

Foresight and territorial dynamics

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Abstract *The development of any region or territory stems from its own dynamic nature. Economic activity and employment are stimulated by the number of local initiatives plus the cross-fertilisation of those same initiatives. Globalisation, external constraints and technological change are therefore not really obstacles to be overcome but rather opportunities to be seized. In our experience, participatory foresight exercise using simple and appropriate methods has proved to be a powerful lever for promoting territorial dynamics.*

Given the overwhelming popularity of the term, globalisation should be defined here as integration within the major regions of the world. Yet integration in those regions may not be all that new; for example, French companies may well export 25 per cent of their production, but the fact is that the remaining 75 per cent of their production is consumed in France. Moreover, 70 per cent of our exports go to Western European countries where social conditions are comparable to our own. In all, 93 per cent of European production is consumed within Europe. These figures give us some perspective when considering the impact of globalisation on our economies and remind us that the causes of our difficulties are mainly internal.

Indeed all European countries are subject to the same external constraints, yet unemployment rates are three times higher in Spain (15 per cent) than they are in Portugal (under 5 per cent). The same holds true of areas within the same country, for example, the unemployment rate in some areas such as the Pays de Vitry in France is one-third that of the Valenciennais area. So let us stop making the globalisation of technology or "critical size" either scapegoat or panacea;

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instead we should take a hard look at our own responsibilities and capacity for initiative.

An area creates development through the economic dynamism of its labour force or assets. The more numerous and enterprising the force is, the healthier the area will be. Unfortunately, rural France is shrinking while urban France is exploding. Unless there is some change of course, the Parisian region and a few metropolitan regions will soon be surrounded by a vast cemetery of French provinces. Yet it is possible to adopt a different territorial development policy. New communication and rapid transport technologies make it possible to achieve greater social cohesion at a lower cost.

A global vision for 1001 local solutions

Areas open up to globalisation more successfully if they have deep roots, for this process heightens an area's need to affirm its distinct cultural and local identity. Globalisation and local cultures interact and mutually enrich one another. "Going global" does not mean losing but rather cultivating what makes an area different. In other words, it requires a global vision to find 1,001 local solutions.

Local development is not made possible by infrastructure and even less so by subsidies, which at best can only support it. For example, Sainte Sigolène, in the Haute-Loire region, has become one of France's most important plastics centres despite its remote location and lack of a railway connection. The key to local development lies really in individuals and organisations. Everything depends on their ability to pool their energies in common projects rather than working against each other, for an area achieves strength



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though unity not divisiveness, and as the American expression goes, a house divided cannot stand. Society cannot be changed by decree; the doors to change must be opened from within and from below, as Chaize (1992) has so aptly put it.

Herein lies an important message for policy makers: instead of imposing top-down solutions that have no effect, they should base their actions on what works in the field; in other words, see how reality can surpass fiction.

“The idea of paying young graduates to acquire initial occupational experience was excellent”

The French Government’s CIP initiative (the “occupational work-experience contract”) provides a typical example of policy from above. The idea of paying young graduates to acquire initial occupational experience was excellent, but it was seen as establishing a sub-minimum wage for young graduates and was therefore rejected. Instead, the project should have been presented as a work-experience grant or bursary rather than a sub-minimum salary. Despite the negative press and apparent failure of the CIP, the regions still managed to achieve at a lower level what had proved impossible to do from the top down. In Poitou-Charentes, the regional authorities established a system equivalent to the CIP called “bridges to employment” and in the Brittany Region a “work-experience cheque” for young graduates was introduced. In short, it is not ideas that are lacking but methods for putting them into practice.

One lesson from experience: before undertaking an initiative, why not begin by consulting those who have succeeded or failed in similar projects? The advantage of establishing a network of local development initiatives in order better to capitalise on others’ experience becomes crystal clear.

Surveying and comparing experiences

Everywhere, people come together to carry out projects, yet only some succeed. Why is this so? What prevents certain regions from succeeding and what changes must they make? The attempt to answer these questions led to the idea of asking dynamic people who have initiated projects and experiments to compare their experiences. This is what we did in 1996 when the Minister of Labour, Jacques Barrot, entrusted us with an informal mission on activity and employment (Godet and Pacini, 1996). We submitted the following five observations to the government:

- (1) individuals and organisations are the decisive factors;
- (2) activity creates employment;
- (3) working creates employability and upgrades skills;

- (4) initiative and innovation create activity;
- (5) support (e.g. consultation and guidance) increases the chances of success.

At the conclusion of this mission, a National Steering Committee for Local Development Initiatives was established in order to bring together the dozens of actors and heads of networks who interact in the field and are involved in initiatives (economic, social, cultural, private or public) that are often, but not always, complementary. The National Steering Committee, acting as a “network of networks”, compiled more than one thousand local initiatives, which it screened and evaluated, ultimately selecting a group of 70 remarkable initiatives that deserve to be spread or distributed as models of good practice. The objective was to encourage the spread and multiplication of these initiatives almost as if they were weeds that could take root in many spots.

The key role of creation

Activity creates employment. This means that innovation and entrepreneurship must be encouraged both within existing businesses and through business creation to develop new activities. In France, according to the APCE (Agency for Business Creation), nearly 40 per cent of new firms are created by the unemployed “job seeker”. This is also true of the long-term unemployed, who create businesses proportionately to their numbers among the unemployed as a whole (roughly 40 per cent). The survival rate of the businesses started by unemployed entrepreneurs is the same as that of entrepreneurs as a whole. Obviously unemployment acts an incentive to entrepreneurship and not as a handicap to entrepreneurs who, as they become involved in their projects, no longer think of themselves as being marginalised or casualties of the labour market. This is what we observed in Vendôme at Ismer (an institute for training entrepreneurs), which has a success rate of 80 per cent. Most of the trainees, who were generally long-term unemployed, ultimately found another job; 40 per cent created their own self-employed activity and 40 per cent did not create a business but became employable again because of their involvement in their project and found a job after they left Ismer. The Ismer experience shows, once again, that participation upgrades skills and promotes employability.

Developing new activities

Initiatives to develop new activities must be encouraged. With its “dormant projects” programme, the Maison des Professions du Nord du Pas de Calais proved that dynamic enterprises were a good place to start[1]. In Lorraine, the Regional Association for the Development of New Activities (ARDAN) developed a procedure for supporting projects that is used as a model in other regions, and has even received ISO 9001 certification. The experience of ARDAN, which has

covered some 3,500 projects over a ten-year period, also confirms the appeal of having incubator enterprises provide support to fledgeling entrepreneurs.

Since its foundation by the Abbé Grégoire, the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM) has had as its mission the teaching of new and useful sciences. The idea of creating a training/development programme for entrepreneurs within its network of associated regional centres is fully consistent with this tradition of innovation.

Orchestrating territorial dynamics

The objective is not to replicate what exists but to capitalise on the 1,001 local initiatives of this kind throughout France and Europe and create synergies between them. This mission of networking private and public local development networks has been entrusted to Jean-Claude Bouly, General Director of ARDAN, in his capacity as an associate professor at the CNAM. The head of the National Steering Committee for Local Development Initiatives is responsible for orchestrating territorial dynamics through local development initiatives in the framework of the National Centre for Entrepreneurship.

It is necessary for regions to prepare for the future through innovation and for change through experimentation while building on their roots. The river of global change will have its source in 1,001 local initiatives. And we must bear in mind this message of hope: the best cure for unemployment, even long-term unemployment, is involvement in a project. Involvement in a project implies responsibility rather than assistance. We must no longer do something for but rather work with the unemployed.

Participatory foresight with simple tools

People need the future; in other words, they need hope. This collective need is best expressed if channelled through some form of method. Surprisingly, this corresponds to what psychiatrist Sutter (1983) meant when he observed that people's main and almost sole occupation was to live their future in advance.

Let us give two quick reminders here: action without a goal is meaningless and foresight leads to action. In our experience, the complexity of the problems and the need to address them collectively call for methods that are as rigorous and participatory as possible to enable those involved to recognise the problems and agree on solutions.

Although foresight analysis requires a rigorous approach to address complex problems, the tools must also be simple enough to be easily used. Since the mid-1980s, the approach of Strategic Prospective Workshops has proven its effectiveness in meeting these criteria (appropriation, simple tools, rigour).

Before undertaking the more or less onerous exercise of forward-looking strategic analysis, it is advisable to take time to reflect on the nature of the problem posed and the

approach to be used to find and implement solutions. This will make it possible to avoid wasting time on false problems and to frame the problem clearly, which is half the battle towards finding a solution. When beginning this process of reflection, which can often involve dozens of people for many months, it is also useful to plan that the overall procedure follow a timetable of intermediate objectives and deadlines and by choosing methods that are not only adapted to the nature of the problem identified, but also to the time and resource constraints of the futures-thinking group.

Whatever the procedure adopted, it is useful to begin this collective reflection process with a two-day seminar devoted to training participants in strategic prospective analysis. This seminar enables participants to discover and familiarise themselves with the main concepts and tools of collective strategic prospective analysis. The purpose of this seminar, in which several dozen persons may be involved, is the total immersion of participants in foresight thinking aimed at strategic action. Such workshops try to frame the problem clearly and dispel any prejudices and stereotypes that distort perception of the issues. They make it possible collectively to define and prioritise the future challenges facing the enterprise in its national and international environment. At the end of these two days, the participants are able to specify the priorities, objectives, timetable and method to be used to organise their strategic prospective reflection (Leroy-Therville, 2000).

“... without a method, there can be no common language, exchange or consistent framework for ideas.”

Although there is no single, set method for this process, it is indispensable that a method be chosen for the meetings to be effective, for without a method, there can be no common language, exchange or consistent framework for ideas. However, the method is not an end in itself, and the results produced must not be followed slavishly, for it is only a tool to help ensure the relevance of the reflection process. A rigorous method is also an invaluable factor for promoting the cohesiveness and motivation of the group, as are the intermediary results, which should be disseminated.

Finally, the method should be chosen in the light of the problems identified (cf. the initial seminar) and the time constraints, and with a concern for communicating the results. The tools should be sufficiently simple to be easily used by participants.

A few lessons from the Basque Region 2010 Exercise

The territorial foresight exercises done for the Basque Region with a horizon of 2010 is exemplary in more ways than

one[2]. They were started in 1999 with the support of the Datar (federal French agency for futures studies) and with the participation of active territorial forces in workshops which brought over 100 people to St Palais (elected representatives, economic agents, academics) for two days. These endeavours led to the publication of entire pages in the regional *Sud-Ouest* newspaper and continued to do so for some two years. A structural analysis was carried out and scenarios were drafted. The group involvement process led to an outline of the development of the territory and serve as a reference to this very day.

We thus were able to test in the field during the Basque exercise the main idea expressed by Gabillet (1999) throughout his work entitled *Savoir Anticiper*; in other words, "the same tools, the same mental and intellectual processes enable a collectivity, a group, even an isolated individual to project itself/himself into the future". The Charter of the Basque exercise was simply transposed from the one we had helped create for the Mides Operation at Renault in 1984. The same collective and participatory methods applied

to the 1992 Basque Country exercise and almost the same rules of the game as at Renault.

Recommendations for forward-looking territorial analysis

Since I have had the opportunity of becoming either familiar or directly involved with a number of forward-looking territorial exercises (Basque Country 2010, Reunion Island, Lorraine 2010, Ardennes, Ille-et-Vilaine, Pyrénées Atlantiques, etc.), I would like to share some of the lessons learnt from their successes and failures (see sidebar "Basque Region 2010").

First, certain conditions must be met to ensure the credibility, usefulness and quality of a forward-looking territorial analysis. It is essential that the process of contemplating an area's future not be outsourced completely.

In any study, regardless of its quality, the final report is less important than the process leading up to it. In this respect, it is important to rely on local expertise and to use

Basque Region 2010 A charter designed to put futures thinking into action (extracts)

A need, a will

In the face of an ever-changing world, what do we want for the Basque Region? That the territory change with us, without us or against us? To liberate the Basque Region from the tyranny of hazard and determinism and to restore the future as the fruit of will, some foresight was needed.

Futures-thinking exercises are no longer the domain of only a handful of specialists or the fare of large corporations only. In the case of the Basque Region, like other territories, does not want to only suffer its fate but rather to master it.

Foresight, be it for a city, region or any other unity, provides a unique opportunity to surpass the short-term constrictions and limitations and make all those involved aware of the need to change habits and behaviours in order to face change. To do that, we must rely on local expertise and use the exercise as a chance to crystallize skills that are often spread out in the region.

A state of mind

The Basque Region 2010 exercise was also a state of mind, inspired by the following:

- (1) *Opening and anticipation.* Understand better what is going on around us and know how to distinguish limits and opportunities so as to influence them or adapt to them in order to face them.
- (2) *Pluralism and cooperation:*
 - Recognize and accept our differences.
 - Take into account contradictory opinions, e.g. knowing how to listen, one of the fundamentals of cooperation.
 - Know how not to abandon one's options or responsibilities, this is the basis of relationships in the social world.
- (3) *Method and imagination:*
 - Set out the problem properly and seek to solve them.
 - Promote participation from each individual present.
 - Stimulate imagination and creativity.
 - Highlight all the possible choices, their advantages and disadvantages.
 - Associate all the actors involved at all levels of thinking and decision-making processes.

These are the principles that guarantee that a solution corresponds to both the problems and needs of those involved.

- (4) *Autonomy and responsibility:*

- Take into greater account the aspirations of the people working or active in the organisation of everyday life.
- Base authority on the capacity to motivate men, to pool their skills together.
- Define fully at every level of local life and in an organized manner, clear and measurable objectives.

These are the principles that guarantee each participant a zone of independence equal to the measure of the responsibilities that he/she is assigned.

the forward-looking exercise to trigger a process of change, at least in people's minds. The goal is not so much one of completing a forward-looking study as initiating a process of participatory reflection and discussion. Stimulating thinking on overall issues at the local level can make actors want to come together and agree to support one or more projects for an area.

The tools of business foresight can be used just as effectively in territorial forward-looking analysis since both methods aim at planning and organising a collective reflection process while they also facilitate communication and promote more creative and consistent thinking (see sidebar "The use of three colours for the three phases of foresight territorial analysis").

However, territorial analysis is more difficult than business foresight for the consultants involved. The origin and purposes of their mandate are rarely clear, the actors have many and often contradictory expectations and the financial resources are not always adequate for the objectives targeted. In short, the consultant is the perfect target when the inconsistencies become too great. The safest approach in terms of image – and the one that is simplest to communicate and easiest for consultants – is to settle for a traditional study report. Unfortunately, this solution has little operational value or lasting effect, for it ignores the fact that

unless local actors appropriate the process, it will be impossible to bridge the gap between foresight and action.

Participatory foresight and territorial governance

Although some foresight or strategic prospective documents must remain confidential, notably analyses of actors' strategies, the exercise requires that the group work together to appropriate the process itself. In this sense, each participant is an actor at all levels of the territorial collectivity. This process should prepare people mentally for the desirable changes to be made in the environment.

In the wake of various territorial futures-thinking exercises as well as the popular "governance" fashion, some "soft" concepts of both foresight and governance effectively reduced them to participatory processes for citizens. This deviation was soundly denounced in the *Libération* newspaper as an example of manipulative language from the "gurus of governance", who twist even simple words like citizen, general interest and authority (Padioleau, 2000). The whole media trial may be exaggerated and beyond further discussion once we consider the true meaning of governance; i.e. "the governing of government". Obviously governance is a real issue in its strict sense and should not be swept aside because of sloppy usage (Cannac and Godet, 2001). Citizen participation in the thinking process that leads up to collective decisions may well be desirable but it is nonetheless part of a government's administrative functions. Moreover it is an insufficient, modest means to ensure public governance. In sum, just as in the simple and irreplaceable logic of the Greek triangle, the yellow of participatory futures-thinking exercises does not lead to the green of strategic action without the blue of reflective futures-thinking analysis of the real issues, even the most annoying ones. "Strategic prospective" does not mean revolution or therapy, yet there is something in the scenario building process that led Gabillet (1999) to say that:

The waking dream scenario, once directed, functions like an idiom designed to express the unconscious experiences of various discontinuities or ruptures that each scenario may hold. The therapist seeks to unravel the hidden breakdown or discontinuity (family, marital, professional, spiritual, etc.). [...] The story told by the patient seems like a puzzle of everything that is a problem to him in terms of the unconscious. A scenario has no value in itself. It takes on meaning only in the relationship that develops between the patient who builds the scenario in his head and then expresses it and the therapist who hears and interprets it. What makes scenarios interesting is the intention to transmit to the therapist messages that are difficult to express otherwise.

We should keep in mind that reflecting on the future of a company or a territory provides a unique opportunity to go beyond short-term constraints and contradictions and make all actors at all levels aware of the need to change their

The use of three colours for the three phases of foresight territorial analysis

Using three colours (blue for "foresight", yellow for "ownership" and green for "action"), it is possible to organise forward-looking territorial analysis in three separate phases for which three types of documents can be produced:

- (1) A blue book. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the past, present and future environment of the area. On the basis of summary key figures, it includes elements of a diagnosis; it identifies problem areas and indicates probable trends, major uncertainties and possible future crises. This document, which is intended as a monographic study, can largely be outsourced to an external consultant.
- (2) Yellow books in which each operational centre makes its proposals for local action to prepare for the overall changes foreseen in the blue book (pre-activity), but also to achieve the strategic objectives and local projects (pro-activity). These yellow books can be prepared by departments in enterprises or in local and regional authorities, and embody the collective ownership of the forward-looking territorial analysis.
- (3) A green book proposing an overall strategic plan for the area of the region and city, listing each objective and the corresponding action. It is a synthesis of the blue and yellow books. This green book is a strategic document that commits leaders and elected officials. It is therefore produced under their sole responsibility.

habits and behaviour in order to face the challenges of change.

To accomplish this, it is necessary to rely on local expertise and use the foresight exercise to crystallise organisational skills that are often scattered. The role of outside consultants must be kept to a minimum. If the consultant is a specialist in the field, he may well be rejected by the group (as an obstacle to its appropriation of the process). The consultants must provide the working method, openness to the outside world and the challenge of a fresh perspective, and they must never forget that the best ideas are not their own nor even those that they suggest but the ones that they enable others to discover.

Notes

- 1 The idea is simple. The objective is to promote the development of successful businesses by making available an unemployed professional or a technical employee. The employee then creates his/her own job on the basis of a project that lay dormant in the company's files.

- 2 Although often quoted, few articles have been written on this topic notably because of the modesty of François Bourse, the main facilitator, who succeeded me in the follow-up to the initial launching seminar. The Basque exercise is nonetheless outlined in the group publication *Projectique* published by Economica in 1996, under the direction of Jean-Michel Larrasquet *et al.*

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