Foresight and the wicked problem of participation

Phases of Foresight, democratic legitimation and the media

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How can Foresight be considered as an instrument for democratic participation?
Formal participation in modern democracies
Participatory aspects in Foresight:

- Integration of decentralized decision-making structures and execution of democratic procedures in spheres of everyday life
- Lowering the barrier of acquiring and exchanging knowledge and information
- Reflect diverging views and competing interests
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**Democratic legitimation of Foresight**
Four phases of Foresight

Foresight Phase

1. Planning and organization
2. Execution/actual activity
3. Recommendation
4. Implementation/evaluation
Four phases of Foresight and democratic legitimation

**Foresight Phase**
- Planning and organization
- Execution/actual activity
- Recommendation
- Implementation/evaluation

**Process**
- Input
- Throughput
- Output
- Outcome

**Democratic Function**
- Representation
- Formalization
- Accountability
Democratic legitimation ...

... by **representation** (input)

- Inclusion/exclusion dilemma
- Little transparency of the stakeholder selection process
- Who are the stakeholders and why? \(\rightarrow\) clear definition
- Formal procedure in the selection of stakeholders
- Additional bibliometric and citation search and network analysis of social media data
Democratic legitimation ...

... by **formalization** (throughput)

- Set of methods to meet specific purpose of each Foresight, not all of them participatory
- Degree and quality of participation different in every method
- Opinions of “experts” might become mainstream
- Risk of “cognitive closure”
- Dependence on participants
- Organizers have to motivate, consider different roles and handle expectation management
Democratic legitimation ...

... by **accountability** (output/outcome)

- Output not legally designed to have binding outcome/effect on political decision-making
- Individual participants might not find their ideas reflected in the results
- Optimization and widening of the spectrum of political decision-making and acknowledgement of multiple visions
- Stimulation of a public and transparent discourse for future policy options
- Foresight has to be formalized, transparent and commissioned by visible and committed sponsors
Reaching public awareness

Function of media relations in Foresight

- Transport scenarios of a future society to a wider audience
- Offer participation in a discussion about a future society and give impetus to a public discourse
- Rising awareness and understanding for the discipline of Foresight and Futures Research
Conventional media communication

Example: Project “WEGE2025”
Breaking new ground

Conclusion

- **Growing demand for participatory** aspects in liberal democracies
- Foresight as a democratic instrument: **formalize all steps** as much as possible and **make these steps transparent**
- The democratic function lies in **the widening of the vision spectrum** and the **stimulation of a public discourse** for future policy options
- Professional media relations can **improve a Foresight exercise at different stages** and can **support the outcome**.
Thank you!