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FUTURES STUDIES IN GOVERNMENTS: INTERNATIONAL MODELS AND THEIR POTENTIAL IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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About Orkestra:

With almost 20 years of experience and knowledge, Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Deusto Foundation) is a leading research centre in Europe in regional competitiveness. Its mission is to promote competitiveness at the service of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing in the Basque Country. To this end, the institute works on a daily basis on transformative research projects with local and international stakeholders and provides rigorous analysis for decision making.

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The opinions and comments contained in the notebook belong to the research team, which assumes responsibility for any errors or omissions in the content of this report.

Executive summary

Today's global environment is characterised by a high level of uncertainty, volatility, rapid change, interdependence and hyperconnectivity, which in turn increases the complexity for governments to address the challenges associated with digital, ecological and demographic transitions. In this environment, traditional planning approaches are insufficient, and futures studies are emerging as a growing discipline to support governments and policymakers in building a more desirable future. Specifically, they can support governments in making progress in the following areas:

- understanding long-term trends and their potential impact on the territory.
- responding to new social and technological developments.
- making sense of complex and conflicting problems.
- making decisions and planning under uncertainty.
- avoiding risks and the cost of doing nothing.

In this context, an analysis of the international state of the art on the incorporation of futures analysis by governments helps us to generate a framework aimed at guiding reflection on its integration in the Basque Country (and in other territories).

Models for incorporating foresight into governments

There is no single best governance model for integrating foresight into governments that has a broad consensus. Those governments that assiduously employ strategic foresight have institutionalised it in a variety of ways. There are also different models according to different classification criteria:

- **Structure in which foresight has an impact**
A distinction is made between the *executive branch* (the most common), the *legislative branch*, the *judiciary* (particularly in the field of future generations' rights) and new foresight actors created by law (e.g. commissioners or accountability structures).
- **Level of centralisation:**
A distinction is made between *centralised* (governments have a central agency in charge of foresight) or *decentralised* (government departments perform the function autonomously).
- **Who has the foresight capacity**
A distinction is made between *internal* capacity and *external* experts, which can be *local* or *international* experts.
- **Funding structure**
The foresight initiative can be funded through budgets; or through stable, long-term funding, either through an internal unit or funding from an external agency or unit.

Six international best practices

Of the various existing models of institutionalising foresight, we have analysed six international best practices, selected to reflect varied approaches to models that have had a significant impact on public policy, and considering the diversity of geography and levels of government (state and regional).

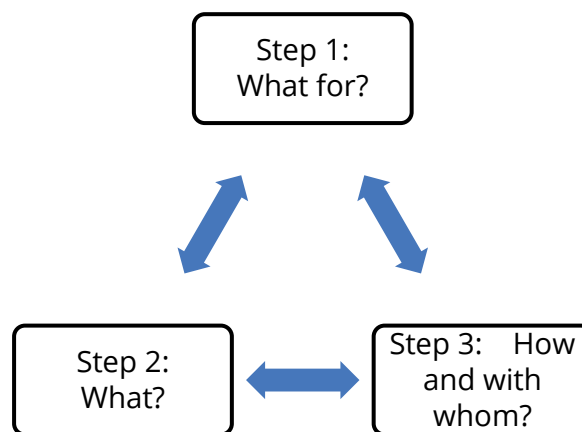
The following table summarises the main body that performs foresight functions in each of the selected territories, and the main tools used in their exercise:

Territory	Main body and its functions	Futures tools
Canada	- Policy Horizons: government's foresight excellence centre, with over 40 people staff, is designed to strengthen decision-making. - It reports to a central committee of deputy ministers. - It trains civil servants and team leaders.	- Horizons scanning. - Capacity building. - Foresight process perfecting.
Finland	- Governmental report on the future (since 1993), contrasted with citizens, private sector and universities. - Committee for the Future in Parliament (since 2001). - Sitra, independent <i>think tank</i> that informs the Parliament.	- Horizon scanning. - Trend and weak signal analysis. - Future scenario studies. - Causal Layered Analysis.
Flanders	- Strategic Insights and Analysis Unit (SIA): within the Flanders Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Knowledge broker connecting academia and the private sector. - Feeds into the functions of the Flemish minister-president.	- Trend analysis - Horizons scanning - Mapping opportunities and challenges - Creation of visions and roadmaps.
Wales	- Commissioner for Future Generations. Ensure decisions are not harming the future negatively. - Develops recommendations and reports on wellbeing. - "Critical friend" role of public bodies required to meet statutory wellbeing targets.	Diverse participatory methods were employed for developing the law: - mass public consultation; - publicity campaigns; - creative methods, such as video games.
New Zealand	- Long-term vision reports, addressing trends, risks and opportunities, produced by each government department every three years. - Wellbeing budgeting: using social, environmental, economic and fiscal indicators to guide public investment.	- Visioning and retrospective.

Singapore	- Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF): currently part of the Strategic Unit of the Prime Minister's Office. Unit that coordinates foresight work within the government.	- Scenario Planning Plus (SP+): scenario planning and examination of signals and trends. - Biennial Foresight Conference.
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Framework for reflection for the Basque Country (and other territories)

Having analysed the variety of existing models, we propose a framework for reflection for those territories that wish to implement and mainstream strategic foresight in their governments, with a focus on the Basque Country. The reflection is proposed in three steps:



The following table relates the three steps to key learnings from the literature that guarantee the effectiveness of the model to be proposed, and to empirical learnings of the authors through the implementation of the initiative to build a shared vision and identify competitiveness challenges, [Euskadi 2040](#).

Step 1: What for?

- What value do we see in incorporating foresight into government?
- To what extent do we see scope for action to guide actions towards a more desirable future?
- To what extent are we open to change and review processes?

Effectiveness catalysers from literature

- The support of political leadership, and the involvement of policymakers themselves in shared spaces with the foresight team.
- The public interest and relevance of the field of foresight in society at large.
- The good reputation of foresight as a policy tool.
- Culture of innovation in the public sector.

Learnings from practice (Euskadi 2040)

- Importance of direct involvement of political and decision-making profiles in the vision.
- Impact of leadership on the scope or delimitation of the vision.
- Difficulty of connecting the vision with action.

Paso 2: What?

- What do we want to achieve with foresight (e.g. define a desirable future, identify opportunities and threats, etc.)?
- On which thematic focus (e.g. wellbeing)?
- What tools and capacities do we already have in the territory?

Effectiveness catalysers from literature

- Availability of a pool of reliable expertise either internal or external to the government.
- Multidisciplinarity.
- The quality of foresight processes.
- Futures literacy of society at large.
- Adequate allocation of resources to make the processes resilient.

Learnings from practice (Euskadi 2040)

- The vision is conceived as a living tool, combining reflection and action.
- There is a preference for quantitative monitoring frameworks; however, there are aspects identified as important for the future of the Basque Country that require more qualitative monitoring.
- The use of innovative methods, such as serious games (games designed for educational purposes) can facilitate the participation of less usual groups.

Step 3: How and with whom?

- Which body/principal/lead agency?
- How do we organise interdepartmental and multi-level coordination?
- Which territorial actors do we want to involve/prioritise and how?
- In which international networks do we want to collaborate?

Effectiveness catalysers from literature	Learnings from practice (Euskadi 2040)
• Stable administrative framework. • Cross-sectoral coordination. • Definition of roles and missions. • Independence of the responsible body. • Alignment with other existing bodies (not necessarily hierarchy). • Networks and facilitation capacities that strengthen inter-institutional cooperation. • Safe spaces for experimentation. • Identification of strategic points for mainstreaming in the policy cycle. • User-centred approach, with these principles: legitimacy of inputs and outputs, accountability and transparency. • Monitoring of activities and analysis of impacts. • Management of generated knowledge. • Active communication with relevant audiences to disseminate results.	• Alternating election cycles among multilevel institutions, slowing down the process of designing and implementing the vision, but at the same time ensuring that the processes are not simultaneously paralysed. • Need to actively involve the various departments. • Need to dedicate time and effort to identify and incorporate key agents, in an iterative manner. • Management of a multitude of interests and a multitude of actors. • Vision is a tool to identify areas of polarisation.



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