing speed of change to evaluate alternative futures to anticipate with desire among what is possible, so it is really improving skill for people. But I don't think this is sufficient, I mean this is important there are many courses, high-level courses, also programmes for school and children, but I would that is something else like what are called **sub-skills, mental skills that improve the way you feel and react to things**. Also, your **intelligence in approaching things**, intelligence considering different shadows, like artificial intelligence, collective intelligence and so forth.

There are many people talking about such skills as **creativity and critical thinking**. Critical thinking and creativity are two of the most important ones, in my opinion.

We have been talking earlier about how this setting (Luogo Comune) in Bologna is a place for creativity. This is happening when you are allowed to freely express your creativity and you also teach how to do that. This is because sometimes it is sort of repressed, the process of learning a profession. But if you are allowed to be creative you are experiencing the stuff in new ways, you understand the reality in a different way. And also what can come - you also invent new things. Or you **improve your synergetic thinking**, using components in different ways. I think creativity is really important and often underestimated.

Q: Exactly, and I am glad you mentioned creativity, because it is fertile soil for innovations and new things as you mentioned. Then, let's talk about some **risks that are involved when we are creating or when somebody is creating digital work spaces**. What kind of risks do you see there? Because we see all the potential and promises but there are always some risks.

A: I think **risks can be considered differently if related to organizations**. Whether this term still applies in the future, I am not sure. This is another concept to monitor, because the organizations are changing. Or, if you relate them to single individuals, or groups of individuals. If you consider working environment, or if you consider social environment, or both, the connection of both. So, maybe we should consider some security, and everybody talks a lot of it. We know that digital systems are improving. Also, the bad ways to use them and to the ways we live them in many ways. The **protection** is another important thing when you consider digital spaces.

This could be in comparison to structures, but if we talk about individuals or social groups maybe we should consider the lack of skills. It is important to understand these new environments, because we are already moving to them, it is different. It means **different perceptions**, it means to anchor yourself to what is reality and understand this reality. It can be a psychological and sociological problem at the same time. And the same goes for groups. Especially if you think about working and team working. Sometimes remotely working can create your whole team *working* so, you need to address these possibilities.

Q: Exactly, and this kind of synergetic approach to the skills needed is very important, so that you don't ignore something that is exactly very important.

A: At the same time you **should not focus on cybersecurity** and other protection and productivity evaluation through the digital system, forgetting the **social and psychological side**. So, a **balance is needed**, it is always needed.

Q: Exactly, then I would like to move on, because we are also interested in what kind of crises there are, some risks may grow in to a crisis. But there is one category of crisis that is very interesting, it is called **creeping crisis**. It is a crisis that is already here in society, we don't see it, or we neglect it, we don't pay attention. Do you see any such creeping crisis that is related to the future or work or in society in general? Can you mention a creeping crisis?

A: Well, I would talk about **stolen focus and time**, because there are results of a system analysis concerning this. We had a related discussion in the World Futures Day in 2022. I cannot tell you the names of the participants. But we had this big discussion about how we are **more and more aware of the way technology improves our life, but we are not so much aware of how they change our approach to life** (see di Berardo et al. 2023). We talk about stolen focus and time that is in my opinion very important thing to consider and to address. We have this technology saving our time, but at the same time they destroy our schedule, we do not have the power to define our schedule anymore.

Q: Exactly, we somehow become prisoners of technology.

A: Yes, and time, at the same time, we do not have time anymore, we do not have focus anymore, we forget things, because we have technology helping us to remember things. At the same time it gives us

input to process 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If we have to “pause” somehow at the same time we would have to change something in our life. We should address it.

Q: That perspective is very important, because the demands for being effective, can require more and more results in a very short period of time and it is making us lose the focus.

A: **We do not have time anymore.**

Q: That brings to my mind that there is movement, slow life and slow food, that originated in Italy actually. We should need balance there as well.

A: But I do not know if this is enough anyway, because we can have sort of a slow-down, but it should be agreed collectively. A kind of a procedural way could be defined by experts, sociologists, psychologists and so forth. Otherwise it is just me, I am plugging/lagging when the world keeps going on. When I replug myself, I need to update and it is even more stressful. **Digital stress** can be very difficult to address. So, we **should find the way to balance the speed of life**, because speed is increasing. Change is increasing and so forth. At the same time, we need to reason on what we do, because we do not take our time to process things anymore. That is why we are forgetting, and that is why we are losing our way even to imagine things. This is because **for the imagination to be, to push and to increase, you have to take your time.**

Q: Exactly, that is really serious. Then, I would like to ask you personally, what is your favorite work space? What is your ideal of a work space where you work and feel that your wellbeing and also your motivation is very much in a good place?

A: Now, because nothing is changed, I like to work at home. But I think I still would like to work at home because I can **follow my own time path**. I can define when and where. I can work for 10 hours a day, and 5 hours the next day. I can consider it according to my personal needs, like making a medical visit. You cannot really do that if you lack some social security rights, and any place at work. So, I like to work at home, but at the same time I feel the pressure of digital stress, being connected especially when you work in a worldwide environment, like we do with Millennium project. This is because they keep sending e-mails, and the project keeps pushing messages. However, over the years I have learned to balance and take my time and process things in a right speed. If you are in a rush you do that, if you are not, you can take your time. For instance, maybe you decide not to take a job, because you need to take slower.

I have worked in many different environments, public, privates, offices, and I fear that sometimes in Italy, the workcratic organisation is too...

Q: ...rigid or?

A: It imposes too much. It does not really have the flexibility to understand your way.

Q: I can relate to your feelings. **Flexibility and freedom** seem to be very important elements for work space.

A: And also **autonomy**, you do what you do. And in my case also changing the things I do, because of the [environment]. I need to learn, learning really motivates me.

Q: Yes, it is more inspiring. And to conclude, in our project T-winning Spaces I am also looking for what kind of paradoxes there are at the moment when you think about the concept of work? I used to do that some decades ago, Ten Paradoxes concerning the future of work. I am going to have a relook at them. But now, we are in a new situation with AI, technology and teleworking increasing a lot. What kind of paradox you would like to mention here as a conclusion that you see concerning the future of work?

A: This is one, I have been feeling for a while now, even before pandemics. I think that while people, and the pandemics accelerated this, are going towards **self-actualisation**, they are taking their time, following their path, doing what they like, you know they have been feeling this desire again. The system is not supporting the transition toward that. So, the new generation is showing us that, because they leave jobs, they do not need to work anymore. They do not see the reason, because the **old concept of work does not apply anymore**. At the same time, we have feelings of a **new concept but the system is not defining it yet**. Which means it is not supporting it.

So, we still have the old concept of job where you do that, you work because you need it, you work because you have to – you work because you need wellbeing, you need to assure your old age. But this is not assured anymore, because you are going to have the system changed. You are not going to have the retirement anymore you cannot really count on it. You do not have a job, you cannot really have a job that one job, assuring you your wellbeing. You have to do three jobs to support your family. So, while your **security is changing** in times of work, and you feel that that does not represent you anymore and at the same time you wish to do something nice **you wish to pursue your passion and maybe make your passion become your job**. But you cannot do that.

Q: No, not at the moment.

A: So, this is a paradox. The transition and they see that for the few years coming.

Q: Exactly, there is a gap we have to bridge. This reminds of course us of the, one of the scenarios in the Millennium Project Future of Work/Technology report, self-actualization.

A: **Self-actualization and economy**. Another thing I would report there is that **values are changing**. Somehow, the study Millennium Project showed us that, and one of the suggestions reporting the study is that companies and workers need to create some **different added values, aesthetic, cultural and so forth**. Not only material and economical value.

Q: Exactly, emphasis is moving from material to immaterial.

A: **Values in terms of what you create and what you do**. But values in the societal way. Our bodies are changing. And we are not reasoning on that.

Q: Exactly, that is exactly related to the concept of work as a sense of meaningfulness in your life.

A: Absolutely. Also, in a relation to the global situation. Young people want to do something for our global challenges. They do not see the system doing that. I mean big companies pursue objectives for instance, for the environment and the climate change, just because they have to, because they are pressed to do it...

Q: Not because they want to.

A: Yes, **young people want to do something meaningful, both for them, for their passion, and for the society in general**. This is very important, we should use it very much. And push it and support it somehow.

Q: Exactly, thank you very much Mara di Berardo for this interview.

A: Thank you, it's been very nice.

## References

di Berardo, Mara, di Zio, Simone & Fontanella, Lara (2023). World Futures Day 2022: A mixed method approach to identify topics of a global futures agenda. *Futures*, Volume 154, 2023, 103244