FutuResilience
Building sustainable futures together

POLICY BRIEF #4

MARCH 2025

HOW CAN FORESIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING SOCIETAL RESILIENCE?

Key Points

Foresight processes can help to cope with and make strategic decisions on specific ongoing crises such as climate change, migration or cybersecurity as well as enhance future preparedness. By strengthening participative, coping, adaptive, and transformative capacities within the societal fabric, these processes enable social systems to thrive amid uncertainty and adverse conditions.

This Policy Brief identifies Foresight processes' different types of contributions to societal resilience, provides concrete examples from the FutuResilience Labs and calls on policy and decision makers to continuously embed participatory Foresight into crisis management.

- **Coping Capacity:** Foresight processes help to make sense of a crisis and deal with uncertainty
- **Adaptive/Transformative Capacity:** Foresight processes enable social systems to adapt or even transform after a crisis, preparing for and imagining new futures worth striving for
- **Participatory Capacity:** Foresight processes mobilize a greater diversity of actors and perspectives for crisis solutions

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094455.

Introduction

Foresight explores and anticipates possible developments to prepare for change or shape a preferable future. It taps into collective intelligence in a structured and systemic way. Strategic Foresight embeds future insights into policymaking, strategic planning, and preparedness. Foresight is not about predicting the future; it explores different possible futures alongside the opportunities and challenges they might present. Ultimately, Foresight helps policy and decision makers to act in the present to shape the future (adapted from European Commission 2025).

The **FUTURESILIENCE project** implements scenario-based Foresight processes within 10 'FutuResilience Labs', creating capacity and strengthening European economic and social resilience. During the experimentation, diverse stakeholders engage in Foresight processes, tackling their specific critical situations, from health system adaptation to digital transformation and social fragmentation.

This Policy Brief examines the linkages between Foresight and societal resilience. It specifies potential Foresight contributions to societal resilience and illustrates these with examples from the FutuResilience Labs.

Societal Resilience: main aspects

Societal resilience refers to the intrinsic ability of a social system (e.g. families, organisations, communities, regions, or nations) to manage and respond to shocks and adverse events while avoiding system failure, i.e. the inability to provide the functions expected by its members (Lorenz, 2013). Societal resilience is greatly shaped by pre-existing societal conditions and relies on the contribution of the entire range of system actors and citizens' participation (Cutter et al., 2008; Burton, 2015).

Social science literature (i.e. Lorenz, 2013) highlights **three main aspects of societal resilience:**

- **Coping or Absorptive Capacity** is the ability to absorb an unexpected shock. This includes:
  - Preserving system identity in the face of a crisis, to integrate it into sensemaking practices and link the past and the future in a new way that preserves inner continuity
  - Constructively dealing with the experience of the system not providing the expected functions
  - Accepting uncertainty, unpredictability, and change in the environment
- **Adaptive Capacity** is the ability to respond to changing framework conditions through incremental adaptations. Important aspects are:
  - Adopting new practices and, whenever required, reforming institutions
  - Adapting narratives to new situations
- **Transformative Capacity** is the ability to implement changes in the system's primary structure and function in response to a major external challenge. This involves aspects such as:
  - Imagining fundamentally new and worthwhile structures
  - Creating new narratives and institutions

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Participatory Capacity underpins all three of these elements of resilience. It entails the ability of the system's actors to self-organise while including a diversity of perspectives and expectations in crisis mitigation and mobilising local practices (e.g. narratives, rituals, and humour) and knowledge, rather than importing external explanatory structures.

Societal resilience depends heavily on the ability of actors in the system to learn from the past, reflect on the future, and – if necessary – divert towards more beneficial trajectories.

The Foresight contribution to societal resilience

Foresight involves forward-looking methods that often assume the present environment will undergo change based on known trends or plausible, expected discontinuities. Foresight is not merely an addition to a planning exercise – it is also about giving people the opportunity to open up to the possibility of change and uncertainties, and dealing with these uncertainties in a structured manner. By integrating Foresight into traditional planning (which tends to disregard disruptions) societal systems become more robust, adaptable, and proactive. Foresight fosters anticipatory thinking, creativity, and diverse participation by strengthening coping, adaptive, and participatory capacities, thus enhancing societies' ability to thrive amid uncertainty and adversity.

Fostering resilience requires a deliberate and forward-looking approach that goes beyond short-term measures. While small-scale adaptations to changes may suffice in simpler contexts, our world is profoundly structured by technological and institutional systems that shape how we access energy, food, water, mobility, and other essential resources. Transitioning to more resilient and ecologically sustainable alternatives requires acknowledging their broader economic and social implications. This is where Foresight also proves invaluable – not only as a tool for anticipating and embracing change but as a means of systematically understanding the interconnected consequences of different policy choices across multiple domains of life.

Learning from the FutuResilience Labs experience

The **TIMES Lab** is working on strengthening local community preparedness at the Municipality of Cesena in Italy. The heavy flooding of Cesena in 2023 saw the spontaneous mass mobilisation of volunteers as an example of coping and participatory capacity by articulating highly diverse societal groups and existing initiatives. This example of social resilience can be assisted by anticipating future crises and how to better make use of the population as resource for emergency management.

One key aspect of the discussions is about developing infrastructure and governance models to manage citizens' contributions to the municipality, civil protection and crisis response, such as logistics and communication systems. This illustrates how the Foresight process empowers the community to mobilise its participatory capacity more effectively by creating new, future-oriented social and technical linkages between people and institutions on different levels. In this direction, the TIMES Lab uses a **Foresight storytelling approach** that invites participants to co-create a news journal from 2050, imagining new forms of emergency response within the community and enhancing future preparedness.

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The **MULTILOCAL Lab** deals with new multilocal living arrangements, which distort many municipalities' budgets – especially in rural and coastal regions in Estonia, where the demand for services is difficult to plan, and very often the increased demand is not compensated by additional tax income. To understand the income effects of potential changes in local population structure, a digital data analysis tool has been developed. The tool enables municipalities to simulate the effects on their tax incomes while considering shifts in population size and composition. Together with stakeholders from local municipalities, the Lab identifies the challenges and opportunities of the multilocality in relation to population dynamics and service provision and explores ways in which cooperation between municipal entities could help to achieve a better balance. The Lab thus enhances the adaptive capacity of the new multilocality challenge by better linking diverse system elements across different spatial levels.

The **IMMER Lab** dives into the future to an imagined crisis in 2050 and explores the hypothetical resulting situation in 2051 to draw lessons for today. IMMER involves stakeholders such as crisis intervention forces, fire brigades, and administrations from France and Germany to be able to react immediately and learn lessons for other situations. The aim is to enhance capacities and cross-border connections in readiness for a potential crisis. IMMER tested using examples such as a blackout, tsunami or new pandemic and programmed a smartphone app to place people in the situations. Using science fiction stories for inspiration and storytelling by and for participants, the Lab strengthens the ability to imagine different system states – a key aspect of transformative capacity. Holding the very long-term view up to 2050 and thereafter, the implications for today and for preparing better collaboration on both sides of the Rhine River become clearer. Therefore, the Lab widens the range of sectors involved and takes many different perspectives into account, usually organisations that can be mobilised quickly for crisis solutions.

Policy implications and action items

Foresight processes can help policy and decision makers to cope with specific ongoing crises such as climate change, cybersecurity, and migration and enhance future preparedness. In addition, Foresight processes can underpin societal resilience on a much deeper level, enabling social systems to thrive amid uncertainty and adverse conditions.

Findings from the labs experience led to the following **policy recommendations**:

- Identify community capacities to cope with system failures to mobilise diverse actors for crisis response and imagine different futures as a core element of resilience, rather than merely focusing on crisis response in the narrow sense.
- Implement Foresight exercises across EU agencies and national governments, particularly those dealing with crisis management. Using Foresight processes on a continuous basis rather than only to address specific challenges will enable striving resilient communities to respond to diverse challenges and changing conditions.
- Strengthen multi-level and cross-sectoral private collaboration to increase participatory capacity and design training for the long-term view and unexpected events at the institutional level and multiple levels of governance.
- Develop scenario-based stress testing for policy design to create more resilient societal structures, including understanding the long-term effects of political decisions on future generations to increase transformative capacity.

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Project Identity

Project Name	Creating FUTUre societal RESILIENCE through innovative, science-based co-creation labs **[FUTURESILIENCE]**
Consortium	***[Coordinator]*** European Future Innovation Systems (EFIS) Centre – Belgium; NTNU Social Research – Norway; Fraunhofer ISI – Germany; University of Ferrara – Italy; University of Urbino – Italy; Maastricht University – Netherlands; Regional Development Institute – Greece; Polytechnic University of Cartagena – Spain; Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies – Denmark; Foresight Centre at the Riigikogu – Estonia; Mid-Sweden University – Sweden; Bulgarian Association of Personalised Medicine – Bulgaria; Municipality of Murcia – Spain; Municipality of Chios – Greece
Funding Scheme	**Horizon Europe /** HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01: An experimentation space for the uptake and use of R&I results for EU resilience and future preparedness
Website	www.futuresilience.eu
Duration	36 months (January 2023 – December 2025)
Budget	€2,889,406.25

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