

Forum report **"Foresight and Innovation in the Territories"**, 12 June 2009

"Les idées ne valent que par leur réalisation" - this motto of the mayor of Deauville could appropriately summarise our panel: In a time of decreasing budgets and increasing competition it becomes more and more important to focus also on the innovation impact of foresight-related activities.

The broad professional experience of the guest speakers allowed enriching insights from various perspectives. Therefore, the general question-line "Which challenge did you address?" – "How did you address it?" – "What are your conclusions beyond the specific case?" was tailored as follows:

1. Questions to Helena Acheson (Division Manager Enterprise Policy, Forfás), who talked about Regional Competitiveness Agendas (RCA) to improve policy making at small territory level:

Ireland has a long and diverse experience with foresight, and Forfas, the national policy advisory body for enterprise and science, has contributed considerably to it. Nevertheless, many innovation actors find it difficult to 'translate' the strategic guiding lines delivered by foresight exercises into innovation activities. Therefore, a current policy focus is on supporting regional actors also in this respect.

- a. Why did you see the need to work on a pilot for developing regional competitiveness agendas?
- b. How can both the process of developing RCAs as well as the RCAs themselves strengthen the link between foresight and innovation?
- c. Which lessons were learnt from the Mid-West pilot case for the application in other regions?

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2. Questions to Claudio Roveda (Professor Politecnico Milano, Vice-President Fondazione Rosselli) whose paper was about improving strategic cluster development

Politicians are interested in tangible results of "their" investments, and one such result is well-paid jobs. They also understand that there must be competitive enterprises to make this happen, and generally accept that only innovating enterprises can stay competitive. Often it is attractive for both, politicians and entrepreneurs, to invest in the lateral transfer from other sectors of already proven technologies.

- a. Which risks lie in such approaches?
- b. How did you mobilise the potential of foresight to convince the stakeholder of also investing in (riskier) radical innovations?
- c. Which are the results so far, what can be learned beyond the concrete case?

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3. Questions to Mikka Aaltonen (Professor Helsinki University of Technology) who focused on how individuals & their networks can improve communication for successful cooperation:

What people consider decision-relevant information, and which decisions they take subsequently is strongly influenced by their own past, and by the spatial and temporal context in which THEY SEE the action to be decided upon. Intuitively, everybody would agree on this. However, very often this is not systematically taken into account to improve effective cooperation between the multitude of stakeholders necessary to turn a territory into an innovative and competitive one.

- a. What are the biggest challenges and failures in present decision-making practices?

- b. What are the differences between macro, meta and micro level responses?
 - c. Based on the results of your research, how do you see it is possible to improve the situation, especially with regard to improving the links between foresight and innovation in the territories?
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4. Questions to Christian Svanfeldt (European Commission, DG Regio), who highlighted the bridging role foresight could play in mutually optimising EU RTDI and Regional Policies

Although competent local innovation support is vital for long-term territorial competitiveness, higher-governance-level guidance becomes increasingly important in globalised economies. This is especially true for foresight, the domain where longer-term strategic issues are researched, put into different policy perspectives, and discussed with stakeholders. Both EC services and EC advisory groups have reflected and acted in this area, aiming for an appropriate balance between (horizontal and vertical) cooperation and competition.

- a. Which challenges do you see, from the EU level perspective, to increase the impact of foresight on innovation in the territories?
- b. Could you present examples of EC services' initiatives which address these challenges.
- c. What are important conclusions, and which messages would you sent to whom?

The multitude of aspects presented and discussed by speakers, participants and the facilitator showed clearly that expectations regarding foresight are high (so, expectations management is important) and often conflicting (so, multiple balances have to be found). Some conclusions:

- It's no longer enough to optimally develop regional innovation systems from the regional resources, but also to optimally positioning them vis-à-vis global sectors and value chains.
- The key outcomes of an appropriately designed foresight exercise (providing relevant and excellent strategic knowledge and generating commitment of the different stakeholders) can be solid bases for sustainably innovative and competitive enterprises and territories. For this to happen, it is important to balance (and rebalance as often as necessary), inter alia,
 - the composition of the groups and the relationships between them,
 - top-down and bottom-up knowledge flows,
 - cooperation and competition,
 - international benchmarking and inward-focused strength and confidence building
 - stimulating different types of innovation (continuous, incremental, disruptive),
 - needs to be pragmatic and methodological considerations,
 - contracting foresight experts and building strategic capacities throughout the territory
- Learning should become as normal as breathing, collective intelligence and early sense making become vital for maintaining the competitiveness, and thus the quality of life in a territory.