

Embedded and Performative Foresight for STI policies: Framing and experiences from Europe

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Motivation

Complex and interwoven change processes in society, economy,
and major S&T domains

A 'strategic turn' in STI policies: a re-orientation in the purpose and
rationales behind STI policies

- improving the structural and institutional settings in innovation systems to improve innovation performance **vs.** thematic prioritisation in line with strategic policy goals
- driven by longer-term ambitions:
tackling societal challenges,
guiding and promoting emerging technologies along desired direction

'Performative' foresight: aims at making a difference in society, by shaping
mindsets and influencing decision-making processes, as well
implementation

Main objective: provide a systematic view of the requirements of a sound
embedding of foresight in policy-making processes at various levels

Outline

Conceptual framework

Illustrative cases

Embedding in policy preparation processes at an EU level: BOHEMIA

An ambiguous embedding in policy preparation processes at a national level: Futur

Developing a national foresight system: the Finnish case

Conclusions

Conceptual framework

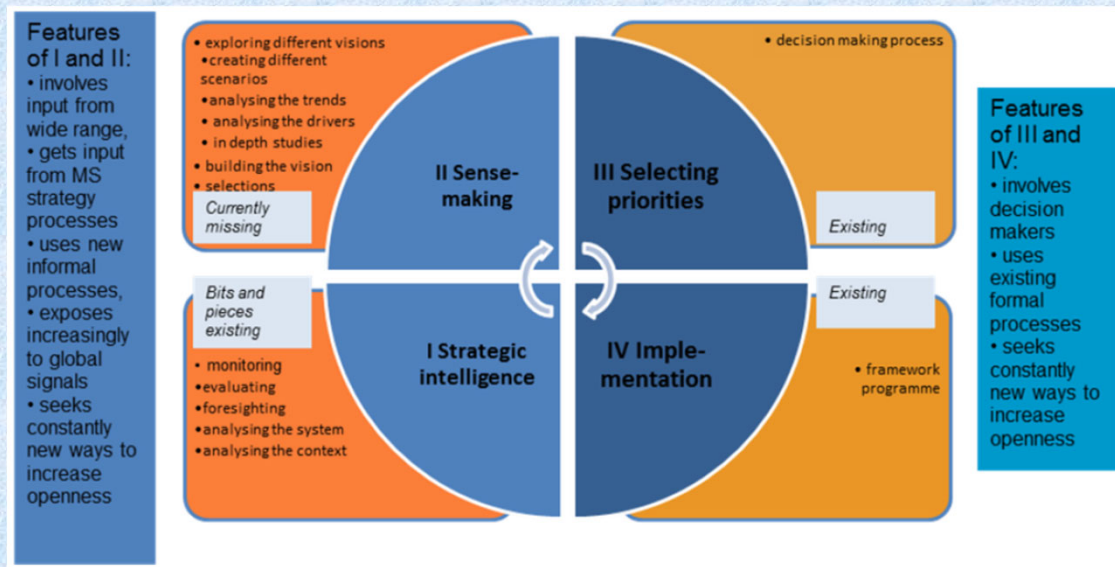
Specific features of foresight vis-à-vis other types of forward-looking activities

- participatory,
- considers multiple futures,
- action-oriented

Foresight in a changing policy context

- multi-domain; major role of other (non-STI) policy fields
- multi-level
- multi-phase

Phases in a strategic process



Analytical dimensions

A relevant embedding is crucial for foresight to be performative in decision-making processes

- not only in advance, but also at regular intervals during implementation
- balance between closeness and distance

Dimensions of embedding foresight

- isolated vs. embedded foresight
- the context and process into which foresight is embedded
- whom to embed: what type of actors are engaged
- how to embed
- when to embed: phases of a policy preparation (strategic) process

ILLUSTRATIVE CASES

BOHEMIA: Foresight to help prepare Horizon Europe

First time the EC used foresight systematically to prepare a Framework Programme

Three main elements

- context scenarios
- extensive Delphi survey to stakeholders
- “targeted scenarios” as proto-missions

Embedding

- internally in close interaction with Foresight Correspondents Network: cutting across DGs/ Directorates
- more limited, but transparent external embedding with stakeholders: moderate ‘systemic’ reach

Well-timed process

- feeding into the Lamy Report defining cornerstones of Horizon Europe
- providing foundations for subsequent definition of mission areas
- follow-up foresight activities to support mission boards

BOHEMIA: Some afterthoughts

Narrow path of being well embedded, while remaining distant from highly politicised decision processes, both in terms of timing and closeness to decision-making

Benefits in terms of harmonising future problem perception and perspectives on future R&I priorities across policy and thematic areas

Budget constraints prevented a more extensive and more thorough involvement of stakeholders

BOHEMIA was a single project, but follow-up foresight actions to accompany implementation of Horizon Europe
e.g. preparation of 2nd Strategic Plan

Futur: the Foresight process of BMBF, 2001–2005

New attempt of participation in the process: not only experts

A bottom-up process with informed citizens – but limited

Enrich the research agenda of BMBF with fresh ideas

bring in more demand-orientation and identify 'societal needs'

Embedded and separated

Participants

BMBF staff

participants with different disciplinary, thematic, professional, and sectoral backgrounds

A variety of methods and instruments (mainly workshop-based)

Major outcomes: interdisciplinary, problem-oriented 'lead visions'

Futur: a failure?

Implementation and financing of R&D support programmes were separated from the Futur process

Only partly embedded: BMBF did not play an active role in the process itself (e.g. in separate workshop, in information meetings)

“Not-invented-here” syndrome

All lead visions were somehow addressed in BMBF research programmes

Yet, the direct link between Futur and the BMBF agenda was never directly demonstrated or claimed

BMBF personnel was only partly integrated in the process

Expectations were (too) high

- BMBF: receive ‘ready-made’ new research topics
- participants: take part in decision-making

Developing a national foresight system: the Finnish case

A rather well-developed and internationally recognised national foresight system

New uncertainties and turbulence caused by complex challenges in the context, in which companies and the public sector operate

⇒ a need of continual development

Explore future developments quite broadly

Major shortcomings

- many actors collect futures information for themselves on their own immediate environment
- much of foresight is still based on forecasting likely developments as opposed to exploring genuinely new opportunities or surprises

Risk of a foresight fatigue, leading to insufficient attention to the truly novel developments

Evaluation of the Finnish foresight system: Recommendations

Strengthen the actors' foresight capabilities

Strengthen collaboration and expand the national foresight system

Utilise global perspectives and networks

Clarify actors' roles and strengthen co-ordination

Strengthen the communication and flow of foresight information

Link foresight more closely to decision-making

CONCLUSIONS

Reap the benefits of foresight

Help reduce uncertainty about

- possible future developments
- the ambitions of partners and competitors
- brings stakeholders together

⇒ assist long-term decision-making by offering orientation

A shared vision (if developed): participants align their future actions in their day-to-day activities to the jointly identified favourable future

A strong sense of ownership among participants promotes orchestrated policy design and implementation

Transparent, systematic decision-preparatory processes can reduce the influence of vested interests

For achieving impact a committed policy client is a must, and thus foresight should be embedded in the decision-making system

Requirements and trade-offs

Structural embedding of a foresight process in policy-making alone is not a guarantee of success

If designed as a cross-cutting internal processes, foresight can contribute to policy co-ordination

Operational implementation of foresight activities: the participation and futures literacy of policy shapers and policy-makers is crucial

BOHEMIA vs. Futur

Effects of foresight can and will arise at different time scales

The visibility and effectiveness of foresight can suffer from its abundance

The value of foresight resides in its scarcity: when overshadowed by the noise of a multitude of other strategic intelligence activities it is unlikely to fulfil its important signalling functions

Trivial caveats

No one size fits all solution: no blueprint on how to embed foresight

- cultural differences
- different contexts
- different policy governance sub-systems
- ...

Futures literacy of various types of actors (participants in a foresight process), at various levels of governance

Awareness of possible benefits

Thank you!

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