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in Europe's Regions*

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Introduction

If there is no doubt about the ongoing global development of the foresight culture all over Europe, this tool is not sufficiently linked to the decision-making process of regional development. In other terms, the relation between foresight and strategic action remains to be built in order to allow European territories to take advantage of the real added value of this approach.

The question we would like to raise here is how far can foresight improve the efficiency of Cohesion Policy through its input into the Structural Funds programming period? In this paper we attempt to provide first answers to this question from three main entry points : the process of the Structural Funds programming period, the territories, and thirdly the fields/themes of territorial development:

- are there critical steps under the scheme for the Structural Funds programming period where foresight could play a significant role?
- how could foresight be applied according to the different categories of eligibility for Structural Funds (convergence, competitiveness and co-operation)?
- can foresight be applied to specific fields of territorial development?

And lastly, we will suggest some actions that could be launched thanks to platforms of knowledge and actors already existing at the European level in order to undertake awareness initiatives towards regions and decision-makers to develop with them the right bridges between foresight and action.

1. Need to bridge foresight to strategy

Over the past years, the European Commission, DG Research in particular, has initiated a broad range of foresight-related activities. At this stage, the nature of programmes and related projects launched seem to have adopted a new direction in order to improve the cross-fertilization of foresight initiatives throughout Europe's regions and to transform foresight into a strong strategy policy tool.

Indeed, the European Commission is promoting an approach that entails dissemination and mutual learning between practitioners and newcomers in the foresight field, with programmes such as **Monitoring Foresight Activities** (European Foresight

Monitoring Network¹) and **Support to Mutual Learning** (FOR-LEARN project² and the Mutual Learning Platform³).

On the other hand, we can observe a growing need to support an enhanced use of foresight by decision makers in the different fields of territorial development and at the different levels of governance. The **Blueprints for Foresight Actions in the Regions initiative**⁴ was an attempt to structure this critical bridge with strong stakeholder involvement in the initiative's five working groups through an exchange on *real problems of real regions* in Europe :

- FOR-RIS - Experiences and ideas to develop foresight in a regional innovation strategy context;
- UPGRADE - Foresight strategy and actions to assist regions of traditional industry towards a more knowledge-based community;
- TECHTRANS - Transregional integration and harmonisation of technology support mechanisms;
- TRANSVISION - Bridging historically and culturally close neighbouring regions separated by national borders;
- AGRIBLUE - Sustainable Territorial Development of the Rural Areas of Europe.

Key recommendations from Blueprints for Foresight Actions in the Regions : Bridging foresight to strategy

- **Support regions** willing to perform a foresight exercise;
- **Integrate foresight studies into policies and strategy planning;**
- Foresight becomes an **integral part of the support actions** of the different EU DG;
- Support the idea that foresight stimulates a good **governance culture;**
- Encourage the use of foresight and other capacity building activities in the next **Structural Funds** programming period...



¹ The **EFMN** is a network of policy professionals, foresight experts and practitioners as well as analysts of Science, Technology and Innovation related issues. The EFMN develops foresight-related content, analysed in an annual workshop and disseminated via a website and mailing list. Membership in the network is free. www.efmn.info.

² **FOR-LEARN** project is under FP 6 and supported by the EC (DG-RTD); it is part of the European Foresight Knowledge Sharing Platform (KSP) and aims to support the mutual learning process through an online foresight guide, workshops, ... <http://forlearn.jrc.es>.

³ **The Mutual Learning Platform** is a joint initiative of the EC led by DG Enterprise and supported by DG RTD, DG REGIO and the Committee of the Regions. It concentrates on three core topics: regional foresight, regional benchmarking and regional profiles in research and innovation. The regional foresight workshop is built on the basis of the DG Research action "Blueprints for Foresight Action in the Regions". Its objective is to update and complement existing foresight tools and disseminate them to regional actors. www.innovating-regions.org.

⁴ www.cordis.lu/foresight/regional_blueprints2004.html

2. Foresight activities in the programming process of the Structural Funds

2.1. Main features of the future Cohesion policy 2007-2013

First of all, the **links between Cohesion policy and the Lisbon agenda⁵ and other EU policies** such as the FP7⁶ have been reinforced. In this new context, the Cohesion policy is no longer merely an objective; it becomes a real tool to support the Lisbon agenda. *Cohesion policy in all its dimensions must be seen as an integral part of the Lisbon process for the EC⁷. The European Commission adopted on 14 February 2004 the legislative framework for the reform of the cohesion policy for the period 2007-2013. The aim of the programmes will be to boost competitiveness and growth in the enlarged European Union.*

Secondly, the **strategic approach and concentration** have been strengthened⁸: Community strategic guidelines for the cohesion policy 2007-2013 have been established in order to ensure a better integration of EU priorities into national and regional programmes.

Thirdly, efforts to ensure **greater ownership of cohesion policy on the ground** are being developed through a reinforced dialogue between Commission, Member States and Regions. This has come about through the National Strategic Reference Framework and a more decentralised sharing of responsibilities such as financial management and control while promoting Private and Public Partnerships.

The cohesion policy for the next period will be structured according to three main objectives: the convergence objective, the regional competitiveness and employment objective, and the territorial co-operation objective.

⁵ The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000, were mainly to make the European Union by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". On 2 February 2005, the European Commission presented a revised strategy for the EU to create more growth and jobs. It aims to revitalize the Lisbon Agenda.

⁶ The seventh Framework Programme is the EU's chief instrument for funding scientific research and technological development over the period 2007 to 2013. <http://cordis.europa.eu.int/fp7>

⁷ http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/lisbon/lisbon_en.htm

⁸ (...), while the mix (of policy) may vary according to context, concentration will be ensured at the level of programmes and projects by including only those elements that can contribute to the growth and jobs agenda. This will be the governing principle which the Commission will bring to bear when negotiating the different national and regional programmes, in Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013, 05/07/2005, p 8.

Future Cohesion Policy 2007-2013

3 objectives

Convergence objective

For regions and Member States eligible for cohesion policy support under the Convergence objective, the key objective will **be to stimulate growth potential to maintain and achieve high growth rates.**

Regional competitiveness and employment objective

The need for concentration on a limited number of key priorities, and in particular on **research, innovation, accessibility and job creation**, is compelling under this objective in order to ensure best use of limited financial resources.

European territorial co-operation objective

The aim of the cooperation objective is to promote **stronger integration of the territory of the Union** in all its dimensions.



2.2. Some critical steps of the Structural Funds programming period where foresight could play a significant role

According to the general scheme of the programming period from the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion to the management of the programmes and projects, three main steps can be identified where foresight could bring a real added value to the cohesion policy and its implementation :

- identifying strategic priorities, i.e. the definition of the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion, National Strategic Reference Frameworks, Operational Programmes, the selection of projects;
- defining indicators according to new references for regional performance;
- preparing the evaluation phases.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that many of these steps have already been performed by the Member States and the regions for the 2007-2013 period. Consequently, this future period could be used to make the decision makers aware of foresight's role in the programming period process. The mid-term evaluations could be a critical period in this perspective, and thus provide some possibilities to introduce foresight gradually in the second half of the next programming period.

The potential inputs of foresight in the Structural Funds programming period is illustrated hereafter at two levels: from the main principles of cohesion policy and at specific steps of the programming period.

The role of foresight according to the main principles of the cohesion policy⁹

| <i>Needs for the Structural Funds</i> | <i>Foresight answers</i> |
|--|---|
| <p>Concentration This is a principle for the Commission (financial and governance). The policy area (territories or thematic) requiring the most important support must be identified.</p> | Providing hierarchic issues and strategies. |
| <p>Strategic approach The cohesion policy has to help regions to implement regional innovation strategies and actions plans. The Structural Funds can play an important role in supporting effective policy design and implementation, which involves all relevant stakeholders and in a broad range of fields.</p> | Building a strategic action plan based on a common vision |

The main links between foresight inputs and the steps in the of Structural Funds process

| <i>Structural funds process</i> | <i>Foresight answers</i> |
|---|---|
| Community's strategic guidelines on cohesion | <p>Foresight is quoted in the guidelines¹⁰ in two main points :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance national and regional RDT capacities by regional foresight (...) - Support good policy and programme design by (...) foresight |
| National strategic reference framework | |
| Operational Programmes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foresight approach can provide priorities and strategic actions - Foresight approach can provide long-term and shared SWOT (Evaluation ex-ante) |
| Programme management and project selection | Foresight approach can be a criteria of eligibility the programme / can be promoted by actions in a programme / can be a pilot action launched by the Commission (ex : RITTS-RIS initiatives) |
| Strategic follow-up | Foresight approach can develop new indicators |

⁹ Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013, 05/07/2005

¹⁰ As an illustration, the word "foresight" was quoted several times in the Community Strategic Guidelines of July 2005 with RTDI issues and with capacity building tools (monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment).

The need to enhance national and regional RDT capacities (...) should be encouraged by regional 'foresight' and other regional strategic planning methods, involving regular and systematic dialogue with key stakeholders. (...) actions in RTD should be aligned with EU RTD policy and the needs of regions in question. In terms of method, these need to be based on a sound analytical approach, such as foresight; as well as use of indicators, such as patents; human resources in RTD; location of private and public research institutions; and on the existence of clusters of innovative businesses (p17)

Support good policy and programme design: monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, through studies, statistics, expertise, and foresight, support for interdepartmental coordination and dialogue between relevant public and private bodies (p19)

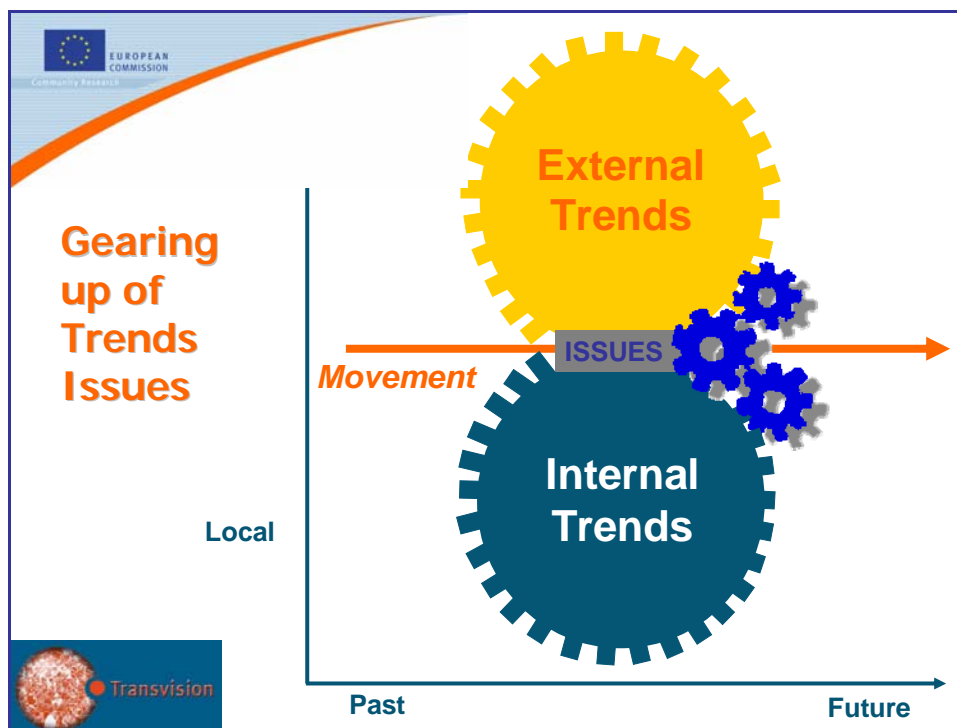
3. Foresight activities and specific challenges of European territories

Regions are considered as a central target of the Cohesion Policy for European actions. *The European Union is one of the most prosperous economic zones in the world. Since the accession of 10 new Member States on 1 May 2004, it has the power of an internal market and the human potential of more than 450 million citizens. But economic and social disparities among its Member States and among its regions weaken its dynamism overall. These disparities are twice as great in the Europe of the Twenty-five, with its 254 regions, than they were in the Europe of the Fifteen.*

In short, Europeans do not all have the same advantages in the face of the challenge of globalisation, depending on whether they live in a region that is prosperous or one that is lagging behind with respect to development, a dynamic or depressed area, a city or the countryside, a peripheral or isolated area, or one of the key economic centres of the Union. (...) the Community acts to strengthen its economic and social cohesion and specifically to reduce the gaps among levels of development in the various regions.¹¹

The future of a region in fact depends both :

- on its national, European and global environment, as much as the external drivers (major trends and uncertainties) that have a particular impact on the region,
- and on its own dynamic resulting from internal drivers, shaping actors and factors.



¹¹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/intro/working3_en.htm

Within that permanent interactivity between globalisation and regional/local specificities, foresight can be used to anticipate what may happen within a specific region according to long term external and internal factors; it can also be used to launch a process whereby the actors of the region build a shared vision and adopt a common strategy to achieve it.

Concretely, we can identify three applications where foresight could play a role.

Firstly, foresight could be a **support tool to decision-making for regions faced with global issues**. For instance what will be the energy effects on a regional economy based strongly on the logistics industry or how can regions organise themselves to reach the goal of 3%?

Secondly, foresight could also be employed to **elaborate territorial visions in the framework of INTERREG programmes**. Indeed, in the last programming period (2000-2006), transnational co-operation programmes undertaken in specific areas such as North West Europe¹², Baltic Sea Area, North Sea Area, etc. have developed spatial visions.¹³ Unfortunately, their effects were limited because their results were not taken into account, neither in related regional policies nor even in the European process. This type of exercises on territorial visions could be promoted in the next Objective 3 "territorial co-operation."

Thirdly, foresight studies and approaches could be further developed through **the ESPON-European Spatial Planning Observation Network** work programme. The ESPON programme is implemented in the framework of INTERREG III¹⁴. It aims to structure a permanent system of observation for the European territory. It is based on different elements: a diagnosis of the principal territorial trends, difficulties and potentialities at EU scale, a cartographic picture of the major territorial disparities and of their respective intensity, a number of territorial indicators and typologies along with some integrated tools and appropriate instruments to improve the spatial co-ordination of sector policies.

Over recent years futures studies and their use were quite limited. We can only note the study about "spatial scenarios and orientations in relation to the ESDP and EU Cohesion Policy (2004-06)".¹⁵ For the next period, it would be interesting to increase the foresight approach, not only at a global level as has been the case until now but more on a regional or local scale with the involvement of stakeholders acting at those levels of governance.

¹² The Interreg IIB Northwest Europe Managing Committee has established a Spatial Vision Working Group to take forward the agenda set out in the 2001 "Spatial Vision for North West Europe" Document. This document is available at <http://www.nweurope.org/page/document.php?p=143>. The "Spatial Vision" identified a shared agenda for spatial development among the countries of northwest Europe, and made a major contribution to the objectives of the Interreg IIB NWE Programme.

¹³ INTERRACT organized a seminar about this thematic: "Strategic thinking in INTERREG development: Spatial visions and scenarios", 27.02. - 28.02. – Milan. <http://www.interact-eu.net/227138/557939/597625/967002>

¹⁴ <http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/objective/index.html>

¹⁵ http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/projects/cross_thematic/cross_thematic_134.html

4. Specific fields of territorial development for foresight application

The next programming period of Structural funds has listed a number of themes according to each objective.

Eligible themes for each objective of the Structural funds¹⁶

| Objectives | Thematics | |
|---|--|--|
| Convergence | innovation environment/risk prevention accessibility; infrastructure | human resources administrative capacity |
| Regional competitiveness and employment | Innovation environment/risk prevention accessibility | European Employment Strategy |
| European territorial co-operation | innovation environment/risk prevention accessibility | culture, education |

Based on this priority list, we mention hereafter some specific fields of territorial development where foresight could have a more specific role¹⁷.

Although foresight could be useful for all the themes listed, there are obviously some critical future issues for all levels - European Union, Member States and regions - on which a priority on foresight could enter into play.

- **Building clusters of regions:** Foresight could be used to promote and develop clusters of regions based on the company clusters approach.

- **Regional impacts of demographic trends:** Europe is strongly concerned by demographic changes (population ageing, decreasing fertility, etc.), and its consequences are very important. Programmes of work on these critical issues focus on the national level and on financial effects. However, the regional consequences of this trend are diverse and specific, and the answers need to be adapted to local situations.

The fourth report of cohesion will address this question in depth.

- **Regional issues of energy sector evolution:** regional development is mainly based on fossil energy but evolutions in the energy sector (price increase, etc.) already have and will have increasing effects at local level which should be taken into greater account in the transformation of economic development;

- **Sustainable development integration:** this question, which has been a bit forgotten in the Cohesion Policy Guidelines, will become central in the forthcoming years. The consequences of climate changes will be more and more noticeable. Of particular note is the Spanish awareness about the water management. Work programmes at regional level should be reinforced on this subject because of the strong specialisation of many regions which need a long period to adapt their economic structure.

- **Regional development role of urban poles:** the role of urban poles is of growing importance for the organisation and development of the territories (economically, culturally,...). These poles have the legitimacy to take actions and a real political

¹⁶ PowerPoint: Investing in Europe's Member States and regions, After the European Council's Agreement on the Financial Perspectives: Putting EU Cohesion Policy into practice 2007-2013, January 2006, European Commission - Regional Policy Directorate-General, http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/funds/2007/index_fr.htm

¹⁷ Working meeting with DG REGIO representatives, March 10, 2006.

weight. The Structural Funds approach, until now, was “infra-urban” oriented (URBAN¹⁸ for instance). As the next programming period integrates urban policy into the mainstream policy, the reflection on the role of cities on regional development could be updated.

- Cultural issues of regional development, ICT development,...

Conclusions

The main challenge raised by this paper is to develop the right bridges between foresight and action by the local and regional stakeholders in order to derive the most benefit from public resources, and especially through the Structural Funds.

The work programmes of existing platforms of knowledge and actors launched at the European level should be steered towards three priorities in order to undertake awareness initiatives towards regions and decision-makers at three levels :

- Awareness actions of regional decision-makers to take an active part in existing initiatives, networks of experiences (Blueprints, Mutual Learning Platform, Innovating Regions in Europe, RegStrat project of KnowReg 2 initiative, etc); these hybrid working parties should support the bridge between foresight and strategy which we have attempted to address here;
- Reinforcement of the whole range of regional capacity building tools at regional level (knowledge platforms, evaluation, benchmarking... foresight); foresight should become a tool of among other strategy policy tools;
- Bridging FP7 foresight activities to regional actors and their respective policy programmes.

In that perspective to support an enhanced use of foresight by decision makers in the different fields of territorial development and at the different levels of governance, it is an enormous challenge for regions to be able to undertake a renewed foresight with innovative inputs for a sustainable society development.

¹⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/urban2/index_fr.htm