

The concept of support group in the Polish National Foresight Programme „Poland 2020”

Introduction

In a country such as Poland, there may be discerned a lack of long-term thinking among decision-makers which is particularly salient in the context of striving for the Knowledge Based Economy treated as the lifeblood of Poland's development. On the other hand, however, there may be noticed a strong need for enhancing communication between politicians, scientists, business executives and the Polish society in the scope of identification of research priorities and relevant technological and social issues^{1,2}. A policy tool providing a common frame and language for reaching consensus among groups of potential stakeholders mentioned above could be foresight. According to B. Martin, *foresight is the process involved in systematically attempting to look into the longer-term-future of science, technology, the economy and society with the aim of identifying the areas of strategic research and the emerging strategic technologies likely to yield the greatest economic and social benefits*³. Another definition of foresight worth citing at length comes from a *Practical Guide* produced for

¹ *Przedsięwzięcie dotyczące realizacji Narodowego Programu Foresight „Polska 2020”*, Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego, Warszawa 2006.

² *Broszura informacyjna Pilotażowy Projekt Foresight w polu badawczym „Zdrowie i Życie”*, Ministerstwo Nauki i Informatyzacji, Warszawa 2004.

³ *UNIDO Technology Foresight Manual. Organizations and Methods*, vol. 1, Unido, Vienna 2005.

the EC-funded FOREN Project, which had set out to explore the scope for using foresight approaches in a regional setting⁴. According to the authors of the *Practical Guide* foresight is a systematic, participatory, future intelligence gathering and medium-to-long-term vision building process aimed at present-day decisions and mobilizing joint actions⁵. It should be emphasized that foresight's aim is not to replace forecasting, futures studies, or strategic planning as each of these future-oriented activities has its mutually supportive role⁶.

The application of foresight has become of considerable relevance for strengthening the transition process in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and in narrowing their competitive gap in the global economy⁷. First foresight activities at the national level in the region mentioned above were carried out by Hungary^{8,9}. Recently foresight has begun to spread to other new EU members such as Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland. The aim of this paper is to present rationales for bringing a new actor into Polish foresight debate, namely the Support Group consisting of young academics whose aim is to serve as an intermediary between Steering Committee and key executors of the foresight programme. Appointment of the Support Group for the Polish National Foresight Programme „Poland 2020” seems to be an innovative element of foresight research, especially in the social dimension, or more precisely in its participatory aspect. The authors of this article have not encountered any similar body of this kind in the existing published works about foresight at the national level^{10,11,12,13,14,15,16}. Furthermore, the concept of the Support Group could be

⁴ I. Miles i in., *The Many Faces of Foresight*, [w:] L. Georghiou (red.), *The Handbook of Technology Foresight. Concepts and Practice, Prime Series on Research and Innovation Policy*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc. Northampton 2008, p. 11.

⁵ M. Keenan, I. Miles, *A Practical Guide to Regional Foresight*, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, FOREN Network Seville 2001, p. 3.

⁶ M. Keenan, I. Miles, *A Practical Guide...*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷ P. Stanovik, M. Kos, *Technology Foresight in Slovenia*, Institute for Economic Research, Ljubljana 2005, p. 4.

⁸ R. Popper, M. Keenan, M. Butter, *2005 Mapping Report*, The European Foresight Monitoring Network, UE 2006, p. 10.

⁹ A. Havas, *Evolving foresight in a small Transition Economy: The Design, Use and Relevance of Foresight Methods in Hungary*, „Journal of Forecasting” 2003, no 22, p. 179.

¹⁰ *Unido Technology...*, op. cit., p. 19, 26, 36.

¹¹ R. Popper, M. Keenan, M. Butter, *2005 Mapping...*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹² A. Havas, *Identifying Challenges and Developing Visions Technology Foresight in Hungary*, Institute of Economics Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest 2002, p. 9.

¹³ K. Klusacek, *Technology Foresight in the Czech Republic*, the Regional Conference on TF for Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States, Vienna 2001, p. 4.

¹⁴ M. Godet, *Strategic Foresight Problems And Methods*, Laboratoire d'Investigation en Prospective, Stratégie et Organisation, Gerpa, November 2006, p. 12–15.

¹⁵ Wnioski na podstawie przeglądu strony internetowej poświęconej brytyjskiemu foresightowi, <http://www.foresight.gov.uk>, stan na dzień 9.06.2009 r.

perceived as corresponding with the newest tendencies in foresight, i.e. inclusive foresight. According to O. Saritas and D. Loveridge its aim is to widen the scope of consultation and to make foresight into a much wider social process¹⁷.

3.1. Polish National Foresight Programme

First steps towards promoting foresight at the national level were taken Poland in the fourth quarter of 2003 with the pilot study in the field of Health and Life. The selection of this research field was justified by the considerable public endorsement. Around 113 experts working in eleven thematic panels exchanged their views on the country's development. As a result of their work, there were identified 140 research subfields, reduced to 26 in the process of selection based on feasibility¹⁸. Then, identified research subfields were consulted with the opinion poll. The priority has been given to the following subfields¹⁹:

- 1) construction of the efficient screening systems,
- 2) development of prenatal care and early detection of the genetic and development defects,
- 3) development of methods and techniques of the life-saving service.

The pilot study was the first foresight exercise conducted by Poland on such a large scale; therefore it was doomed to many failures. Many of them were the result of the lack of rudimentary knowledge of the foresight methodology among the experts, experts' lack of support of the chosen methodology, lack of experts of many important disciplines related to health and life and insufficient budget for programme's realisation and promotion²⁰.

Furthermore, one of the most considerable disadvantages of the pilot study was the lack of young people (aged below 35 years old) involved in the process of its realisation. Considering it very significant factor, the authors of this paper suggested the appointment of a new body for the full Polish National Foresight Programme (conducted in three research fields, i.e., Sustainable Development, Information and Communication Technologies, Security), giving it a name „Support Group”. In this way the authors proposed a new scheme of the programme's realisation (Fig. 1).

¹⁶ G. Aichholzer, *Searching for leadership in innovation niches: Technology Foresight in Austria*, strona internetowa Narodowego Instytutu Nauki i Technologii National Institute of Science and Technology Policy (NISTEP), <http://www.nistep.go.jp>, stan na dzień 9.06.2009 r.

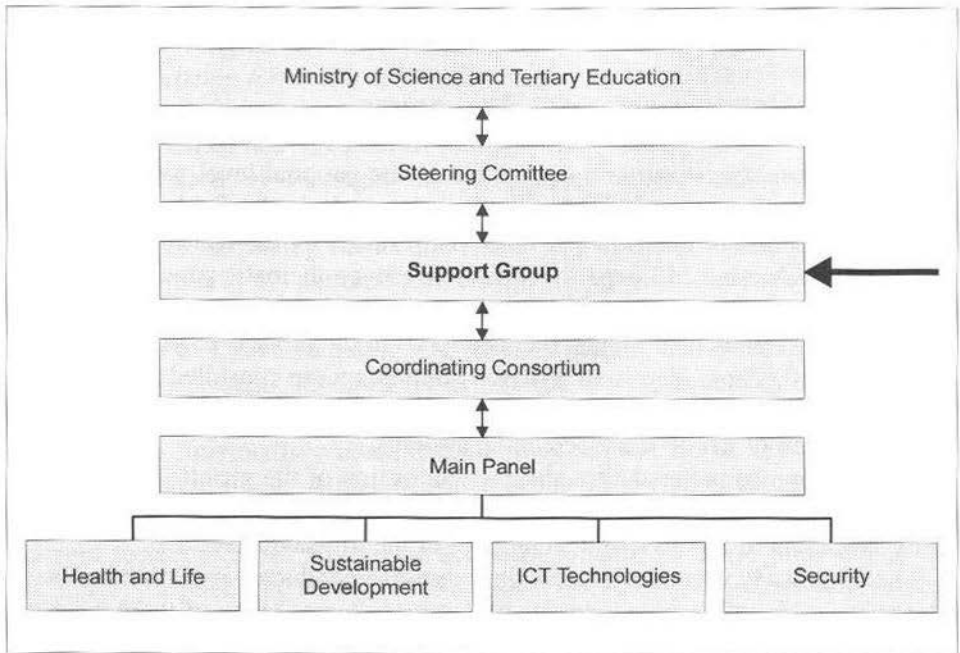
¹⁷ D. Loveridge, O. Saritas, *Reducing the democratic deficit in institutional foresight programmes: A case for critical systems thinking in nanotechnology*, „Technological Forecasting & Social Change” 76 (2009) 1208–1221, s. 1209.

¹⁸ A. Matczewski, *Raport końcowy z realizacji Pilotażowego Projektu Foresight w polu badawczym Zdrowie i Życie*, Warszawa 2005.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Figure 1. The realization scheme of the Polish National Foresight Programme proposed by the authors



Source: Authors' study.

The proposed scheme was then announced as the possible alternative in the ministerial proposal for the Polish National Programme realization²¹.

3.2. The Support Group in the Polish National Foresight Programme

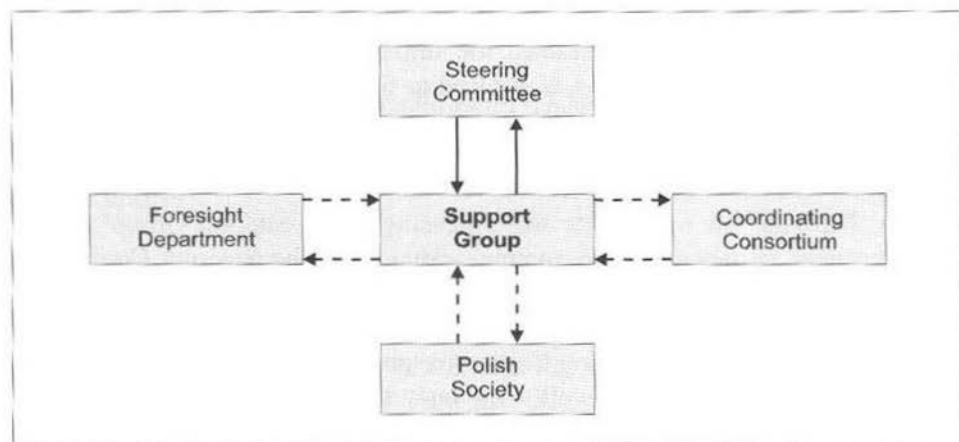
The initial idea of the Support Group appointment was the bottom up initiative of young academics who wanted to participate actively in the programme with the aim of focusing their PhD dissertations on the programme results. Therefore, they prepared the first draft of its functioning which was met with enthusiasm by one of the Steering Committee members. Then the proposal was introduced to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education which promised to endorse the idea provided that all members of the Steering Committee accept it. After some time, the Steering Committee, although with some resistance related to the inexperience and the allegedly low qualifications resulting from the age of

²¹ *Przedsięwzięcie dotyczące...*, op. cit.

possible candidates, allowed for the possibility of the appointment and recruitment of the members to this innovative body whose general aim was to assist the members of the Steering Committee in supervising the whole foresight research process.

The preliminary assumption for the functioning of the Support Group was based on the idea of the cross-disciplinary communication between its members, the Steering Committee, the Foresight Department in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Coordinating Consortium and, in the broader sense, Polish Society (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The Support Group as an intermediary



Source: Authors' study.

Therefore, its founders wanted to incorporate not only young promising scientists but also media representatives and business executives believing that all of them would add some value and fresh look to the research process. More specifically, the main rationale for young academics being involved into research process were that they would focus their scientific interests on the problems relevant for the country's development and that their assistance would significantly facilitate the work of Steering Committee in the scope of extra analyses needed for the proper supervision of the programme progress. The involvement of young business representatives seemed relevant due to the fact that they have practical experience in the researched field and therefore, they could assist the Steering Committee in establishing the fruitful cooperation between the science and business world, whereas the participation of young media representatives seemed to be supported by the fact that they would assist the Steering Committee in the activities related to the promotion of the Polish National Foresight

Programme not only among the possible experts but also among the future beneficiaries. It was assumed that the nomination of the Support Group members should be carried out by the Steering Committee with each member appointing maximum three nominees. Unfortunately, the preliminary assumptions were, in some sense, doomed to failure. First of all, only a small number of eight Steering Committee members were interested in the appointment of the Support Group; the others were still unconvinced seeing the involvement of young people as threat to the proper course of research (resulting mainly from their alleged inexperience). Secondly, due to limited programme budget the number of Support Group members had to be reduced. Therefore, the chairman of the Steering Committee decided to appoint one member of the Steering Committee for the coordinator of the issues related to the members' recruitment and its activity. Due to the abovementioned reasons, the initially assumed cross-disciplinary character of the Support Group was reduced to fifteen young academics coming from Polish universities and research institutions. During the first meeting of the Support Group, there were established rules and regulations of its activity. Additionally, the chairman and the secretary were chosen.

The chairman was responsible for organising of the Support Group's work, presiding over its meetings and communicating with the Steering Committee, whereas the duties of the secretary were mainly to be in charge of all documents needed for the proper functioning of the body.

In agreement with the Steering Committee and the Coordinating Consortium there were accepted the general following tasks to be carried out by the Support Group for the needs of the Polish National Foresight Programme, i.e.:

- processing and presentation of the interim reports of the programme progress,
- assisting the Steering Committee in the monitoring and supervision of the programme,
- signaling weak points of the research process to the Steering Committee,
- promoting the idea of the Polish National Foresight Programme through the scientific publications, seminars, etc.,
- helping in the experts' recruitment for thematic panels,
- helping in the experts' recruitment for Delphi method.

All of activities of the Support Group have been presented in the separate document called *The Report of the Activities of the Support Group to the Steering Committee of the National Foresight Programme „Poland 2020”*. The report contains the following elements²²:

- key information on the National Foresight Programme „Poland 2020”,
- a list of the Support Group members,

²² Raport z działalności Grupy Wsparcia przy Komitecie Sterującym Narodowego Programu Foresight „Polska 2020”, Warszawa 2009, s. 3. Raport dostępny w formie elektronicznej (plik PDF) na stronie www.foresight.polska2020.pl

- scientific papers published by the Support Group members on the basis of their experience in the National Foresight Programme (abstracts in English in the text),
- presentations on foresight topics created by the Support Group members,
- non-scientific text and interviews given on foresight topics by the Support Group members,
- summary of the reports from expert panels attended by the Support Group members,
- summary of foresight popularisation activities carried out by the Support Group members,
- reports, presentations and photographs from the popularisation symposia organised by the Support Group,
- a list of conferences attended and training courses completed by the Support Group members,
- Support Group members' reflections on the National Foresight Programme.

Conclusions

In the course of the programme implementation the members of the Support Group have had an opportunity to directly gain knowledge and experience in the area of foresight research, especially in its concept, methodology, organisation and application. Apart from the educational function, the creation of the Support Group for the Polish National Foresight Programme "Poland 2020" created added value in other dimensions. Its appointment seemed to enhance significantly the communication between key actors taking part in the research process and made foresight into a much wider social process at the same time. The 2-year cooperation of young academics with the leading Polish scientists representing different disciplines was an excellent form of tutoring promoting cross-disciplinary thinking. The establishment of networks among its members turned out to be conducive to joint foresight projects.

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