

Conference Foresight at the Heart of the Regional Action of the Elected Officials Deauville, 11th and 12th of June 2009

Report of the Forum “Foresight and a shared vision of the region” with contributions of

- Monique le Clezio, Vice-président of Côtes d'Armor county council (France),
- Justyna Dabrowska, Project Executive - International Co-operation Manchester Science Park (U.K.), and
- Erik Øverland, Head of Subito! Research&Futures/Advisor to the Government (Norway)

facilitated by Peter Heydebreck, Managing Director inno-group (Europe).

The session was inspired by the three contributions and very much took the form of an interactive forum dedicated to mutual learning. The three contributors presented very different (but not contradictory) approaches to initiate, build, grow and maintain stakeholders' commitment to a shared vision of and for the region.

- The Manchester case was based upon a pre-existing dedication of key players to a joint vision and focused mainly on strengthening commitment, co-ordination, and specification of activities, taking the form of a 24h success scenario workshop.
- The case of the Côtes d'Armor is a long-term initiative mobilizing organizations and individual citizens (even those who only have their second address in the region) which has progressed for three years already and is still developing, i.e. increasingly implementing actions.
- The Norwegian contribution reflected the specific potentials the Norwegian (maybe Scandinavian) culture and tradition offer: namely employers' and employees' associations jointly shaping the future instead of negotiating it against each other. Overall, the Norwegian foresight culture appears to be characterized by a very limited participation of policy makers (compared to e.g. France). Norway has not conducted comprehensive regional foresights, but several grand thematic foresights, like Norway2030. N2030 has indirectly influenced the policy discussion in Norway on the future of the regional organization in the Norwegian society as such.

The discussion with the speakers (and between workshop participants) was very much (creating and) mirroring a consensus on the following aspects:

- Sustainable regional competitiveness demands for a shared vision of all actors who are crucial for deciding upon and implementing strategies and actions core to the respective region's competitiveness.
- The vision needs to be based on regional specificities (e.g. strongholds and challenges) and to enjoy strong commitment of key actors.
- At a given moment, this shared vision might exist to a certain degree (like in the Manchester case) or there might be substantial need to develop it.

In case there is a pre-existing consensus, foresight actions help to strengthen commitment to the vision, create transparency and foster trust-based partnerships/networks.

In case there is no pre-existing consensus around a strategy, a regional foresight process fosters the development of such consensus of all participants and commitment to the strategy. Such a process might very well take substantial time. More specifically, a foresight process creates a feeling/culture amongst participants of being included. Such an “inclusion” effect can be seen at organisational level and very much also at the level of an individual.

- It is decisive to remember that the process is to integrate views and experiences from very different backgrounds and that one must not homogenize the process.
- It is important to keep clear who is responsible for what (i.e. does the process primarily aim at co-ordinating actions of individual organisations or of developing recommendations/guidelines for a joint (mostly public) body?
- Regional foresight processes are as powerful as they are difficult to manage. Professional management is essential. Paying respect to regional specificities even in methodological respect is important (e.g. when deciding upon employing arts, web-based questionnaires etc...).
- The costs of foresight are very moderate when compared to the impact foresight has in terms of e.g. getting the questions right (awareness raising), improved decision support, mobilisation/inclusion, improved system quality (e.g. transparency, networking ...). This holds true also and particularly for very holistic initiatives as the one in Côtes d'Armor.

Peter Heydebreck, inno group, June 16th, 2009