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Foresight Embedding in Malta Foresight Brief No. 8

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Sponsors: EU DG Research STRATA Programme
The Government of Malta

Type: A national foresight exercise based on a series of three pilot projects intended to introduce and systemic, future-oriented processes in RTDI policy development

Organizer: The Policy Unit of the MCST - Malta Council for Science and Technology www.mcst.org.mt

Duration: January 2001 to December 2003 **Budget:** €200,000 **Time Horizon:** 2015-2020

Summary

On the eve of accession to the European Union, Malta like all new members states, experienced considerable pressure for change. This included a drive to adapt RTDI policies for participation in the European Research Area. For a small transition economy with limited resources there was a need to adopt a creative approach to policy development. In the period 2002-2003 foresight was introduced to Malta via three pilot projects conducted by the MCST. These pilot projects played an important role in breaking path-dependencies. They liberated the mind-sets of stakeholders and provided occasion for mutual learning on systemic issues. Foresight is now an integral part of the day-to-day work of the MCST which continues to promote and encourage its application to other policy domains.

The Development of Human Capital in a Small Transition Economy

Context

In a critical phase when Malta was preparing for EU accession, foresight was identified as an important tool to tackle macro and micro level challenges relating to strategic planning for the future. These included:

- Competing in an increasingly global learning economy by strengthening national research and innovation capacity and by introducing more systemic approaches to policy,
- Developing cross-sectoral strategies for the effective use of structural funds for research, technological development and innovation,

- Capturing the spirit of strategic conversations about the future that were already underway.

Overall Objectives

The overall objective of the series of foresight pilots in Malta was to elaborate a vision for Malta as an advanced knowledge economy in 2020 whose main resource would be its ability to develop human capital for a global learning economy from a Mediterranean base.

The pilots were also intended to guide MCST's decision-making in relation to its input for the National Development Plan (2003-2006). Through the foresight process itself, the target was to mobilize public-private sector partnerships to take action on business opportunities. A second aim was to revitalize old networks and to stimulate the formation of new



networks. The aim was to encourage cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral networks, involving new kinds of players such as management and HR consultants, researchers and educators). Since the project was the first experience of the use of foresight in Malta, it also aimed at exploring foresight approaches and the embedding of foresight culture and skills.

Methods

The exercise used the following methods in a stepped approach, with phases evolving in synergy over time:

- Scoping – questionnaire-based surveys and one-to-one interviews
- Stakeholder analysis
- Awareness and Training in Foresight Methods
- Panels
- SWOT and STEEPV analysis
- Driver Analysis
- On-line consultation on visions and mind-mapping of issues
- Scenario-development
- Web-based and Dissemination

Factoring Informal Societal Challenges

An important point of reference for the exercise was a set of formal objectives or challenges to be addressed by the Maltese government as part of the general process of integration with the European Union. These issues arose in dialogue with the European Commission and with EU member states and have been adopted as part of a policy learning process negotiated with the European which were agreed on in consultation with the sponsors, namely the EU Commission and the Government. However in the process, a number of societal challenges emerged which needed to be tackled.

Top-down or formal challenges identified by the Government as sponsor of the exercise include:

- Build capacity for strategy and policy development,
- Develop strategic intelligence,
- Develop cross sectoral synergies,
- Support public-private partnership,
- Re-align existing stakeholder networks,
- Update RTDI policy using a long term perspective,
- Make effective use of structural funds.

Bottom-up challenges that are societal in nature, which are intimately linked to the top-down challenges and important for the eventual impact and success include a need to:

- Give Science, Technology and Innovation a higher profile on the national agenda using an outreach approach,
- Promote a national culture for science and innovation,
- Encourage individual and organizational learning,
- Improve science-society links,
- Adopt a consensual approach to policy that is inclusive on a country wide scale,
- Embed foresight in the overall public policy development process.

Knowledge Community 2020 Vision: A Success Scenario for Foresight Embedding

The first foresight pilot developed a success scenario entitled Knowledge Community 2020 Vision. The orientation of the exercise was to build on the work which had been developed through the National Strategy for Information Technology with a view to taking the vision-building process forward into the emerging realities of the Knowledge Society. The emphasis was on the challenge of identifying the drivers of the transition from the information society to the knowledge society and the related knowledge management and transfer aspects.

The major challenges identified included:

- Ensuring a more holistic and integrated approach to strategic policy-making in ICT and Knowledge Management,
- Embedding foresight in key policy areas for the knowledge-based economy, and
- Allocating appropriate levels of resources to each of the pilot exercises.

Given constraints of critical mass, the exercise focused on the need to target resources to a defined set of niche areas in which Malta possesses existing strength or with areas which demonstrate a potential for developing and test-bedding new ICT applications and approaches. These included tourism, e-health and local knowledge domains linked to crafts, cultural heritage and fisheries.

The Knowledge Community 2020 Vision recommended the setting up of a National Knowledge Platform for facilitating joined-up open governance (considered as a major driver of the Vision). The Knowledge Platform is designed to activate a complementary value-added layer to the current portfolio of information services provided to the community and citizen. The Platform's services and facilities extend beyond information-sharing to knowledge-sharing. The Platform can serve as the main portal for pooling inter-sectoral knowledge, e-learning facilities and knowledge resources, on-line policy discussions and debates and fast-track learning. The convergence of knowledge and open user-access which can be acti-

vated through the National Knowledge Platform initiative forms the basis of the second strategic thrust of the KC 2020 Vision, namely the exploitation of inter and intra-sectoral knowledge futures synergies. Knowledge futures opportunities are opening up at the interface of disciplines and sectors through the synergetic impact of information, communications and knowledge technologies. The focus on cross-thematic clustering and knowledge management are seen as key drivers of this initiative which will aim to identify complementarities between current strategies and initiatives of different Ministries and public and private entities.

The Knowledge Platform provided the basis for more streamlined, joined-up policies developed through a process of open on-line governance and the introduction of integrated resource management. The smart convergence of knowledge and innovation-driven policies, addressing collectively needs and strengths in different sectors, including health, education, culture, tourism, transport, the maritime sector and enterprise, provided the key to value-creating synergies for indigenous development, the third thrust of the Malta Knowledge Community 2020. On a social and cultural level this encouraged greater synergy between the cultural and ICT communities in Malta with a view to bring about more avant-garde and innovative artistic production was identified as another promising

avenue. It was envisaged that this would put Malta at the forefront of the contemporary cultural scene.

Coping with EU Membership

The EU Accession challenge was perceived as presenting Malta with a mix of opportunities and threats. The opportunities related mainly to the economic, political, and military security afforded through membership coupled with improved quality of life; the chance however is seen in the possibility to escape from constraints of a small country and its path-dependencies thereby achieving a faster transition to the knowledge society. The threats focused mainly on negative societal impacts, including possible loss of socio-cultural identity and values, the challenge of coping with an increasingly diverse society, the brain drain, and negative effects on marginalized groups. Other identified threats related to the heavy burden and competing pressures related to compliance with the EU *Acquis Communautaire*, the poor/slow visibility of benefits of membership and the capture by vested interests of the opportunities opened up through membership.

Moving Closer to the Local Players

The exercise represented a creative fusion of innovation and socio-cultural foresight for harnessing the impact for optimum effect. The main challenges in implementing the pilot project series were related to a need to activate and support fast policy learning and unlearning processes, and to bridge the divide between policy-makers and Maltese society by engaging competent new actors and moving towards more consensus-oriented dialogue.

The long-term embedding of foresight skills and policy learning processes is one of the often indirect and unintended effects of foresight exercises. These effects may be taken for granted but they are not usually included by design as a core objective of a foresight exercise. Given the critical need to generate fast track societal learning, a key insight that emerged from the Maltese pilot project series was the utility of designing foresight exercises which target more directly societal and individual learning, assigning this a more central role than that assigned in most foresight initiatives.

Another insight emerging from the exercise is that less-emphasized benefits of foresight are its facility to make transparent policy processes and structures and to bring to the fore key challenges and key individuals or champions to the cause. It also helps to identify hidden obstacles to the introduction of more informed, transparent open and participatory governance

processes as well as barriers that could hinder the 'wiring-up' of the national system of innovation.

A key success criterion of the exercise was the involvement in the panel of new actors beyond the established players, including domain experts (IT, law, media, business, human resources, management, education, communications, social scientists), mainly from university, consultancies and private sector training institutes, together with theatre specialists, students and policy-makers. Efforts were made to record in a detailed way the process of consultation and consensus building and all processes of the foresight pilot from scoping to implementation and evaluation thus satisfying the final success criteria. The foresight approach adopted with the first pilot provided a useful basis for the other two pilots, although these adapted and developed their own approach to design and implementation.. Use of the website and mailing lists to engage strategic players, new actors and external experts in the discussions, has helped to make local players more aware of science, technology and innovation policy concerns. A shared web-based facility (space) for exchanging documents, proposals, ideas, and news has brought important knowledge and opportunities to the attention of local players and continues to be appreciated by the subscribers as a free source for receiving key STI Policy updates

- The results of the exercise were presented to key stakeholders including the Ministry for Information Technology and Investments in May 2003.

- Feedback lead to the refining of the policy recommendations and to the further definition of recommended action lines.
- The results have also been presented to the Office of the Prime Minister's Regional Policy Directorate (responsible for structural funds coordination) and there is specific reference to the role of foresight in RTDI policy development and more specifically the results in the Research and Development section of the Single Programming Document (2004-6).
- There was also reference by the Minister of Finance to eFORESEE and its results in the National Budget Speech 2002 and the updated National RTDI Strategy presented to Cabinet by MCST.
- The exercise has also helped to strengthen MCST's links with a range of players in the innovation system: the Ministry for Education, the Ministry for IT and Investments, the University of Malta, the Malta College for Science, Arts and Technology, Malta Enterprise through their involvement in the panels, as

well as in the briefing, training and dissemination events and strategic consultations.

- It has also lead to the introduction and use of foresight approaches more broadly into MCST's work and activities, particularly in relation to FP6. The strong engagement of the MCST team in national and international foresight activities led to an accumulation of expertise that was subsequently transferred from one activity to another.
- The results are being used as the basis for the new proposals being drawn up by MCST for RTDI under the National Development Plan 2007-13. The findings provide an important input for follow-up foresight activity currently underway in two ERANETs, ForSociety and MarinEra and a new foresight initiative for the Mediterranean, INNFORMED.

Sources and References

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About the EFMN: Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.