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Bridging Science and Policy: the Role of Strategic Foresight in Estonia

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The role of strategic foresight

- Strategic foresight has gained considerable currency in policy and academic circles during the last decades.
- Foresight in policy-making implies involvement of considerable number stakeholders with heterogeneous understanding of its role.
- The heterogeneity goes beyond traditional debates among different schools of thought concerning design and implementation.
- This presentation explores the role of strategic foresight on the basis of Foresight Centre in Estonia.



Supply and demand for foresight

- Experience on the basis of domestic policy-making with members of parliament and other policy-makers as key stakeholders.
- An attempt to develop policy scenarios in collaboration with various European think-tanks.



Twin deficits

- A mismatch between supply and demand.
 - A significant gap in understanding of the nature of foresight emerges between heavy users and general policy-making community.
- Some findings on the basis of our main method - scenario planning,
 - Scenario planning is often confused with forecasting and prediction.
 - Scenarios are sometimes seen as mutually non-exclusive policy options which all can be implemented.
 - Policy-makers tend to see scenarios as positive and negative depending on their preferences and ideological leanings.
 - Confusion about key drivers in scenario planning and whether key drivers can be shaped by policy-makers or not.
 - Policy-makers often assume that scenarios already include suggestions and recommendations for implementation of their favorable scenarios .



Derived demand

- The "demand" for foresight is a derived demand, i.e. it depends ultimately on the demand for knowledge and policy insights that foresight helps to generate;
- There is little or no demand for foresight for its own sake.
- Many alternatives are available, particularly in a „post-truth“ era.



Supply-side implications

- Improved communication for overcoming deficits in understanding.
- Involvement of policy-makers in various steps of foresight processes.
 - Such as project steering committees where various steps of research process are elaborated.
- Focus on education for tackling limited understanding and unrealistic expectations.
 - Educational events for policy-makers where nuts and bolts of various foresight methods are explored.
 - Alternative methods and their pros and cons should be discussed in social science classes at universities.



Thank you!

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