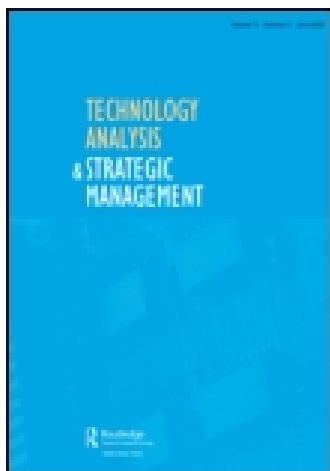


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EDITORIAL

Impacts and implications of future-oriented technology analysis for policy and decision making*

Most of the papers in this special issue were presented at the Third International Seville Conference on Future-Oriented Technology Analysis (FTA) that took place in October 2008. They address a wide variety of issues in FTA including methods and policy and governance impacts with discussions and demonstrations at the regional and corporate levels.

Andersen and Borup's paper addresses the issue of foresight and strategy processes of national research councils and research programmes. It is based on a study of strategy processes in national research councils and programmes, and the challenges faced by their strategy activities. The authors analyse the strategy processes of the Danish Technical Research Council and the Danish Energy Research Programme and find that the impact of foresight exercises can be improved with a better understanding of the traditions and new challenges faced by such organisations. Also that a more formal use of foresight elements could improve the legitimacy and impact of the strategic considerations of research councils and research programmes.

Glod, Duprel, and Keenan review the conduct and immediate impacts of a recently completed two-year national technology foresight exercise conducted in Luxembourg. The paper covers the evolution of the foresight exercise over its two-year life span, highlighting the different meanings given to the exercise by different stakeholder groups as the process unfolded and interim results were made known. It highlights the underlying tensions present in those foresight exercises that explicitly attempt to set national priorities. By doing so, the paper draws lessons not only for other small countries and regions hoping to use foresight, but also highlights principles for using foresight for priority setting more generally.

Weber et al. discusses the trade-offs between policy impacts of FTA with the experience gained from the innovation policy foresight and strategy process conducted in the city of Vienna. The paper gives a comprehensive review of the foresight and the assessment of its impacts on policy. With the case of the city of Vienna, it is demonstrated that short-term, medium-term and long-term success of policy translation may vary. The case analysis indicates that the outputs and outcomes of the foresight and strategy process were successfully translated into policy decisions immediately after the exercise. However, as a result of the critical and systemic assessment of the process the

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authors conclude that the short-term success of the policy impact was at the expense of medium- to long-term impact that remained limited as a result of the factors associated with the novelty of the ideas/controversies involved in the process, which became evident sometime later.

Jenssen discusses the challenges of inclusivity in a participative foresight process in terms of achieving genuinely democratic decision making. The paper introduces the concept of 'stakeholder image', which is associated with the inherent characteristics of specific social groups from socio-economic, cognitive and political perspectives. The main question in the paper is how to draw images for different social constituencies so that they can be involved in a foresight process representing a stakeholder group. A municipal foresight activity in Lundal is described to illustrate how an image for young people was created to endow them to be represented as stakeholders in the process.

Salo, Brummer, and Könnölä describe and analyses *FinnSight 2015*, a joint foresight exercise that took place in Finland and that would provide inputs for the country's national strategy, foster collaboration between the two main funding agencies – the Academy of Finland and the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes) – and promote foresight and innovation activities at large. Such a description shows how Internet-based tools were critical to support the achievement of expected results within the tight schedule available. It also reports on the process design and what policy developments have taken place after to the publication of foresight results. The exercise has identified through its panels about 6–10 focal competence areas and, for each of these, elaborated the underpinning scientific and technological bases, relations to emerging societal and industrial needs, with illustrations of future possibilities by way of concrete manifestations (such as innovations). It is worth highlighting that the exercise has identified a competence area linked to the financial and economic crisis of 2008–09, which was driven by the recognition that Finland is strongly dependent on global developments. The objective of encouraging other actors of the R&I system to initiate foresight activities has lead to many spin-off activities, and the analysis portrayed in this paper is instructive for the planning of large-scale foresight exercises that need to serve high-level policy objectives subject to demanding time constraints and expectations.

The above papers, a selected subset representing the themes¹ of the 2008 FTA Conference, offer a clear insight that smarter policy and corporate decision-making processes are needed to deal with recent crisis and the threat of disruptive changes. Changes within society and nature are happening at a much higher speed than current institutions and organisations are able to cope with. Business as usual approaches are not capable of addressing these challenges. Smart decision making linked to the ability to innovate calls for the anticipation and exploration of future directions through a societal debate within policy making, and by involving different stakeholder groups at corporate decisions. The ability to design adaptive processes is therefore linked to the recognition that there is a need to introduce into processes of government and business decision making a much stronger orientation and capability to address the future in a more systematic way.

Ozcan Saritas, Cristiano Cagnin, Attila Havas and Ian Miles

Note

1. Reflecting the 2008 FTA Conference emphasis on impacts and implications of FTA for policy and decision making, during the conference posters and papers were presented within five different themes including: (1) Methods and tools contributing to FTA; (2) The use and impact of FTA for policy and decision making; (3) FTA in research and innovation; (4) FTA and equality: new approaches to governance; and (5) FTA in security and sustainability.