P234 / Grasping the Future, Governing the Present: Anticipatory Governance in Practice across Administrative Contexts

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

Chair : Lizan Calina (Development Academy of the Philippines)

Second Chair : Ebinezer Florano (University of the Philippines Diliman)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Anticipation has become an expected function of government. Foresight units, parliamentary committees for the future and long-term national visions are now common, and a practitioner consensus defines what integration requires: a senior mandate, links to planning and budgeting, distributed focal points and skilled staff (OECD, 2025; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2026).

Far less is known about what foresight does once inside government. The literature holds both that foresight remains detached from core decisions and that embedded foresight yields better strategic choices, yet both claims rest largely on a few exemplary cases (Choo & Fergnani, 2022) and self-assessment. Unlike corporate foresight, where longitudinal performance evidence exists (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018), public-sector foresight is seldom studied as knowledge in use. Because policy knowledge often influences conceptually and cumulatively rather than instrumentally (Weiss, 1979), the "impact gap" may partly reflect how impact is defined.

The question sharpens as turbulent problems compress the time between signal and decision (Ansell et al., 2021) and artificial intelligence makes futures cheap to produce. Most administrations also differ from the exemplars: where capability is stretched, best-practice reforms risk reproducing institutional form without function (Pritchett et al., 2013).

The panel asks: How is strategic foresight used in public administration, under what conditions does it shape policy and organizational behavior, and how do these conditions vary across contexts and under accelerating change? It invites contributions that test or contest five propositions:

P1. Foresight's influence may depend as much on organizations' capacity to absorb futures as on producing them.
P2. Foresight may contribute by reframing problems, informing deliberation and preparing options, not only by shaping discrete decisions.
P3. Foresight's position within government may shape both how often it is used and how freely it questions prevailing assumptions.
P4. Where administrative capacity is stretched, foresight may take root more readily when linked to existing planning and budgeting systems.
P5. Artificial intelligence may shift foresight work toward interpretation, judgment and translation by public servants.
Understanding how foresight is used, by whom and to what effect, is a precondition for governments that seek to anticipate rather than react.

References List

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers that examine how strategic foresight operates inside public administrations and with what consequences. Rather than asking how foresight ought to be institutionalized, it asks what foresight actually does: how it is used and by whom, which decisions and organizational routines it reaches, and what it takes for anticipatory knowledge to matter. We welcome single-case and comparative studies at national, subnational, regional and international levels, in any policy domain, using qualitative, quantitative, experimental or mixed methods. Conceptual papers that sharpen how foresight use and impact are defined and measured are equally welcome. We particularly encourage contributions from the Global South and from collaborations between scholars and practitioners.

Papers may address, among others:

1) Uses and non-uses. How is foresight used instrumentally, conceptually, symbolically or politically, at which stages of the policy cycle, and why is foresight sometimes produced but not used?
2) Evidence of impact. How can the influence of foresight on decisions, organizations and outcomes be observed over time, when its effects may accumulate gradually rather than appear in discrete choices?
3) Translation. Through which formats and routines do scenarios and signals enter budgets, regulations, contingency plans and performance frameworks?
4) Context and capability. How does foresight function in devolved, resource-constrained or donor-supported administrations, and when does it take root in existing planning instruments rather than remaining a project (Andrews et al., 2017)?
5) Acceleration and artificial intelligence. How is AI reshaping horizon scanning and scenario work, how is its use governed, and who gains or loses anticipatory capacity as a result?
6) People and practice. How do foresight practitioners, focal points and senior sponsors build credibility, convey unwelcome futures and sustain their work through political change?
7) Legitimacy and voice. Whose futures are represented in government foresight, how are citizens and future generations given standing, and how does participation affect the legitimacy and uptake of long-term policy?

Contributions may draw on theories of knowledge utilization, policy capacity (Wu et al., 2015), organizational institutionalism, policy advisory systems and state capability. Together, they will build a grounded, comparative account of anticipatory governance in practice and its implications for public administration and policy.

References List