

“From Research to Regional policy – using regional foresight to reconcile seemingly opposing European perspectives¹”

Christian Svanfeldt²

1. BACKGROUND

This paper is a reflection on the challenges for the regions to manage both an indigenously based development based on their own specificities, resources, and strengths, as well as being part of global knowledge systems, and the implications for regional foresight. It draws on my experience of working eight years in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research, which included support to regional foresight, and the change of perspective my recent move to the Directorate-General for Regional Policy has given.

2. THE "LISBONISATION" OF RESEARCH AND REGIONAL POLICY

Looking at research and innovation policy in Europe over the last decade, some important changes have occurred. New instruments have been put in place (not least at the European level with the JTIs, Art 169, ERC), new concepts have been established (lead markets, triple helix, variable geometry, etc), but maybe more important are the changes relating to the priorities with the awakened consciousness of major challenges, such as climate change, globalisation, demographic deficit, etc. In addition, the current financial and economic crisis has put pressure on policymakers to deal with acute and immediate problems and have reduced the available financial resources. The Lisbon strategy has been dominating European policy making during this period, but it has taken on different expressions depending on the policy area.

During the last decade, EU research policy has been focusing on the creation of a European Research Area, in which knowledge and researchers should move freely. Excellence has been reinforced as a guiding principle for research support, which has taken a concrete expression with the creation of the European Research Council. Another guiding principle has been achievement of critical mass and the need for increased concentration and coordination of resources, which is reflected by new instruments, such as Article 169, Joint Technology Initiatives and Joint Programming initiative. The international, or global, dimension of research, as well as the mobility of researchers, have also received more attention. During this period there has been a significant increase of the budget for the Framework Programmes for RTD. The European Research Area is ideally borderless for knowledge flows, with no geographic or territorial bindings. The cooperation part of the Framework Programme has traditionally stood for

¹ This paper does not reflect an official position of the European Commission.

² Christian Svanfeldt is a policy analyst in the 'Urban development, territorial cohesion' unit in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy; christian.svanfeldt@ec.europa.eu

the bulk of the research funding, but many voices argue that support to cooperation is no longer so important, as research cooperation takes place anyway, and that the bottom-up funding of single researchers or research teams on the sole criteria of excellence should be increased.

Regional policy has also evolved during this period and there has been a clear “Lisbonisation” of cohesion policy with a shift towards more innovation, growth and employment related investments. With 25% of its funding equalling €85 billion, directed towards innovation, the structural funds is the biggest source of EU funding for innovation. This is due to both an earmarking of resources for Lisbon related investments, as well as a mainstreaming of Lisbon in the strategic guidelines for the 2007-2013 period. Cooperation between regions, especially cross-border within EU, has also gained in importance. As the funding (close to €8 billion) remains small in relation to the total budget of the structural funds), the focus is mainly on softer measures. As a result, national programmes have become more strategically oriented, more future oriented and less demand driven.

But although cohesion policy has been effective in reducing the disparities between the Member States, disparities have not decreased between regions within Member States, and there is an increased recognition of the need to take into account territorial diversity and the territorial potential in the formulation and implementation of a renewed Lisbon strategy. Two manifestation of this is the Baltic Sea strategy - which takes on regional issues in a variable geometry form at an intermediate level between the EU27 and the Member State level - and the increased and renewed emphasis on territorial cohesion.

Basically, territorial cohesion is about ensuring that all of Europe’s territory is given the opportunity to develop and grow. It has to do with making most of the territorial specificities and reducing barriers for interaction and access to resources not readily available in all regions. It is dependent on place-based policies that are close to the citizens and the local and regional actors. Territorial cohesion builds on horizontal and vertical policy integration and transcends administrative borders.

3. KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY VERSUS KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

In a simplified manner, research policy can be considered as the support of a borderless knowledge *economy*, in which the territorial dimension has little place. On the other hand, cohesion policy can be considered as the support of a knowledge *society*, empowering citizens, local and regional actors via participative policy processes, support to capacity building enabling and facilitating access to external resources

The constituencies concerned by the two policy approaches are belonging to two partly overlapping sets, as cohesion policy is directly addressing the whole European social and economic tissue, whilst research policy mainly addresses the public and private research champions and their role in a global knowledge production system. Only indirectly is the wider tissue addressed through expected knowledge spill-overs.

The perspectives, objectives and capacities to act and influence of local and regional actors (citizens, local firms, public authorities, educational establishments, etc), national governments, internationally recognised academic institutions, Multinational companies, etc, are very different and the territorial aspect takes on a very different meaning for these different actors. A major issue for the regions is therefore how the two extreme approaches of research policy and regional policy can be reconciled and become

supportive to one and another. Regional foresight is one of the instruments that could be used to tackle this issue.

4. REGIONAL FORESIGHT AND THE EU TODAY

4.1. Are we suffering a foresight fatigue?

During the last decade several parallel efforts have contributed to a strong foresight community, solid methodological approaches and support, a mainstreaming of foresight in European funding schemes, etc. But for some time there seems to be a certain lack of steam and visibility for foresight, coupled with a tendency to move towards a lighter type of "forward looking activities". In a sense, foresight has been a victim of its own success, and many activities that have been given a foresight label have not been able to deliver, be it due to lack of rigour, copying, wishful thinking, poor implementation or lack of monitoring. There is also an aspect of fashion in policy tools; the decline of interest in foresight has for instance been followed by an increased interest in evaluation and impact assessment. There are a few signs that the pendulum is swinging back, especially in association with concept such as the policy cycle and strategic policy intelligence. The danger is that the expectations on foresight will be set too high due to a short policy memory and a lack of understanding of the importance of long-term processes and continuity.

4.2. Direct support to foresight activities limited and dispersed...

At EU-level, dedicated support to foresight activities have mainly been channelled via DG Research and its activities in the 5th and 6th Framework programmes. This included the active support to regional foresight in the first half of this decade, with the development of methodologies and tools, policy aspects and direct support to foresight activities (some examples, such as the Country Specific Guides to Regional Foresight and the Blueprints expert group can be found in the appendix). This activity was ended with the mainstreaming of foresight within regional policy through its inclusion in the Community Strategic Guidelines. Today, there is no dedicated support for regional foresight at EU level, but provision for regional foresight activities exist in the structural funds (as mentioned above) and in the 7th Framework programme for research within the capacities specific programme (see appendix). In addition, there is also a specific line for foresight within the Socio-economic sciences and humanities theme of the cooperation specific programme, as well as provision in many thematic areas for foresight type studies. Many of the European Technology Platforms have also carried out foresight.

The European Commission has also commissioned forward looking studies, supported expert groups and networks to produce scenarios and visions of Europe in 2020, the future manufacturing, future regional challenges etc, for both internal and external use (e.g., the ESPON network and the "Regions 2020", see appendix). But although a large number of activities exist, there is no dedicated support for regional foresight and no clear entry point to regional foresight at EU level.

4.3. ...but strong elements of foresights and mutual learning are present

It is not easy to evaluate to what extent foresight is being used by and within Europe's regions, as funding is rarely allocated and monitored from the EU-level. But although all regions or regional cooperation projects do not engage themselves in foresight, territorial cohesion policy is built around foresight related elements; e.g., participative processes

with a maximum engagement of relevant stakeholders; horizontal and vertical policy integration, mappings of current state of play, SWOT-analysis, shared visions of the future, creation of strong local or regional identity, communication, etc. These processes are also often extended in time to cover at least a seven-year programming cycle. Provisions are there for external expertise via the territorial assistance and there is a strong element of learning from best practice. This means that even if foresight is not used as such, the step and additional cost to actually start using foresight are not so great, both within and in between regions. The fast track networks of URBACT II and INTERREG IV C associated with the Regions for Economic Change Initiative provides not only platforms for policy experimentation, but also high-visibility examples of best practice. By being closely associated with the national managing authorities they may also have a significant influence on the spending priorities and investments of the nationally available funds.

5. LESSONS LEARNT – THE “BLUEPRINTS” EXPERIENCE

The Blueprints for Foresight Actions in the Regions expert group, run by DG Research in 2003-2004, served many purposes. It was built up around five challenges that corresponded to regional typologies:

- FOR-RIS: Combining short term regional innovation strategies (RIS/RITTS) initiatives with long-term time perspective of foresight initiatives
- UPGRADE: Towards more knowledge based regional economies: reconversion of regional production systems in decline
- TECHTRANS: Trans-regional integration and harmonisation of technology support mechanisms – a multi-regional response to multi-national firms
- TRANSVISION: Bridging culturally close neighbouring regions separated by national borders
- AGRIBLUE: Foresight for sustainable rural economies

Each of the challenges gathered a set of experts and as a set of regional stakeholder from different regions with the ambition to initiate foresight in their specific region. Due to its construction, it created mutual learning partnerships between regions of all types, belonging to old and new Member States, Candidate Countries and New Neighbours. It was also an open process in which a large number of stakeholders participated on a purely voluntary basis - the willingness to engage in regional, trans-regional, or horizontal foresight actions was found to be very high. Each of the groups associated with the challenges had a coach that monitored, steered and documented what was done. This in turn served to produce practical manuals for how to initiate regional foresight under specific regional circumstances, including such basic issues as the cost to set up a regional foresight initiative and the most commonly used tools. The concrete results also included: a mobilisation and awareness amongst regional stakeholders and decision makers; a continued cooperation of involved actors for mutual learning on a voluntary basis; a continuation and deepening of actions started in the framework of the Blueprints expert group; initiation of new foresight actions within individual regions (ERDF, RIS-NAC, etc) and in trans-regional cooperation (INTERREG, etc). The lessons learnt were many and can still be largely considered valid after five years:

- The importance of focus on key questions and issues that foresight can influence - foresight is not a blanket solution but provides a set of innovative tools, which should only be applied when, and where appropriate - systems should be devised to measure practical benefits for the region, which would be a key to sustainability.
- Clarity of purpose a pre-condition for committed participation; UPGRADE regions are in a hurry for economic progress - foresight exercises will not be supported without convincing arguments for how proposed actions will impact on current priorities.
- The need to mobilise key stakeholders; Leadership should be given to individuals combining great influence with specialist knowledge in target area. Committed participation come from believers in the process with high stake in the outcome. Avoid the 'usual suspects' belonging to divergent public initiatives.
- Greater impact is possible in poorer, less confident regions - foresight makes people think creatively and takes them out of their current environment. Practical foresight action is not creative in itself, but involves hard systematic work.
- Foresight training is needed: the methodological quality and success of spreading foresight in the regions linked to learning of foresight values and methods
- A common confusion between the «ultimate aims» (sustainability, social cohesion, welfare of the citizens, etc.) and the «strategy» (to become the most competitive region, the 3 % action plan, the ERA, etc.).
- A need for permanent drivers to develop continuous foresight process in trans-border areas, such as specific teams, agencies, and networks of existing organisations (administrations, think-tanks, etc.)

It is interesting to note that some of the lessons learnt relate directly to the problematic raised in the beginning of this paper:

- For cultural reasons, foresight will succeed in UPGRADE regions only if rapidly converted from a top-down to bottom-up activity - should aim to become a 'mass participation activity' empowering people to influence their own future prospects.
- Technology trends may be predictable but their long-term applications are not; foresight is relevant to all aspects of social and economic development - balanced work-programme contains cross-cutting activities bringing industry, education and public services together.
- Links between companies, research and territories are extremely important in a transition to a knowledge-based economy

6. CHALLENGES FOR REGIONAL FORESIGHT

The reconciliation of territorial cohesion with the borderless global knowledge production system and open innovation type of business operations with weak territorial linkages is a major challenge for the regions and for regional foresight to tackle. But there are several obstacles on the way.

In a knowledge economy as well as in a knowledge society there is a need to transcend borders and barriers hindering exchange, be it exchange of knowledge, goods, people, etc. Clusters may for instance develop across borders and go beyond the immediate trans-border regions depending on their functional integration within European or global value chains. There is therefore also a need for policies and instruments to transcend borders, which is very difficult. For instance, when looking at trans-national research program cooperation, the rationale often put forward is easy to understand and includes avoiding duplication, building knowledge difficult to attain within a single country, exchanging good practices and to access expertise. However, the barriers to cooperation are many. They range from softer barriers such as lack of experience with cooperation and reluctance to cooperate with strangers to barriers of a technical nature such as incompatible programming routines and cycles, and to “hard” legal barriers to cross-border funding. But these problems are not exclusive to research cooperation and need to be taken into account both when setting up joint foresight activities and in any cooperation activity resulting from the recommendations of (joint) foresights.

The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a new European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, trans-national and interregional cooperation. EGTC is a legal entity enabling regional and local authorities and other public bodies from different member states, to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality. So far, the agreements signed are mainly expressions of good will, except in the case for the Grande Region (involving Luxemburg and the regions of Lorraine, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland and Wallonia), and a hospital on the French-Spanish border.

Territorial cohesion policies can in some way be considered as *coherent* policies. Territorial cohesion builds on an integrated approach. A second major challenge is therefore need for horizontal and vertical policy integration. It is not unusual that different sectoral policies have conflicting objectives or adverse effects on each other, and this may also be the case for regional, national and European policies. Stakeholders from with different sectoral perspectives and bindings may also ardently and dogmatically defend very different positions. A holistic approach is therefore by no means easy.

A third challenge relates to the effectiveness of foresight. It is important to be able to demonstrate clear results. This calls for focused and effective monitoring and steering, linkage to ex-ante and ex-post evaluation etc. But the task is complicated by the heterogeneity of territories and the long-term nature of the outcomes and is dependent on a continuity of processes a systematic approach. Foresight alone may not be sufficient, but the complete strategic policy intelligence tool-box has to be used. Lack of solid and comparable data is often a problem. There might be a need for a strategic approach beyond mutual learning. A key question is whether cooperation should be centred on foresight or on other elements of the policy cycle.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The challenges are many for regional foresight to be effective in reconciling the two extreme approaches of research policy and cohesion policy, or put differently, marrying the knowledge economy with the knowledge society. Maybe as important as dealing with the above challenges is to have realistic expectations and ambitions and be prepared for

hard work! The lessons learnt from the Blueprints exercise, and the advice given in each individual Blueprint, give practical guidance that may prove very useful for this purpose.

Appendix – Useful resources

1. EC REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

1.1. REGULATION (EC) No 1080/2006 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1783/1999

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:210:0001:0001:EN:PDF>

Especially:

- *Article 5* -Regional competitiveness and employment
- *Article 6* -European territorial cooperation

1.2. "Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013" (COM(2005) 0299)

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/050706osc_en.pdf

Especially:

- 4.2. GUIDELINE: Improving knowledge and innovation for growth
- 4.3. GUIDELINE : More and better jobs

with references to foresight; and

- 5. TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF COHESION POLICY

concerning territorial cooperation.

2. COHESION POLICY INITIATIVES RELEVANT TO FORESIGHT, INNOVATION AND/OR TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

2.1. Green Paper and debate on Territorial Cohesion

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/terco/

How to turn diversity into strength - territorial cohesion addressed through focusing on new themes, new sets of relationships binding EU territories at different levels and new forms of cooperation, coordination and partnerships.

2.2. European Territorial Co-operation objective (formerly the INTERREG Community Initiative)

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/

The European Territorial Co-operation objective is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and supports cross-border, transnational and interregional

co-operation programmes. The budget of €8.7 billion for this objective accounts for 2.5% of the total 2007-13 allocation for cohesion policy, including the allocation for Member States to participate in EU external border co-operation programmes supported by other instruments ([IPA](#) and ENPI). It covers three types of programmes:

- (1) **52 cross-border co-operation programmes along internal EU borders**, dealing with a wide range of issues, e.g.: encouraging entrepreneurship, especially the development of SMEs, tourism, culture and cross-border trade; improving joint management of natural resources; supporting links between urban and rural areas; improving access to transport and communication networks; developing joint use of infrastructure; administrative, employment and equal opportunities work. (ERDF contribution: €5.6 billion)
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/crossborder/index_en.htm
- (2) 13 [transnational co-operation programmes](#) cover larger areas of co-operation such as the Baltic Sea, Alpine and Mediterranean regions, with focus on: innovation, especially networks of universities, research institutions, SMEs; environment, especially water resources, rivers, lakes, sea; accessibility, including telecommunications, and in particular the completion of networks; sustainable urban development, especially polycentric development. (ERDF contribution: €1.8 billion.)
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/transnational/index_en.htm
- (3) The [interregional co-operation programme](#) (INTERREG IVC) and 3 networking programmes (Urbact II, Interact II and ESPON) cover all 27 Member States of the EU. They provide a framework for exchanging experience between regional and local bodies in different countries. Interregional cooperation works at pan-European level, covering all EU-27 Member States, and more. It builds networks to develop good practice and facilitate the exchange and transfer of experience by successful regions. It showcases what regions do well, to the benefit of those still investing. (ERDF contribution: €445 million).
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/index_en.htm
 - The **[INTERREG IV C](#)** programme enables EU regions to work together and is structured around two priorities, which address: innovation and the knowledge economy, and environment and risk prevention. ERDF contribution: €321 million.
3 networking programmes:
 - The **[URBACT II](#)** programme brings together actors at local and regional level to exchange experience and to facilitate learning on urban policy themes. The programme supports thematic networks and working groups between cities, conferences and the development of tools. ERDF contribution: €3 million. <http://urbact.eu/>
 - The "European Spatial Planning Observation Network" (**[ESPON](#)**) provides scientific information for the development of regions and larger territories through applied research, analysis and tools. ERDF contribution: €34 million. <http://www.espon.eu/>
 - The **[INTERACT II](#)** programme provides training, services and tools to programme managers and administrators of co-operation programmes in

order to improve the management of these programmes.
ERDF contribution: €34 million. <http://www.interact-eu.net/>

Jointly with the URBACT II programme, the INTERREG IVC programme is the main vehicle for the EU initiative '[Regions for Economic Change](#)'

2.3. Regions for Economic Change

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/index_en.cfm

"Regions for Economic Change" is an initiative under the Territorial Cooperation objective for the 2007-2013 programming period. It introduces new ways to dynamise regional and urban networks and to help them work closely with the Commission, to have innovative ideas tested and rapidly disseminated into the Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment, and European Territorial cooperation programmes.

2.4. European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/gect/index_en.htm

The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a new European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Unlike the structures which governed this kind of cooperation before 2007, the EGTC is a legal entity and as such, will enable regional and local authorities and other public bodies from different member states, to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality.

2.5. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm

The aim of the just recently launched Baltic Sea Strategy is to **coordinate the efforts of various actors in the Region** (Member States, regions, financing institutions, the EU, pan-Baltic organisations, non-governmental bodies etc.) to **promote a more balanced development** of the Region. This is the first time that a comprehensive Strategy, covering several Community policies, is targeted on a 'macro-region'. The Strategy will aim at **four main objectives**:

1. to improve the **environmental** state of the Baltic Sea Region and especially of the Sea;
2. to make the Baltic Sea Region a more prosperous place by supporting balanced **economic development** across the Region;
3. to make the Baltic Sea Region a more **accessible and attractive** place for both its inhabitants, for competent labour force and for tourists;
4. to make the Baltic Sea Region a **safer and more secure** place.

2.6. Regions of knowledge

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/capacities/regions-knowledge_en.html

The 'Regions of knowledge' initiative in the FP7 Capacities programme aims to strengthen the research potential of European regions, in particular by encouraging and supporting the development, across Europe, of regional 'research-driven clusters', associating universities, research centres, enterprises and regional authorities.

2.7. Research potential of Convergence Regions

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/capacities/convergence-regions_en.html

The Research potential of Convergence Regions in the capacities part of FP7 aims at stimulating the realisation of the full research potential of the enlarged European Union by unlocking and developing the research potential in the EU's 'convergence regions' and outermost regions, and helping to strengthen the capacities of their researchers to successfully participate in research activities at EU level.

3. FORESIGHT RESOURCES

3.1. Country Specific Practical Guides to Regional Foresight

<http://cordis.europa.eu/foresight/cgrf.htm>

The country specific practical guides to regional foresight are destined for those contemplating, or already undertaking, foresight at a regional level. They are handbooks, which can be used both by practitioners and regional decision-makers. The country adaptations provide examples to further clarify the aims, concepts, methods, as well as potential sponsors and participants of regional foresight.

3.2. Blueprints for Foresight Actions in the Regions (expert group 2003-2004)

http://cordis.europa.eu/foresight/regional_blueprints2004.htm

The Blueprints for Foresight Actions in the Regions expert group was set up in December 2003 to develop and encourage the use of regional foresight in support of the implementation of EU policy. One of the results was the development of five so called "blueprints. The blueprints are practical guidelines to the setting up and planning of foresight. They are manuals or roadmaps, not foresight exercises in themselves. They build upon real problems in real regions, with strong stakeholder involvement. The five blueprints are:

- (4) FOR-RIS - Experiences and ideas for developing foresight in a regional innovation strategy context (RIS/RITTS)
<ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/foresight/docs/blueprint-for-ris.pdf>
- (5) UPGRADE - Foresight strategy and actions to assist regions of traditional industry towards a more knowledge-based community
<ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/foresight/docs/blueprint-upgrade.pdf>
- (6) TECHTRANS - Transregional integration and harmonisation of technology support mechanism <ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/foresight/docs/blueprint-techtrans.pdf>

- (7) TRANSVISION - Bridging historically and culturally close neighbouring regions separated by national borders
<ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/foresight/docs/blueprint-transvision.pdf>
- (8) AGRIBLUE - Sustainable Territorial Development of the Rural Areas of Europe
<ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/foresight/docs/blueprint-agriblue.pdf>

3.3. EFMN – the European Foresight Monitoring Network

<http://www.efmn.info/>

The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network monitors ongoing and emerging foresight activities and disseminates information about these activities to a network of policy researchers, foresight practitioners. It supports the work of policy professionals at regional and national level.

3.4. FOR-LEARN

<http://forlearn.jrc.ec.europa.eu/index.htm>

Online Foresight Guide developed by the JRC IPTS on behalf of DG Research.

4. ADDITIONAL LINKS

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm (EU Regional Policy)

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/regions2020/index_en.htm
(Regions 2020' - an analysis of the likely regional impact of four of the biggest challenges facing Europe: globalisation, demographic change, climate change, and the energy supply)

<http://www.cordis.lu/foresight/> (Foresight activities supported by DG Research)

<http://www.innovating-regions.org> (Innovating Regions in Europe)

<http://www.eu-territorial-agenda.eu/Pages/Default.aspx> (COPTA - Cooperation for Territorial Cohesion of Europe)

<http://www.proinno-europe.eu/> (PRO INNO Europe[®] - focal point for innovation policy analysis, learning and development)