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Perspectives from Armenia, Canada, France, Georgia, Germany, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Futures Studies Activities in Germany: Towards a Perspective of Foresight

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In an age of globalisation and new working worlds, foresight[1] is a major challenge for policy makers, governments and businesses. Pushed by new technologies, tempestuous markets and uncertain social developments, planners have to see beyond the end of their noses in order stay in control of the situation for the years to come. This makes an extensive knowledge framework about changes in business and society indispensable, or else one risks wriggling helplessly in the snares and pitfalls of this fundamental transformation.

Acknowledging this background, it is easy to understand why foresight and future studies have played a more and more important role in Germany in the last years. One central influence furthering this development was surely the support of the European Union for foresight activities and the funds provided for research activities in the field, which seem to continue growing on the national as well as on the European level. This article presents an impression of the variety of futures studies and foresight activities in Germany, though, facing some limits of time and space, I will only be able to offer a glimpse into the field.

Key Future Issues in Germany

As the foresight scene in Germany is so diverse, it is difficult to give an overview of the main subjects that are at the centre of futures activities at the moment. Without aiming at completeness, however, one can say that subjects being discussed strongly include:

- Demographic Change: rapidly ageing and shrinking population, and the consequences for society and economy

[1] We use the term "foresight" in an open-sense (see the dominant definition "Foresight is a systematic, participatory, future-intelligence-gathering and medium-to-long-term vision-building process aimed at present-day decisions and mobilizing joint actions," Gavigan et al. 2001: V), but do not want to imply an opposition to activities that work with the term futures research or futures studies.

- Future of Bio- and Nanotechnologies
- Sustainability – with focus on energy production, climate change etc.
- Shift to Asia, transformation of markets, relocation of production sites to the East
- Knowledge Society and Economy

German Futures Scene

The German "scene" of futures studies and foresight is characterized by a "patchwork structure" of a variety of actors and activities in the field. Although there is currently no university teaching futures studies in Germany (in contrast to the situation in Finland or the USA, for example), methods and subjects of future studies are being taught in the context of other disciplines. For example, in strategic marketing at the private University of Witten-Herdecke, "trends and issue management" is taught by Prof. Liebl, which includes a section on scenario methods and the like, and Peter H. Mettler teaches at the University of Wiesbaden with his background of Societal Science and Sociology of Planning and Technology. In addition, at the Free University of Berlin there are efforts underway to establish a department for future studies ("Institut Futur," Prof. de Haan).

In general, one can say that the field is undergoing change. For example, the Academy for Technology Assessment in Baden-Württemberg was recently closed, which was one of the main institutions with public funding. On the other hand, there was a visible growth in state-funded activities (as in the process "Futur," see below), in the whole field of regional foresight as well as in the sphere of corporate foresight. One could say that one of the main recent developments seems to be the diffusion and integration of foresight into "regular" strategic and research activities, as in integration of future questions and tools into research agendas and calls for proposals by the German Federal Ministry for Research.

To name some of the most important institutions in the field, these are:

- The Office for Technology Assessment at the German Parliament (TAB) http://www.tab.fzk.de/

- Research Institutes:
  - SFZ Secretariat for Futures Studies, Dortmund, http://www.sfz.de/english/index.htm
  - IZT Institute for Futures Studies and Technology Assessment, Berlin, http://www.izt.de/english/
  - Fraunhofer Institute for Innovation and Systems Analysis ISI, http://www.isi.fhg.de/homeisi.htm
  - Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS), http://www.itas.fzk.de/home_e.htm
  - Future Technologies Consulting, German Association of Engineers (VDI-TZ), http://www.zukuenftigetechnologien.de

- There is also a number of companies specialized in foresight, trend monitoring and the like, including: Z_punkt GmbH The Foresight Company (us), Trendbüro, Zukunftsinstitut, SCMI, Prognos, FutureManagement Group, …

- And, not to be forgotten, there is a growing number of departments or individual specialists in major corporations who are concerned with Corporate Foresight, for example at Daimler Chrysler, Volkswagen, Siemens, BASF, and Deutsche Telekom.

Recent Activities in Germany (selection)

In order to give an impression of what kind of activities are being undertaken in the futures field at the moment in Germany at the moment, I will concentrate on some examples which show the variety of subjects as well as of organizational and institutional forms involved. Surely the German project that has received most of the international attention in the last years is "futur – The German

Research Dialogue" (see http://www.futur.de, English version available), conducted by the Federal Ministry for Education & Research. This large-scale process, which has involved more that one thousand participants since it started, aims at the identification of research demand, and produces as its output interdisciplinary "Lead Visions" for the Ministry. After a selection process, these are implemented in the form of new research programmes.

Another rather new but rapidly growing field is Regional Foresight Activities, where foresight is used to improve regional planning and focus this on future-oriented action. Some time ago, the "Four Motors Foresight," an EU-funded project, was conducted in Baden-Württemberg in cooperation with other European regions. At the moment, there are regional foresight activities all over Germany, from the level of individual cities up to larger scale entities such as the German Länder. Currently, Z_punkt works with two other partners in the EU-funded regional foresight project "SPIDER Project: Increasing Regional Competitiveness through Futures Research Methods" (http://www.spider-project.net). It is supported in the Regions of Knowledge Program of the European Community, and with the partners Turku School of Economics and Business Administration/Futures Research Centre (project coordinator, Finland), The Destree Institute (Wallonia, Belgium), it focuses on improving regional foresight methods for improving a region's innovation systems and competitiveness. The output will be regional visions and a concept of "future knowledge regions," wherein the research on the regions' competitiveness will back up the work on visions, using Delphi and workshop formats and methods.

Apart from these rather new developments of large-scale state-funded participatory processes and the diffusion of foresight into regional planning, there are also still the traditional forms of studies on the future. I have picked out one example, which, interestingly enough, was not produced by one of the specialist research institutes of futures studies, but by the German Federal Agency for the Environment (Umweltbundesamt) – which proves the point of futures studies' integration into regular research, planning and strategy activities. The study focuses on the future of sustainable development in Germany and works with 3 scenarios to point out options and risks analyzing consequences in different fields, such as energy and climate change, mobility and transport, tourism, industry and natural resources. The study as a whole is available only in German, but an English summary is offered on http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-daten-e/daten-e/p-1897-e.htm .

Connecting National and Global Perspectives – The Millennium Project

The German Futures scene is quite well connected to the international level, and one example of these connections is the German Node of the Millennium Project. The Millennium Project (American Council for the United Nations University) is an NGO, an international think tank working on global trends, perspectives and challenges. Annually, it produces the report "State of the Future" (see http://www.acunu.org). Z_punkt officially formed the German Node of the Millennium Project in March 2003, which spreads the results of the MP work in Germany, brings in experts from Germany for surveys, conducts its own research and, generally speaking, connects regional and global future perspectives. A Planning Committee to support the work of the Node has been founded, embracing the main futures studies actors in Germany, whose members are:

- Dr. Günter Clar, (now Steinbeis Academy, formerly European Commission, Research DG)
- Dr. Kerstin Cuhls (Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI in Karlsruhe)
- Robert Gaßner (IZT = Institute for Future Studies and Technology Assessment in Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Gerhard de Haan (Free University of Berlin, educational studies)
- Prof. Dr. Peter H. Mettler (FH Wiesbaden – University of Applied Sciences, Societal Science and Sociology of Planning and Technology)
- Dr. Axel Zweck (VDI-ZT = German Association of Engineers, Future Technologies Division, Düsseldorf).

Corporate Foresight

Recently, as Z_punkt's 2002 survey has shown, Corporate Foresight is on the rise in Germany (see http://www.z-punkt.de for a summary of the results), and more and more major corporations work with methods of future studies and foresight for their strategy or innovation development. In addition, there is a re-orientation from a technology-centred towards a more holistic perspective, as well as a tendency to use more qualitative methods and combine and link these with and to the established quantitative approaches. Practical experience as well as other sources seem to show that this is more or less the case in many other countries as well[2]. For example, the conference "in the long run" has brought together practitioners from the field from the USA and Europe, exchanging and discussing experiences (see http://www.inthelongrun.de). Representatives from companies such as Volkswagen, Deutsche Bank, Telekom, Shell and Philips Design reported on their corporate foresight activities – showing a variety of organizing forms and a growing knowledge of methods which are known, used, being improved in the process and even invented. For example, Shell works with combining scenario methods with real options analysis (Cornelius 2004: 12). Philips Design works with the concept of open innovation, moving from a technology-centred perspective to a "more human centric and social focused approach" in their foresight activities (Green 2004: 14). Deutsche Telekom uses corporate foresight in a holistic approach within their innovation strategy development (Aukes 2004: 23), while BASF continually develops and works with a number of regional as well as global scenarios (Heinzelbecker 2004). Ove Arup & Partners have developed user-centric-processes (Luebkeman 2004: 30), and Deutsche Bank works at the connection of quantitative and qualitative methodology in their project "Global Growth Centres" (Schneider 2004: 43).

Some other conferences or workshops have proven the same point of the professionalisation and growing implementation of corporate foresight, for example the two Strathclyde International Conferences on Organizational Foresight[3] (in the year 2002 and 2004) or the EU-US Scientific Seminar on New Technology Foresight[4], which also featured a number of contributions from the private sector. A further not-so-weak signal concerning this trend is the growing interest in an exchange of experiences, as evident for example in the work of a German network of practitioners (the so-called Rauchfangswerder Gespräche, co-managed by Z_punkt), or of the Association of Professional Futurists or the Corporate Foresight Network[5].

Perspectives

This rough sketch of observations from Germany implies a positive outlook of a growing future orientation, especially as it is happens in the private as well as in the public sector (and also seems to be a tendency all over Europe; see for example the activities in the field of regional foresight all over Europe[6] or the foresight initiatives in the new member states of the European Union[7]). However, foresight activities and implementation still face a number of problems and challenges. The

[2] See for example Becker (2003) for an analysis overview of corporate foresight in Europe or van der Duin (2004) for a case study from the Netherlands.

[3] See the Website of the last conference: http://www.gsb.strath.ac.uk/worldclass/foresight/2004/ .

[4] EU-US Scientific Seminar: New Technology Foresight, Forecasting & Assessment Methods in May 2004: http://www.jrc.es/home/foresight_seminar/introduction.htm. ,

[5] See the Website of the Corporate Foresight Network: http://www.corporateforesight.net/ .

[6] For an overview, see for example Keenan/Uyarra 2002, or the Website http://www.regional-foresight.de/ on "Europe's Regions Shaping the Future - the Role of Foresight."

[7] See for example eForesee, a project which wants to "address challenges faced by policy makers implementing foresight activities for smaller economies and regions": http://www.eforesee.info .

obvious tendencies for growth in public as well as private sectors call for a stronger exchange of experiences as well as for answers to the problems of integration into decision-making processes. What is interesting is that the development in the private and public sectors does have more in common than the simple tendency for growth, such as, for example, the shared growing awareness of the need to widen the horizon, the tendency to include a variety of actors in the process, and the orientation towards social and societal developments replacing a focus on technology forecasts.

There is, quite obviously, a number of gaps that need to be closed in order to face the above-mentioned challenges: the gap between the amount of already existing methodological work and the lack of knowledge about it, and also the gap between the foresight / futures research and futures studies community and their work results and its practical applications in business and public sectors[8]. The gap between the persisting "report culture" in many foresight activities and the need for action and communication on the other hand also seems a major challenge. Therefore, a major threshold for foresight, in order to grow and become even more successful – and not only in Germany – lies in the connection of the qualitative and the quantitative as well as in developing flexible yet stable frameworks for foresight and its integration into decision-making.

General Information on Z_punkt GmbH

Z_punkt GmbH The Foresight Company (http://www.z-punkt.de)

- founded in 1997 by Klaus Burmeister and Karlheinz Steinmüller
- located in Berlin, Essen and Karslruhe
- Staff of about 15 employees
- trend and futures research projects for business and institutional clients, esp. technology leaders
- clients include Deutsche Telekom AG, Bayer AG, Degussa AG, TUI etc.
- research activities for ministries, EU-funded etc.
- partner and service provider for future workers and strategists
- free English language Newsletter *Future News* informing on Foresight and Futures Research News (global view)

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[8] Bridging gaps towards the technology assessment community can be added to this list – see Malanowksi et al. 2002 for a summary of the application of technology assessment in corporations in several countries and their future perspectives. The authors also come to the conclusion that more dialogue and cooperation between the business and the scientific community is needed.

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POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM *(send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):*

- *Ms. Daheim observes that the technology-centred perspective is giving way to a more holistic perspective and that there is new interest in combining qualitative methods with the established quantitative ones – not only in Germany but also in other nations. How will this impact the use of various methodologies in futures studies – that is, which ones will be used more frequently and which ones less frequently? "Bonus question": what new future studies methodologies will emerge within the next decade?*

- *A common managerial approach, at least in some parts of the world, relies on financial statements (costs, profits, etc.) and other metrics. However, metrics typically fail to capture all of the important information and are often misleading – especially when substituted for leadership. Against this backdrop, will the new interest of client companies and government agencies in holistic perspectives and qualitative methods result in a "seismic shift" in business and government leadership, and if so, in what timeframe? (Also see other* **FUTURE*takes*** *articles on leadership, this issue and past issues.)*

- *Identify additional consequences of the renewed interest of futurists and forecasters in qualitative methods and a holistic perspective.*