

## Futures of Foresight

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'speed talk' proposal for EU-SPRI 2023: *Research with Impact*

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Preferred track: Making foresight effective for next-generation STI policy:  
Exploration – Orientation – Participation

**Keywords:** Disruptive changes; New demand for foresight; New types of stakeholders; Future foresight methods and approaches

### Extended abstract

The 20s of this century have already forcefully shown that the future has become rather uncertain, and thus unstable. 'Black swan' events occur at a shocking rate: the Covid19 pandemic is not over yet while a cruel, previously unthinkable war was started in 2022 by a major geopolitical actor in Europe. The ever-stronger interconnectedness of the world challenges the resilience of many societies and economies. Wicked problems become the new normal in what appears to be the future for decision-makers.

In these evermore uncertain times, it is not only the circumstances that change. Also, the practice of foresight, used to underpin decision-making process, both in policy-making circles at different levels of governance (Havas et al. 2010) and in business circles (Gordon et al. 2020), needs to adapt.

Given the complexity, urgency, and likely fundamental impacts of the already known challenges (among others, climate change, geopolitical uncertainties and severe tensions, migration, emerging disruptive technologies, social conflicts), foresight would be even more in demand to support various decisions by politicians, policy-makers, and business people, as well as actions of other (non-decision-maker) players and citizens. The question arises, therefore: can current foresight approaches and methods meet these challenges in the next 10–15 years? What new factors might reshape i) the context, in which foresight is used, and ii) foresight itself? How do foresight practices (need to) adapt? Which drivers and trends influence these change processes? What new opportunities open up to improve the current approaches and methods, and thus increase the chance for wider and more effective use of the insights generated by foresight processes?

The way we approach these questions is separated into three steps. *First*, through desk research and based on our own experience, we will identify some major trends and drivers that might have disruptive impacts on the 'demand' for and 'supply' of foresight, as well as on its environment ('external' factors). To seek for structured answers to this question, we draw on an analytical framework following the STEEPV approach: we consider social, technical, economic, ecological, political, and value changes.

*Second*, building on these findings, we will conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews with foresight practitioners, policy analysts, policy shapers, and preferably with decision-

makers as well, to explore how these trends and drivers might change three important “ingredients” of foresight:

- Exploration: How would the ways we explore possible futures change? Which new methods are evolving? Which new demands necessitate the development and use of new methods (e.g., the question of techno-moral change (Swierstra et al. 2009) due to emerging technologies)?
- Orientation: Why and how clients would redefine their needs while searching for orientation to underpin their decisions and strategic actions? What type of new clients might emerge with which needs for orientation? How to support these rethinking – orientation and re-orientation – processes by foresight, in particular by sensemaking?
- Participation: What stakeholder groups need to be involved for more fruitful foresight processes? What new types of stakeholders might need to be ‘represented’ (e.g., ‘eclipsed’, ‘neglected’ citizens due the lack of their expertise; the nature as a stakeholder without a distinctive voice; future – especially unborn – generations; general artificial intelligence with ‘agency’?) Would we need new approaches and methods to express, include and reflect upon their aspirations and visions? Would we need new, ‘low-threshold’ participation methods to involve lay persons as active, committed participants?

*Third*, as a summary, we devise short, narrative scenarios to describe some possible futures of foresight. With those, we aim at sparking a fruitful dialogue with foresight practitioners – and preferably with potential clients of foresight as well – to reflect on the current practices of the field and the possible new requirements and opportunities.

Our proposed speed talk is not based on a ‘proper’, already funded research project. Rather, it draws on a thought experiment aimed at opening up the space and reflecting on the various challenges, opportunities, and tasks ahead of foresight practitioners. In other words, how our practices need to, and can, adapt to be prepared for the new tasks in a fast-changing environment. Overall, our expected results are directions and hypotheses for further research, as well as for thorough, systematic dialogues among the members of the foresight community, preferably involving some stakeholders as well, in particular clients of recent foresight processes and potential new clients.

This speed-talk will give a first insight into our research, its conceptual framework and methods, as well as some preliminary results from the early phase of the process.

## References

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