4 Towards a multi-level strategic foresight model in Flanders

Global challenges require international networks to produce and use strategic foresight (Bos, Brown and Farrelly, 2015[1]). This is important not only on the national, but also regional and local levels. Global trends need to be contextualised, and specific effects and challenges identified. There is also a great deal of mutual learning that can happen between regions, with exploring and mapping emerging change, and learning from novel policy and service innovations.

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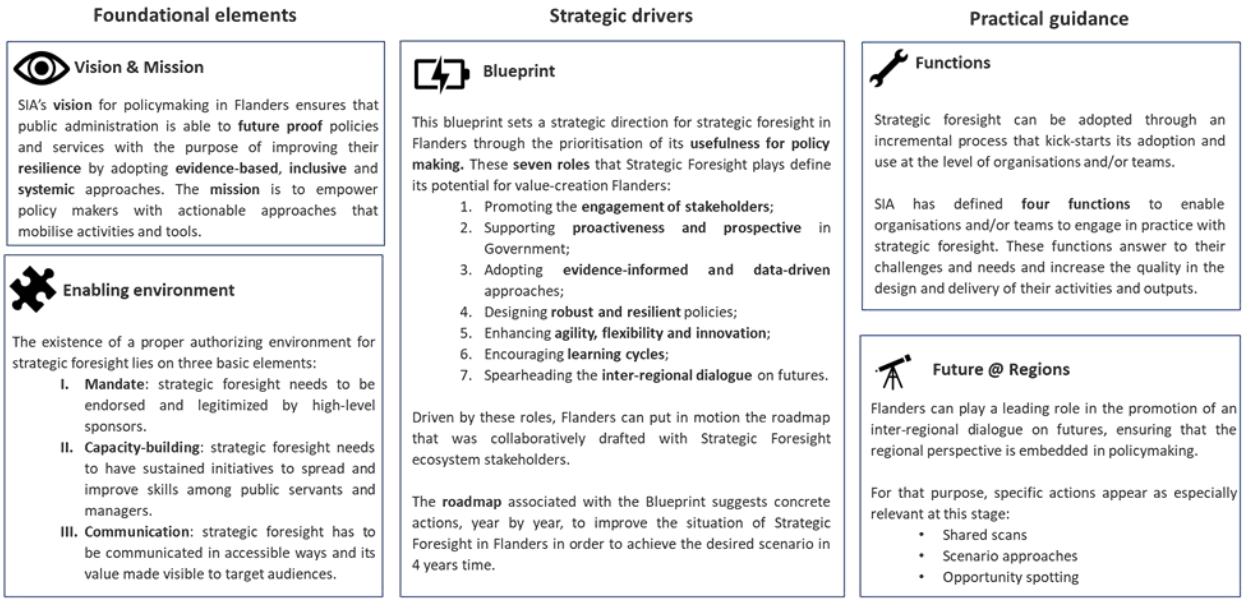
To build this collaboration and anticipate change effectively, public-sector organisations need to strengthen their strategic foresight capabilities and link them with policy-making. Based on regional dialogues and the assessment the government of Flanders has carried out with the OECD, a multi-level model for strategic foresight is taking shape (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Building a strategic foresight system in a multi-level setting



Source: OECD.

First, it is important to build a shared vision of how multi-level strategic foresight can be used for policy purposes. This vision will underpin a mission that articulates the objectives and actions required to make foresight practice reality.

Second, on the systems level there are three key components to address: mandate, capacity-building and communication. The use of strategic foresight in policy-making can be systematic only when clear mandate is given to the public administration to engage with uncertainty surrounding policy problems. This expectation and responsibility should be made clear. Once put in place, the mandate's success relies on robust systemic capacity-building – developing the necessary strategic foresight skills and capabilities for public administrators and managers to draw upon in their day-to-day work. Furthermore, open communication about these aims is essential.

Third, key foresight goals need to be defined. These could include: engagement with stakeholders; a proactive, agile, flexible and innovative government; evidence-informed approaches; robust and resilient approaches, and; shared learning and dialogue in the foresight ecosystem. These help to design fit-for-

purpose strategic foresight systems for regions. They also help emphasise the interconnectedness of practices and connections to futures work.

Fourth, individual teams can start integrating multi-level strategic foresight into their work based on these foresight functions: discover, explore, map and create. Much of the strategic foresight work in organisations is underpinned by a structured intelligence/horizon-scanning process that collects signals and analyses drivers of change. Establishing these practices to continuously discover, explore and map drivers and signals of change relevant to regions is the first step towards systemic strategic foresight work.

Lastly, governments do not have to explore the future alone. Countries and regions are often impacted by the same events and challenges. While their context and realities may differ, much can be gleaned from pooling resources, sharing intelligence, developing scenarios, and doing strategic foresight together. Regional results and outputs could be further contextualised for regional needs (as was the case during the regional dialogues piloted by the government of Flanders). Ongoing and structured learning will greatly enhance the resilience of regions, spurring more collective transformative innovations between regions in the future.

References

Bos, J., R. Brown and M. Farrelly (2015), “Building networks and coalitions to promote transformational change: Insights from an Australian urban water planning case study”, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, Vol. 15, pp. 11-25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2014.10.002. [1]