



FROM ORACLES TO DIALOGUE

“Exploring new ways to explore the future”

The Final Conference of the COST A22 Project

National Technical University, Athens, Greece 9-11 July 2007

<http://www.costa22.org/conference/>

conference@costa22.org

INTRODUCTION

Foresight is a growing area of professional activity. Its application ranges from strategy development to the raising of the general public's awareness of developments that are likely to influence society's future. Common to all use of foresight, however, is the structuring of knowledge about complex issues into manageable elements so that these issues can be understood better and more informed decisions can be made.

This conference will address aspects of foresight that the organisers (COST Action A22) feel should demand special attention. These aspects are:

- Research and development of foresight methodology: currently there is an imbalance between the high level of operational use of foresight and the relatively low level of research and development of its methodology. Addressing a number of specified methodological issues in the conference would serve to enhance the quality of foresight practice.
- Communication of and co-operation on foresight expertise and experience among researchers and practitioners is improving but most takes place within disciplinary and thematic boundaries. More cross-disciplinary communication would enhance learning and the development of methodological aspects of foresight.

COST A22

This conference is organised by the COST A22 network 'Foresight Methodologies – Exploring New Ways to Explore the Future'. COST A22 is an action in the domain 'Individuals, Society, Culture and Health (INSOCH)' of COST, an intergovernmental framework for European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research. The main objective of the Action is to develop certain aspects of foresight methodology so as to ensure systematic use and optimum benefit. This is done within the framework of a European Network for Foresight Methodology that facilitates communication and co-operation among researchers and practitioners. More information is available on our website at <http://www.costa22.org>

IMPORTANT DATES

June 7th

Authors' delivery of paper deadline to conference@costa22.org
(later deliveries will not be included in the proceedings)

June 7th

Registration and payment at early bird rate (Late registration: € 300)

July 9th 09:30 Conference starts

July 10th Conference and conference dinner

July 11th 13:00 Conference closes

PROGRAMME

The conference will be organised around the following themes or strands:

1. Theoretical bases for foresight methodologies

(How can foresight methods be more robust?)

The results of foresight activities have serious consequences for policy and strategy. Such activities need to be methodologically sound. This strand of the conference is concerned with theoretical bases for foresight methodology. This contrasts with the other strands which are more concerned with an elaboration of methodologies, descriptions of methods used and the rigour with which methodologies are applied. Foresight activities have derived their current, often implicit, methodologies from a range of disciplines and practices, most notable being Futures Studies, which itself embraces a variety of episteme.

If the field is to develop conceptually and professionally, underlying methodologies need to be developed and improved. This strand of the conference invites contributions that strengthen foresight methodologies through a consideration of the links between theory and methodology. For example, the working group has considered some of the methodological implications of counter-factual reasoning, social constructionism and actor-network theories, vision theory, reflexivity, and also the effects of methodological design and choices.

New contributions to this debate are welcome. These may be derived from Futures Studies and Foresight communities as reflections and theorisation from practice, or from the re-examination of important literature from a contemporary perspective, or from research domains such as complexity, sociology and philosophy that may help us understand, theorise and formulate our attempts to comprehend, produce and protect the future.

2. Identifying Seeds of Change

(How can we spot threats and opportunities early?)

Emerging issues in the form of weak signals, potential surprises, seeds of change, etc., constitute particular challenges as they combine multiple factors in domains of which, typically, the stakeholders concerned by such changes to the landscape are also often, part. The identification of these issues and planning for their eventuality is the central focus of many, if not most, foresight activities.

A particular concern here is to identify points of vulnerability, i.e. parts of the system that are subject to sudden, discontinuous change. Areas of opportunities, in turn, may look easier to

suggest, but strong biases due to wishful influence on observers' judgment have to be overcome. Seeds of change issues correspond therefore to processes that require particular methodological creativity and consistency.

There will always be events and developments that are unexpected, due to three types of indeterminacy — ignorance, surprise, and volition. First, insufficient information on both the current state of a system and on forces governing its dynamics (complexity issue) leads to uncertainty about possible future developments. Second, even if precise information were available, complex systems are known to exhibit unpredictable behaviour, extreme sensitivity to initial conditions, and branching behaviours at various thresholds. Finally, for most issues of interest, future events are subject to human choices that have not yet been made. All the above point to the continuing possibilities for novelty, surprise, and emergent phenomena. Techniques exist to understand better the existence and likelihood of these happenings. Various typologies and classifications of surprise, risk, uncertainty, and ignorance have been proposed to help distinguish sources and types, and to suggest how these may be addressed.

The 'seeds of change' strand of the conference therefore invites contributions that can be discussed in the best constructive manner. These contributions should elaborate on developments in methodologies, tools and methods that help to identify, distinguish, understand and evaluate emergent phenomena, as well as contributions that problematise or theorise conceptions of 'seeds of change'.

3. Integrating Narratives and Numbers

(How can we make best use of different forecasting and modelling techniques?)

Many foresight studies involve the use of both qualitative and quantitative scenarios. This strand of the conference is partly concerned with understanding way in which the two approaches can be integrated to decrease the gap between the increasing complexity of the data presented and the analytical tools used to address this complexity. Similarly, strand also addresses the question of multi-scale analysis in foresight activities, the presentation of quantitative material to non-expert groups and the representation of discontinuities and non-linear change in quantitative analysis. Examples of contributions encouraged, such as papers or workshops, with respect to foresight are:

- definition of the meaning of quality and quantity, measurable and un-measurable, subjective and objective information,
- triangulation of methods to increase the validity and reliability of the foresight exercise and to investigate the supporting role and complementarities among the various methods,
- methodological issues arising from the study of past, short-term future and distant futures,
- approaches to coping with uncertainty and ambiguity,
- communication issues involving rigor and accessibility in foresight,
- building a taxonomy of methods in foresight,
- interaction of three critical elements of foresight: methods, networking and stakeholders' needs

4. Interactions between Researchers, Decision makers, and the Public

(How do researchers, decision makers and the public learn from each other about the possibilities for the future?)

This strand concentrates on the role foresight plays in the interaction between researchers, decision makers and the broader public. Bringing together the views and expertise of different disciplines, stakeholder groups and regions can be difficult due to ignorance and prejudice. Therefore the aim is to examine how foresight analysis can be used to provide a common framework and language to promote interaction. Other areas of focus for this group will include participatory processes, theories of decision making, discourse analysis and theories of communication and negotiation.

We invite proposals for scientific papers or workshops that address the following issues in a foresight framework - or the interaction between them:

Dialogue: The contribution can address whether dialogue as a two-way communication can establish the content of foresight processes. The focus should be on the mutual exchange of ideas, learning, problem structuring and solving. Dialogue across disciplines and institutions can also be addressed.

Dissemination: The contributions can address how to inform different stakeholders on the process, content and outcome of foresight. The focus can be on communication concerning the foresight exercise, and how dissemination can lead (or not) to action (policies, programs, decisions etc.), or to reach out to wider society in order to inform and achieve legitimacy.

Vision: The contribution can address how images of desirable futures have been developed in foresight processes, and whether visions have played an important role in foresight exercises. Moreover, how stakeholders have used visions in an attempt to inspire people towards action and promote change by targeting potential change agents and/or mobilising resources.

REGISTRATION FEE

The early bird registration fee of €250 will cover lunches, coffee and the proceedings.

There will be a reduced fee for students coming from the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

Student fee is applicable only if the student presents the paper herself /himself and will be €25 for students as first authors and €50 for students as co-authors. A **prize for the best young researcher** (under 35) will be awarded . For faculty members or researchers from the countries listed above the fee will be 100 Euros.

All attendees, including speakers and session chairs, must register and pay the registration fee.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

The submission of abstracts is closed.

LANGUAGE

The official language of the conference will be English.

VENUE

The conference will be hosted by the National Technical University of Athens (Department of Geography and Regional Planning), Athens, Greece

ACCOMMODATION

Information about hotels and prices is available at <http://www.costa22.org/conference>

ABOUT ATHENS

No need to say why Athens is a place worth visiting all over the year. In Athens you are standing at a crossroads of cultures, colours and civilisations, you feel the strength of history, you may also discover an evolutionary process of thought, influence and experience, but also the warmth of being in the southernmost part of Europe, A city that despite being rich in history has a population, huge in its diversity, that moves towards the future.

That's why Athens was chosen to host the ***COST A22 final conference***:

As a tourist in Athens you could visit an abundance of sites:

Athens is full of archaeological sites and monuments of distinctive prestige and charm, on which all known periods of its long-standing [history](#) have left their mark. Visitors have the opportunity to make a unique "journey" through the rare "mosaic" of historic and cultural memory which has left an indelible mark on every region of the country and effortlessly highlights the manifold manifestations of Greek culture to date.

Throughout the year, but especially during summer, hundreds of cultural events are held and scores of bigger or smaller festivals are being organised, involving all forms of art. Major Greek and foreign artists take part in these events, presenting works covering a wide range of art production (classical and modern).

Some of the most important events are held under the auspices of [the Hellenic Festival](#) that, during the summer months, organises the Athens Festival, the Epidaurus Festival (theatre) and "Musical July" (in Epidaurus), which are considered to be among the most significant art festivals of the European continent.

Of particular interest are the events held at the [Athens Concert Hall](#), which boasts one of the most modern concert halls in the world.

Highly interesting are the productions of the [Greek National Opera](#) during both winter and summer seasons. As for the theatre, apart from private companies and the [Municipal and Regional Theatres](#), the [National Theatre of Greece](#) in Athens stages very interesting plays.

More specific information will be provided by the local organization on request.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Steering Committee:

Kristian Borch, Risoe National Laboratory (Denmark)
Peter De Smedt, Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering (Belgium)
Ted Fuller, University of Teesside (United Kingdom)
Maria Giaoutzi, National Technical University of Athens (Greece)
Jari Kaivo-oja, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration (Finland)
Sandro Mendonca, Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa (Portugal)
Bartolomeo Sapio, Fondazione Ugo Bordoni (Italy)

Local Organiser: Maria Giaoutzi, National Technical University of Athens (Greece)

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Adrian Curaj, National University Research Council, Romania
Aharon Hauptman, Tel-Aviv University, Israel
Ana Morato Murillo, Fundación OPTI, Spain
Attila Havas, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary
Bartolomeo Sapio, Fondazione Ugo Bordoni, Italy
Dale Rothman, The Macaulay Institute, United Kingdom
Edita Nemcová, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia
Erik Terk, Estonian Institute of Future Studies, Estonia
Erik W estholm, Institute for Futures Studies, Sweden
Éva Hideg, Budapest University of Economics Sciences and Public Administration, Hungary
Florin Filip, Romanian Academy, Romania
Georgi Angelov, Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria
Göran Nilsson Axberg, Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden
Harry Kogetsidis, Intercollege, Cyprus
Jan Erik Karlsen, Stavanger University College, Norway
Jari Kaivo-Oja, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland
Jennifer Cassingena Harper, Malta Council for Science and Technology, Malta
Josep A. Rodriguez Diaz, Universidad Barcelona, Spain
Karel Klusacek, Technology Centre ASCR, Czech Republic
Karl-Heinz Simon, University of Kassel, Germany
Krista Loogma, Tallinn Pedagogical University, Estonia
Kristian Borch, Risø National Laboratory, Denmark
Laurent Mermet, ENGREF, France
Maria Giaoutzi, National Technical University of Athens, Greece
Peter De Smedt, Research Centre of the Flemish Government, Belgium
Philip van Notten, The Netherlands
Pierre Rossel, EPFL-Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Switzerland
Ruud van der Helm, Independent Futurist, The Netherlands
Sandra Dingli, University of Malta, Malta
Sandro Mendonca, Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa (Portugal)
Sari Söderlund, Finland Futures Research Centre, Finland
Serge Stalpers, Wageningen University, The Netherlands
Ted Fuller, University of Teesside, United Kingdom
Ulrik Jørgensen, Technical University of Denmark, Denmark
Yair Sharan, Tel-Aviv University, Israel
Zdenek Hejda, Technology Centre ASCR, Czech Republic