

SIX FUNCTIONS OF FORESIGHT FOR POLICY-MAKING

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Abstract

The e-poster presents recent insights from the FORLEARN¹ “Mutual Learning” workshops. FORLEARN is an ongoing EU research project aiming to develop Foresight theory and practice by supporting the sharing of experience (“Mutual Learning”). A series of workshops was organised on the topic of Foresight’s impact on policy-making. Six functions of Foresight for policy-making have been highlighted:

1. **Informing policy:** generating insights regarding the dynamics of change, future challenges and options, along with new ideas, and transmitting them to policy-makers as an input to policy conceptualisation and design.
2. **Facilitating policy implementation:** enhancing the capacity for change within a given policy field by building a common awareness of the current situation and future challenges, as well as new networks and visions amongst stakeholders.
3. **Embedding participation in policy-making:** facilitating the participation of civil society in the policy-making process, thereby improving its transparency and legitimacy.
4. **Supporting policy definition:** jointly translating outcomes from the collective process into specific options for policy definition and implementation.
5. **Reconfiguring the policy system:** in a way that makes it more apt to address long-term challenges.
6. **Symbolic function:** indicating to the public that policy is based on rational information.

The relationship between these functions and the tensions that can arise when a Foresight exercise is being intended for several of them, are discussed. Possible approaches for Foresight practice to better achieve the targeted impact on policy-making are outlined. In particular the concept of “adaptive Foresight”, is presented, in which a Foresight exercise is **subdivided into different phases**, each addressing specific functions, such as “windows of policy interaction”, “windows of wider participation” and “windows of expert-driven analysis”.

Emerging guidelines for improving Foresight practice with reference to its impact on policy-making can be summarised as follows:

1. A thorough **analysis of the policy context** to understand the system in which the exercise is embedded as well as that on which an impact is sought.
2. Each Foresight exercise needs to explore its room for manoeuvre in shaping the future more diligently. Accepting this restriction will enhance the impact of the exercise **within these boundaries**.
3. **Policy-makers need to be adequately involved.** Their involvement in the **design** of an exercise should become a real attempt to build trust and mutual understanding instead of the one-way transmission of a static demand. Their involvement in the **process** should not jeopardize the creativity and independence.

¹ <http://forlearn.jrc.es/>

4. Where a powerful impact on policy strategy building is being aimed for, the linkage with **policy implementation** needs to be addressed more specifically in the Foresight design, possibly by adding a specific phase with the role of **supporting policy definition**.
5. When it is not feasible to move towards policy implementation by adding a policy definition phase, it might be appropriate to present the outcomes in the form of a **'reservoir' of options** that can be adopted by different actors at different times.
6. Policy-makers should explicitly **address choices and values** to legitimise their policy orientation.
7. A **"smart communication"** using up-to-date communication tools and indirect transmission via the involvement of stakeholders and the careful use of media is essential for improving the transmission of information and messages to policy-makers.

The topic for the second year series of the "Mutual Learning" workshop series will be the "evaluation of Foresight activities". Some recent insights will be presented

Keywords: Foresight, FORLEARN, policy-making, impact, mutual learning