

Example 5: Stakeholders mapping as a means for finding the champions, supporters and initiators for foresight activities – Latvia

Latvia has a highly educated population, fairly good communication links with the outside world, and an acceptable economic incentive regime. But Latvia's fundamental weakness is the lack of innovation systems both at the national and at the regional level. Latvia does not yet have an effective system for converting knowledge – domestic or foreign – into wealth. In the creation of innovation systems, futures thinking is essential. In fact, the Latvian science and technology community has committed itself to create a set of new mechanisms for long-term research and innovation. The development of foresight activities and innovation can also make use of the European Commission's initiatives, programmes and projects aimed at the development of the knowledge-based economy (the European Research and Innovation Area, the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes, the RIS/RITTS projects, the European Foresight Area, etc.).

In the development of foresight activities, it is not enough to have participants from science and technology organisations, but it is important to involve all interested public and private organisations and individuals in the process of building new scenarios for economic development. Therefore Latvia has started the preparation of its foresight activities by mapping systematically which organisations could be the relevant stakeholders. At the same time, the mapping of stakeholders is used for awareness raising and the development of foresight mindset. The process can be described as 'learning/debating by doing with the stakeholders'. A combination of the following approaches based on personal contacts and formal techniques are applied:

- face-to-face interviews
- various kinds of conferences and workshops, where European Foresight Guides and other foresight information and material have been disseminated
- informing about European experience and the EUROFORE database
- Entrepreneurial Foresight Network
- analysis of feed-back from readers to Latvian foresight websites and e-publications
- dialogue utilising 'learning CD' with international

best practice and Latvian foresight projects' materials, as well as the examination of foresight projects and other material provided by on-line links (EUFORIA, FOREN, the ESTO network)

- development of brainstorming, Delphi, etc. methods in regional research, where thinking and debating about the future take place.

At a more detailed level, the following concrete activities can be mentioned: In 2004 a foresight project 'Latvia towards the Knowledge Societies of Europe: new options for entrepreneurship and employment achieving the goals of the Lisbon strategy' has been started. The leading organisation in the project is the Forward Studies Unit, and the financial support is provided by the Latvian Council of Science. The project contributes to the identification of research capacity, to foresight understanding and to knowledge dissemination for policies and strategies; its particular task is to foresee the development of innovative enterprises (in a broad sense). Creation of an 'Entrepreneurial Foresight Network' has been shown necessary in order to identify both national and international experts and practitioners who can consult in entrepreneurial foresight exercises at the regional and local level – including the mapping of stakeholders for these exercises. In the RIS context, typical cases for the stakeholders mapping are the meetings of the Steering Committee and the brainstorming sessions with local authorities and leading entrepreneurs. Workshops and discussions on the results of the surveys made by different international organisations – as World Bank, IKED, UNDP, etc. – are also efficient tools in finding out the champions, supporters and initiators for foresight activities. For the next year, the Forward Studies Unit has launched a project 'Innovative Learning Society – Foresight in Latvian RTD community', and one of its panels is to address regional issues with 5 – 10 years' time horizon.

In the stakeholders mapping, the ability of different groups and persons to provide valuable and substantial inputs into the planned foresight activities is evaluated, and the stakeholders are selected on this basis. They must be able to promote the foresight process, to manage necessary changes, to contribute to a paradigm shift in thinking about the future, and to increase the validity of the results. Important issues to be taken

into account are political influence, finance and budgetary competence, deployment of infrastructures, knowledge management, and broad consensus on strategic goals. The stakeholders selected should also be independent experts and authorities in their fields; personal characteristics needed are creativeness, open-mindedness and flexibility in decision-making.

Many organisations and individual experts have been involved in activities, where relevant experience from the viewpoint of foresight accumulates. Thus, the champions, supporters and initiators for foresight may be searched for in the context of these kinds of activities. In Latvia, such activities include:

- strategic planning of the implementation of the Lisbon strategy (reorganisation of the research financing system)
- elaboration of the Latvia's economic development plan (SME development and export strategy)
- implementation of the National Innovation Programme (preparation of the yearly Action Plans)
- development of the strategic plan for science and research (elaboration of the Master Plan for research)
- implementation of the recommendations of the RIS LATVIA project (implementation of pilot actions and preparation of the draft of the regional innovation strategy)

The mutual agreement has been achieved that the core group, which acts as the champions for the foresight exercises in Latvia, could be formed from following organisations and experts: The Futures Subcommittee at the Saeima (Parliament) of the Republic of Latvia, The Council of the National Innovation Programme, The Economic Council at the Ministry of Economics, The Steering Committee of the RIS LATVIA project, and Latvia's foresight experts community participated in various European foresight activities; leaders of local municipalities would also be involved.

These champions can help to translate foresight concepts, processes and results into frames and forms that make sense to governmental structures and decision-makers, and to business people and other practitioners.

The supporters that can provide both intangible and material assets for futures research can be found in Latvia in the following organisations: the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Education and Science, The Economic Council at the Ministry of Economics (an initiator as well), the Municipality of Riga and the Riga Region, and The Latvian Academy of Sciences. Different types of activities – conferences and workshops, brainstorming sessions, joint innovative projects, publications etc. – have been already undertaken in cooperation with these organisations.

Organisations that have actively involved in strategic planning, futures studies as well as in the elaboration of development projects could be considered as relevant candidates to be the initiators for foresight, as the activities mentioned include many elements of the foresight methodology. In Latvia the following organisations, among others, have carried out such activities during the recent years:

- The Latvian Investment and Development Agency
- The Latvian Technological Centre
- The Forward Studies Unit, Latvian Union of Scientists
- Riga Region Development Council
- Riga City Development Department
- The Latvian Council of Science
- The University of Latvia
- The Banking Institution of Higher Education
- The European Movement in Latvia

Both the public bodies and the research organisations in Latvia have expressed their willingness to participate in foresight activities. The main impediment to the development of national and regional exercises is the lack of public funding.