



European Foresight Platform

supporting forward looking decision making

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Foresight and Forward-Looking Activities – Exploring New European Perspectives

Summary of Kick-off Event

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European Foresight Platform
The European Commission is providing the means to continue the important networking activities of foresight initiatives. Setting out on the previous work of the European Foresight Monitoring Network and For-Learn the new European Foresight Platform resumes its work.

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Foresight and Forward-Looking Activities - Exploring New European Perspectives

Summary of major findings

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Forward looking approaches aim at building shared visions of the future European challenges and evaluating the impacts of alternative policies. Foresight combines qualitative and participatory methods with quantitative and operational methods such as Forecasting to support better long-term policies - such as those in regard to the European research and innovation policies.

The future role of foresight for European research and innovation policy

In a period of crisis, the demand for anticipation and forward-looking knowledge is increasing. Containing uncertainties and navigating on the newly emerging socio-economic and policy landscape are of paramount importance. The foresight community needs to listen carefully to such changing requirements in order to be able to respond to this demand and deliver insights that are of use to policy-making. However, to take advantage of these insights, also policy-makers need to be responsive by formulating their requirements and developing the absorptive capacities that allow incorporating forward-looking knowledge in decision-making.

Key messages to the policy community

The **need for anticipatory intelligence and structural adaptability** is crucial to pave a way out of a critical situation that is likely to end up with a transformation of the global research and innovation landscape. Anticipation should not be misunderstood in the sense of predicting the future, but as a transparent effort to be prepared for contingencies and wildcards.

At the same time, we can observe a re-focusing of European research and innovation policy “from within”, as reflected in the European Research and Innovation Area concept, in the re-focussing of public policy towards Grand Challenges, and more generally in the new Europe 2020 agenda. These developments are in **need for guidance in processes of structural change**. Foresight-inspired approaches have a large potential to contribute to this by helping to:

- Develop visions that can serve as guidepost in debates, and as orientation for action (e.g. in the context of high-level policy debates in the Parliament and the Council).
- Break down the Grand Challenges into more specific and operational medium-level targets (e.g. in the context of the preparations for FP 8).
- Make policies addressing Grand Challenges more coherent across areas and levels (e.g. in the context of Joint Programming).

For foresight to become effective and useful in this sense, changes in the governance of research and innovation policy are also required. The **capacity to generate and to absorb forward-looking intelligence** needs to be established at all decision levels, from local to European to global. Currently, too much emphasis is still put on drawing lessons from past (which is certainly instructive!) rather than exploring pathways into new territories and the corresponding consequences. This change requires to:

- Establish a new thinking and mentality that is based on strategic anticipation and action.

- Establish forward-looking functions of strategic anticipation closer to the centres of decision-making. In the EU, as in several Member States, such functions are still missing at higher policy levels, as, for instance, at the level of the European Council.

There is a role for dedicated European level **foresight activities associated to Grand Challenges** that require a genuinely European approach. They should be complementary to and drawing on national and regional foresight results, especially in those areas that can be addressed by way of multi-lateral cooperation in Europe and beyond.

Key messages to the foresight community

The foresight community needs to respond to this new global and policy context if it is to have a future itself. This will imply dealing with a number of new requirements.

A **new generation of “strategic anticipation”** needs to be established that emphasizes the ability to handle contingencies and reflects the diversification trends in our society. The foresight community will have to deliver the right concepts, processes and mental models for dealing with an open future.

A **better integration of different forward-looking communities** and their respective methodologies for dealing with future challenges is needed. Existing approaches need to be combined and configured in such a way that credible, robust and plausible outcomes are generated that support policy development and policy learning. More specifically, this implies that:

- A stronger emphasis must be put on “sense-making” by means of novel forms of conceptual (e.g. new epistemologies) and simulation modelling (e.g. gaming, agent-based modelling) that change the way we think about the world. These models should help improve the coherence and transparency of foresight results, by providing better future topologies as well as quantitative modelling results.
- There is a need to combine visionary, participatory and modelling approaches as the basis for designing better ways to organize the world we are living in. Different areas have developed different approaches for handling the future. In security and defence, thinking in terms of wildcards and scenarios has a long-standing tradition, whereas in energy and transport, quantitative modelling approaches are well established.
- To make forward-looking activities more effective and more democratic, participation of a broader range of actors (citizens, policy-makers, etc.) should be implemented as widely as possible. This is also a reflection of the decentralisation of the power to shape our societies, as mirrored in new forms of social networking or in growing importance of social and user-led innovation.

Foresight actions should seek to have **impact on and relevance to policy**. In order to achieve this, two main inroads should be pursued:

- Put more emphasis on solutions rather than problems and challenges.
- Improve the understanding and evaluation of the impacts of foresight.

The findings and **insights of foresight tend to be under-exploited**. This deficit should be remedied in at least the following ways:

- Better communicate results (e.g. using media) to make them more effective. This requires passing the main insights generated in concise and accessible form.
- Better exploit existing foresight material and interpret it in policy-oriented way (“meta-foresight”).
- Better ensure that the future-oriented initiatives suggested are actually followed up and their progress is monitored (“follow-up teams”).