

# FORESIGHT AS A METHOD IN MIGRATION STUDIES

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## ABSTRACT

### **Foresight as a Method in Migration Studies**

Used exclusively or as a complementary methodology, foresight has the potential to enrich hard data with possible future scenarios and encourage policy and decision makers to utilize the results in strategic planning on migration and related processes. The article outlines the first example of a diverse stakeholder involvement in discussions on future migration-related scenarios in Slovenia, organised within the international project SEEMIG – *Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE – Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies*. Methodological planning and application of creativity-based and interaction-based foresight methods is discussed. Outcomes are outlined to highlight the value of foresight for strategic planning.

KEYWORDS: foresight methodology, migration, migration studies, strategic planning, policy-making

## IZVLEČEK

### **Uporaba metodologije predvidevanja v migracijskih študijah**

*Foresight* ('predvidevanje') je metodologija, samostojna ali komplementarna drugim pristopom, uporabna za oblikovanje verjetnih scenarijev prihodnjega razvoja. Uporabna je tako za obogatitev kvantitativnih podatkov kot spodbuda oblikovalcem politik, da rezultate predvidevanja uporabijo v strateškem načrtovanju na področju migracij in z njimi povezanih procesov. V članku je predstavljen prvi primer vključevanja različnih deležnikov s področja migracij v razpravo o prihodnjih scenarijih razvoja na tem področju v Sloveniji. Scenariji so bili oblikovani na delavnici, organizirani v okviru mednarodnega projekta »SEEMIG - Upravljanje z migracijami in njihovimi učinki v Jugovzhodni Evropi – transnacionalni ukrepi, ki vodijo k na podatkih temelječim strategijam«, in so v članku v skrajšani obliki predstavljeni skupaj z metodološkim načrtovanjem in uporabo različnih metod predvidevanja. V zaključku so, kot doprinos metodologije predvidevanja k strateškemu načrtovanju na področju migracij, predstavljeni tudi rezultati.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *foresight* metodologija, migracije, migracijske študije, strateško načrtovanje, oblikovanje politik

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## INTRODUCTION

Foresight is defined by Cassingena Harper (2003) as “a process which involves intense iterative periods of open reflection, networking, consultation and discussion, leading to the joint refining of future visions and the common ownership of strategies. [...] It is the discovery of a common space for open thinking on the future and the incubation of strategic approaches”. Although the name implies differently, foresight exercises provide “mental maps of possible futures, but not as alternative predictions” (CEEHPN 2012: 4). In other words, they offer scenarios of alternative futures which might but also might not happen. By creating mental maps of the future (CEEHPN 2012) and discussing possible scenarios “outside the box”, foresight reinforces thinking about future steps to be taken should a specific scenario become a reality. In this respect, the benefits of foresight for policy-making and strategic planning are significant.

Several methods, both quantitative and qualitative, can be utilized to conduct foresights. Quantitative methods, which focus on measuring variables and applying statistical analyses include, among others, benchmarking, modelling and patent analysis. Qualitative methods, which focus on interpretations based on subjective thinking, include, among others, brainstorming, citizens panels, expert panels, scenario writing, interviews and morphological analysis (Popper 2008).<sup>1</sup> Popper’s “foresight diamond” graphically presents the variety of foresight methods and clusters them into creativity-based, expertise-based, interaction-based and evidence-based methods (see Figure 1). Regardless of the chosen set of methods, which can either be all qualitative, all quantitative or mixed, the five complementary phases of the foresight process as suggested by Miles (2002) should be followed: pre-foresight planning, recruitment of key stakeholders, generation of knowledge through exploration and anticipation of possible futures, action in terms of advising on strategic planning and decision making, and renewal or evaluation of impacts, efficiency and appropriateness.

Foresight methodology has been applied in social science research (see e.g. Canin, Scapolo 2007: 41; EC 2012; COST 2009; Radosevic 2002), including the field of migration studies. The most notable examples are Bijak’s work on forecasting international migration in Europe, which promotes the Bayesian view to predict future trends by interlinking statistics with the subjective opinions of stakeholders (Bijak 2011) and a project on the impact of global environmental change on patterns of human migration, conducted by the UK Government Office for Science (Foresight Migration and Global Environmental Change 2011).<sup>2</sup> A similar attempt has been made recently within the framework of the project SEEMIG – *Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE – Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies*,<sup>3</sup>

1 Popper et al. took a sample of 130 foresights conducted in 15 European countries and found an average of five to six methods per exercise, the most common being literature review, expert panels, scenarios, trend extrapolation, futures workshops and brainstorming (Popper et al. 2005). Apart from trend extrapolation, all these methods are qualitative.

2 In Slovenia, foresight methodology was generally introduced in the early 2000s, while the first technology foresight was conducted as early as 1995 (Komac 2000). Researchers at the Institute for Economic Research have explored technology foresights more broadly (Stanovnik, Kos 2005), while researchers in the social sciences and humanities were less oriented towards the future and have more often opted for other, similar approaches to gather data about the development of social processes (i.e. Delphi). In connection with the history of conducting foresight in Slovenia it is worth mentioning the Bled Forum on Europe, an international think-tank that promotes knowledge-based governance and the use of future studies and foresight in policy-making. The main issues for the Bled forum, mainly discussed at the annual conferences, are contemporary global challenges that will influence the future (Bled Forum 2012).

3 SEEMIG is a strategic project funded by the European Union’s South-East Europe Programme. The project aims to better understand and address longer-term migratory, human capital and demographic processes in South-East Europe, as well as their effects on labour markets, national and regional economies. The main goal of the project is to empower public administrations to develop and implement policies and strategies by using enhanced datasets and empirical evidence. SEEMIG is managed by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Lead Partner of the project), and the partnership includes research institutes, statistics offices and local governments from eight countries, and observers from a further three countries ([www.seemig.eu](http://www.seemig.eu)).

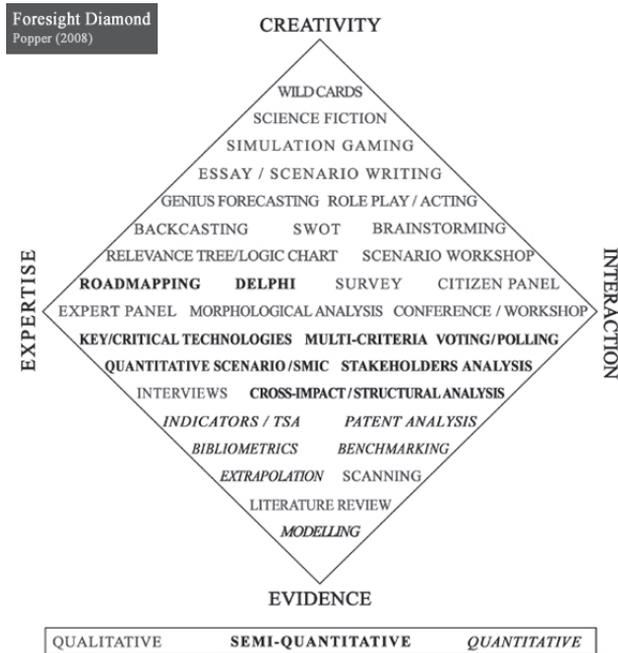


Figure 1: Foresight diamond (Popper 2008)

with the aim to complement historical analysis, online surveys and population projections with future predictions of migration dynamics in eight South-East European countries, using creativity-based and interaction-based foresight methods (Toplak et al. forthcoming). The purpose of this article is to present a first example of a diverse stakeholder involvement in discussions on future migration-related scenarios in Slovenia and introduce methodological planning, implementation, and the usefulness of the SEEMIG foresight exercise outcomes in policy and decision making. The potential of foresight as a methodology for migration studies will be outlined in the concluding remarks.

## METHODOLOGICAL PLANNING AND APPLICATION OF METHODS

Four workshops in total were planned and held with three stakeholder groups, i.e. migrants/civil society representatives, experts and decision makers.<sup>4</sup> The chosen methods according to the Popper's foresight diamond (see Figure 1) were brainstorming and scenario development (workshops). These two methods seemed most appropriate in regard to the topic and research needs of the SEEMIG project. During the first three workshops, each group of participants was asked to engage in a process of creative thinking and brainstorming. All participants were then invited to the fourth workshop with the intention of developing a matrix of binary opposing scenarios, taking into consideration a jointly identified set of drivers.

<sup>4</sup> The workshops took place in December 2013 at the premises of the Maribor Development Agency in Maribor. The number of participants in total was 13: 3 immigrants, 1 returnee, 1 employee at the Centre for Adult Education that offers language courses for immigrants, 5 researchers and/or university professors with background in migration studies, and three government officials with significant experience in migration management and strategic planning. The age range of the participants was 26–65.

All sessions were planned to take place in quiet, spacious rooms, with tables forming a circle, which allowed undisturbed interaction of all participants. An additional room was provided for the scenario-preparation session, when participants were divided into two groups to develop opposing scenarios. Significant efforts were made to create a permissive and friendly environment, where the participants would feel comfortable to share personal opinions with the rest of the group (Toth 2013), including the moderators and their assistants welcoming every individual participant upon arrival, and providing refreshments. Since audio recording was planned, consent forms were prepared and participants were asked to sign them *in situ*. An assistant moderator was appointed to observe group dynamics and take notes.

Upon the arrival of each group of participants, the moderators briefly introduced the SEEMIG project and the purpose of foresight analysis. They explained why the participants were selected and how their responses would be used in the project. They also explained that the purpose of the first part of the brainstorming sessions is not to reach a consensus of differing opinions but to gather different points of view that will contribute to knowledge formation. The brainstorming session began with an open-ended question that encouraged participants to think about key factors which, in their opinion, influence their country's future in relation to migration and labour market in the period until 2025. The motivation to participate was high in all three groups, and the discussion was open and free-flowing. In the first group, the migrants/civil society representatives group, the participants preferred to discuss current issues associated with migration, especially the problem of integration of immigrants into the majority society. During the second stage of the brainstorming session, the moderators asked the participants to cluster the enumerated ideas into main themes. Suggestions were written down on a flipchart and subsequently evaluated according to the perceived importance and degree of uncertainty. Clarifications and some guidance were needed, but overall, the grouping was done mostly by the participants.

All of the participants were invited to a second workshop with the intention of developing a matrix of binary opposing scenarios. At the session, the participants first introduced themselves to each other and then the spokespersons for the migrants/civil society representatives, experts and decision makers presented the most important conclusions, i.e. drivers, from the previous workshops. Under the guidance of the moderators all drivers were reviewed, and the participants were encouraged to select 4-5 drivers which they considered to be the most important in the set time frame. With the assistance of the moderators the drivers were put into the matrix of binary opposing scenarios: positive and negative.

After the formulation of the matrix, two mixed groups were formed so that migrants/civil society members, experts and decision makers were equally represented in each group. The groups decided which scenario they would prefer to develop and proceeded with work in two separate rooms. They were asked to imagine the dynamics of migration and the labour market in Slovenia within a set time horizon of 2025, keeping in mind the most important jointly identified drivers. More particularly, they were encouraged to think about what the future would look like if the selected drivers were shaping reality by 2025. They were then asked to place a specific person with either positive or negative characteristics into the developed scenario. They were encouraged to think what would that specific person do if he/she encountered such circumstances and what his/her life would look like in such a country. This was a departure from thinking in abstract terms to considering real-life situations on a micro level, through the lens of a chosen 'hero'. The workshop was concluded by the two groups coming back together to present the positive and negative scenarios to each other.

## OUTCOMES

In all three groups, the economic situation was considered to be one of the key factors that will affect our future, although in the group of migrants/civil society representatives it was more latently identified than in other two groups by referral only to labour market participation and (un)employment.

All groups also emphasized the importance of migration policy, but to varying degrees. The group of experts considered policy to be less important than the economy, climate change related disasters and the unfavourable demographic situation, while migrants/civil society representatives considered migration policy as the key determinant in future developments. In contrast to the group of experts and decision makers, migrants/civil society representatives also considered social integration and the creation of a multicultural society to be important drivers. Through a set of workshops, a matrix of binary opposing future scenarios was developed using the five most important drivers selected and agreed upon by all participants: economic development, climate change, migration (and other state) policies, and demographic situation.<sup>5</sup>

According to the positive scenario, the steady inflow of immigrants due to favourable economic conditions would have a positive impact on the Slovenian economy, since they would fill the gaps in the Slovenian labour market. The current brain drain would be regulated with a set of policy measures, including incentives for return migration, although the outflow would not entirely discontinue. The consequence of an increased immigration flow, i.e. population growth and increase in ethnic diversity are perceived as positive. The negative outcomes within the scenario are the abovementioned brain drain and a low birth rate.

The negative scenario predicts economic decline in Slovenia, an increase in unemployment rates and an increase in emigration of educated population. Slovenia would still be a destination country, but mainly for low-skilled migrants from the global South. The decrease in social spending and subsequently the need to provide means of survival independent of the state and the market would force people to increasingly engage in agricultural activities with the aim of becoming self-sufficient in food and other resources. Local weather-related disasters (floods etc.) would trigger internal migration. The role of the state would be overridden by strong market dynamics and the centralization of policy-making at the EU level. European directives would become increasingly binding and Slovenian government officials and policymakers would become merely executors of policies developed at the EU level. In the case of migration management, the inefficiency of the state would be reflected in uncontrolled functioning of migrant recruitment and employment agencies. The ageing of the population and increased emigration rates would result in depopulation and social deterioration. Care for the elderly would become a pressing need and a high priority, but although demand for migrant care workers will be high, people would not be able to afford to employ them. As a result, immigration of care workers to Slovenia would be barely existent.

It should be emphasized that immigration was perceived as a positive phenomenon in both scenarios. Even the negative scenario, for example, recognized the important potential of highly-skilled immigrants who could benefit from the economic crisis by taking advantage of the existing economic niche areas and bring innovation and creativity into the Slovenian labour market. However, such generally positive perceptions of immigration could be attributed to the structure of the participants. Should the group of participants include more of the general public and key decision makers from the governmental administration responsible for migration issues, the scenarios would most likely be less inclined towards immigration.

Policy recommendations based on the developed scenarios and arising with respect to the identified socio-economic and demographic challenges include improvements of migration policies, especially in terms of developing mechanisms to limit brain drain and introducing mechanisms that enable the successful return and re-integration of Slovenian emigrants. The role of the migration policy also includes ensuring integration packages that would facilitate inclusion of immigrants into Slovenian society. Since integration was recognized as a two-way process, the need to introduce anti-discrimination measures and publicly address the emerging multicultural dynamics with positive public campaigns

<sup>5</sup> Their views on the possible future trajectories are in many respects compatible with the historical, demographic and current socio-economic profile of Slovenia (see Cukut Krilič, Novak, Jurišič 2014).

Table 1: Binary opposing scenarios developed by the foresight exercise participants

	<b>Polarity A: positive outcomes</b>	<b>Polarity B: negative outcomes</b>	<b>Essential and scenario-dependent policy recommendations<sup>6</sup></b>
<b>Scenario 1/ Positive scenario</b>	Steady flow of immigrants will fill gaps in the labour market		Improvements of integration policy
	Ethnic diversity		Employment of anti-discrimination measures, including launch of media campaigns to fight discrimination based on citizenship and ethnicity
		Brain drain	Policy addressing emigration, encouraging return migration and reintegration
		Low birth rate	Providing social benefits for young families
<b>Scenario 2/ Negative scenario</b>	High-skilled migrants bring innovation and creativity		Improvements of integration policy
		Increase of unemployment rates and increase of emigration of educated people due to economic crisis	Policy addressing emigration, encouraging return migration and reintegration
		Unsustainability of welfare system due to economic decline and unfavourable demographic situation (ageing in particular)	Challenges for social and healthcare systems rise, elderly care system needs improvement
		Centralization of decision-making at the EU level leads to ineffectiveness of national policy	Strengthening of state policy and inclusion of local perspectives in policy-making
		Climate change related weather disasters with impact on migration dynamics	Intersectoral cooperation and coordination to achieve early detection and efficient reaction

was suggested. Decision makers should also promptly react to the possible collapse of the pension and healthcare system by anticipating far-reaching consequences. To keep the birth rate high, various benefits should be provided for young families, including financial assistance and housing benefits. In regard to possible weather-related disasters due to the climate change, early detection and efficient reaction by the relevant governmental agencies and sectors is strongly advised.

<sup>6</sup> Essential policy recommendations are the most robust policy recommendations, as they are recommended across all possible scenarios, while scenario-dependent recommendations are only valuable under specific conditions (see Harnessing European Labour Mobility 2014).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Used exclusively or as a complementary methodology, foresight has the potential to enrich hard data with possible future scenarios and encourage policy and decision makers to utilize the results in strategic planning of migration management and integration processes. In the most recent large-scale study of European labour mobility (2014) the authors use foresight methodology to provide scenarios which are defined as stories that describe “a specific future connected to the present through a series of causal links that demonstrate the consequences of decisions or series of decisions. They describe events and trends as they could evolve” (Saunders, Arminaitė 2014: 33). Since the scenarios outline possible future challenges and opportunities, as well as indicating measures that could make an undesirable outcome less likely (Glenn and the Futures Group in Saunders, Arminaitė 2014: 33) they are indeed a useful tool for policy and decision makers. To effectively serve the objective of influencing policy and decision making, however, the proposed visions of the future should be credible, and built upon past and present knowledge (EC 2012), but most importantly, they should include the visions of a variety of stakeholders in order to assure participatory, inclusive and engaging future planning.

The SEEMIG foresight exercise is the first example of a diverse stakeholder involvement in discussions on future migration-related scenarios in Slovenia. The policy implications and recommendations that were identified in both the negative and the positive scenario and can be considered as essential include improvements of migration policies, especially in terms of developing mechanisms to limit brain drain, introducing mechanisms that enable successful return and re-integration of Slovenian emigrants, and encouraging integration of immigrants, whereas development of anti-discrimination measures, social benefits for young families, improvement of the elderly care system, strengthening of the national policy in relation to the EU and improved intersectoral cooperation to address climate-change related weather disasters, were scenario-specific. For more detailed and elaborated policy recommendations, however, future foresights in Slovenia should include a larger group of stakeholders across public and private sectors in order to ensure the representation of a variety of differing views and perceptions of future developments.

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