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Milestone 25 – Participatory foresight exercises completed and documented

SPI Foresight Workshops 2023

Work Package 6 Science-Policy Interfaces and Relationship Building



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Authors	Alex Inman (UNEXE), Mingyuan Chen (UNEXE)
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1 Background

These workshops were the first of at least three workshops to be conducted with SPI participants during the VISIONARY project timeframe. Although a hybrid physical/online participation approach was originally considered, the complexity and length of the meetings necessitated a physical in-person meeting in nearly all cases. It was also agreed by project partners that a physical meeting would have additional advantages from the perspective of building trust and understanding with and between SPI participants.

It may be possible to use a hybrid approach for future meetings once the necessary social capital has been built with/between participants.

1.1 Workshop objectives

Build Social Capital

- (1) To enable SPI participants to build social capital amongst themselves and with the research team
- (2) To explore the needs of SPI participants and how the VISIONARY project can help them

Foresight exercise

- (3) To review initial results from the policy/regulatory mapping and mental model interviews and further refine this assessment
- (4) To identify, refine and prioritise policy and business model interventions to be taken forward for assessment in WP3 and WP4 (experiments/participatory research)

1.2 What is a foresight exercise?

Foresight methods have become an established approach for exploring solutions to complex public policy problems with multiple stakeholder typologies. In essence, they provide a systematic, knowledge exchange and vision-building process that can help stakeholders shape the future rather than simply anticipate future scenarios. As framed by the OECD, *'the objective is not to get the future right, but to expand and reframe the range of plausible developments that need to be taken into consideration'*. In addition, the OECD suggests a strategic foresight exercise should aim *'to pose key questions that might have gone unasked in developing a strategy, and to reveal and challenge potentially fatal assumptions and expectations built into current policies and plans'* (see <https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/whatisforesight>)

1.3 Where do the foresight workshops sit within the VISIONARY project as a whole?

Building in a foresight approach is crucial for the VISIONARY project. This will require the project team to work with stakeholders to create ideas that are not shackled by 'business as usual' thinking. A well structured foresight exercise provides a vehicle to do this by helping participants think creatively.

The foresight workshops were structured to include the following stages (1) **Diagnosis (optional)** - understanding the current situation (2) **Prognosis** – analysing what change should happen (3) **Prognosis prioritisation** – identifying which changes should be prioritised (4) **Prescription** – making recommendations on how to implement the changes.

1.4 Workshop Format (adapted by individual partners as needed)

- (1) **Arrival & coffee** (30 minutes)

On arrival, participants were given two post-it notes and asked to write two outcomes they would most like to derive from the project (one per post-it note). These were then placed on a whiteboard/similar in the meeting room and grouped into themes to create a metaplan – see stage 4 below

(2) Introductions (30 minutes)

Project team introduced themselves and then asked each SPI participant to briefly introduce themselves

(3) Overview presentation of VISIONARY project (20 minutes)

Project team provided a standardised VISIONARY overview presentation explaining where the SPIs fit into the project as a whole. The presentation included the objectives of the workshop (see above) and the workshop structure/agenda. An emphasis was placed on identifying necessary changes and interventions (radical if necessary) rather than spending too much time listing the problems themselves (it was felt SPI participants were already aware of these). Time was allowed for questions/answers.

(4) Discussion on the responses identified on the metaplan to assess SPI participants needs from the project (20 minutes)

Project team summarised the themes identified on the metaplan, providing commentary on what will be likely/more difficult/impossible to deliver (hopefully very few outcomes will be impossible)

(5) Main foresight exercise (140-170 minutes)

This exercise was conducted in breakout groups of between 8-10 participants in each group (with the exception of the Diagnosis stage which involved all participants together)

The following steps and methods were used:

- (1) **Diagnosis** (between 10 and 40 minutes) - The project team presented an overview (10 minutes) of the SPI case study topic (e.g. how can organic farming be developed) focussing on an assessment of the current barriers (lock-ins). This assessment was informed by any regulatory/policy mapping and mental mapping work undertaken by the project team to date.




If partners felt SPI participants already had a shared/common understanding of the barriers (lock-ins), they could elect to move straight to Stage 2 below (Prognosis) However where partners perceived a lack of a shared/common understanding exists, an optional facilitated session was then undertaken with SPI participants to review, assess and amend the barriers (30 minutes)

- (2) **Prognosis** (45 minutes) - A visioning exercise with SPI participants to reach an understanding of what changes need to take place at local, regional, national, international level

Documentation of individual visions (10 minutes) – each workshop participant was invited to articulate his/her vision for the changes needed. Ideas were recorded on post-it notes and placed on a flipchart without discussion. Facilitator encouraged participants to challenge existing norms. A collective creative vision (35 minutes) was then constructed by synthesising the individual comments received into clusters/themes.

- (3) **Prognosis prioritisation** (20 minutes) - the changes derived from the Prognosis stage above were then prioritised to determine their perceived importance by SPI participants. This helped to guide which changes the project team will focus on for research within Work Package 3 and 4. As such, these changes frame and focus the research objectives for the VISIONARY project as a whole.

Prioritisation was undertaken by listing the changes (themes/clusters) on a simple table as demonstrated below (one or more flip charts used depending on the number of changes derived at Stage 2).

Changes needed	Importance
insert Change 1....	
insert Change 2....	
insert Change 3....	
etc	


Each participant was issued with 10 sticky dots and asked to allocate these across the various changes listed in the table. In the above example the participant has chosen to allocate six dots to Change 1, one dot to Change 2 and three dots to Change 3. The changes with the most sticky dots were those which were prioritised for the Prescription stage below.

- (4) **Prescription** (65 minutes) – a pathway mapping exercise to describe how the changes can be delivered i.e. what interventions (levers) are needed.

It was not always possible to create a pathway for all the changes identified at the Prognosis prioritisation stage. Facilitators started with the highest priority change identified and worked downwards to cover as many as possible in the available time.

Facilitators used a flipchart (landscape orientation) to help participants visualise the pathway(s) to reach each change using the table matrix below. One flipchart sheet was used for each prioritised change.

Title: {priority change 1, 2, 3 etc}

Pathway 			
Intervention	Who	Constraints	Enablers
insert intervention 1...			
insert intervention 2...			
etc			

(6) **Next steps, Thank & Close** (10 minutes)

2 Table of SPI workshops undertaken

Institution	SPI topics	Number of participants	Date of workshop
UNEXE	Short Supply Chains	20	6 th July 2023
UCPH	Plant-based protein	15	19 th June 2023
CBS	Plant-based protein	15	19 th June 2023
UNIABDN	Organic	14	23 rd May 2023
AKI	Organic	15	16 th May 2023
AKI	Irrigation water management	13	1 st June 2023
FIBL	Organic	13	14 th June 2023
FIBL/ ZALF	Plant-based protein	18	15 th June 2023
HCC	Local Gastronomic Points	16	13 th June 2023
HCC	Short Supply Chains	18	8 th August 2023
UPV	Organic	19	27 th June 2023
CAAE	Short Supply Chains	32	11 th July 2023
UNITN	Diary	22	23 rd June 2023
UNITN	Diary	20	10 th July 2023
UNIWARSAW	Organic	10	3 rd July 2023
UNIWARSAW	Short Supply Chains	9	11 th July 2023

3 Observations from the SPI foresight meetings

All flip charts and materials generated from the foresight exercise have been collated and stored by the project partners and reviewed by the Work Package 6 lead. It is clear from the detailed information received that the meetings have proved very successful in generating insights from SPI participants on the key interventions required to tackle the barriers and lock-ins relating to the issues each SPI is addressing. As envisaged in the project proposal, the guidance generated from the initial SPI foresight meetings will now be used to refine and target the research activity undertaken by the VISIONARY partners in their respective countries.

The following observations have been derived from the experience of facilitating these initial foresight meetings which are important within the context of managing SPI development going forward.

A significant cohesion both within and between SPI groupings regarding a vision for change

In general, there is considerable agreement within each SPI across the different stakeholders involved regarding food system interventions needed. It is also possible to identify a number of common themes emerging across the individual SPIs.

3.1 Transition to organic farming systems

There are strong common themes emerging from the SPI foresight meetings focussing on how to encourage organic production. Of note, considerable state intervention is regarded as necessary by

all SPI groups, particularly to facilitate organic distribution systems and to promote the consumption of organic food within state/public sector institutions (demand side) e.g. schools, hospitals civil administration offices. State intervention is also seen as needed to provide training and research to farmers (supply side) and enable wide-scale and on-going marketing of organic food to consumers (demand side).

It is possible to detect from the SPI results a scepticism that national governments have the political will to provide the necessary support to the organic sector. This sentiment appears very strong amongst the Polish SPI group in particular.

3.2 Transition to plant/legume based diets

Those SPIs addressing the topic of a transition to plant/legume rich diet articulated a number of common goals with strong agreement emerging amongst the SPI participants involved. The need to empower citizens with the skills to grow and prepare vegetables is a widely cited issue; the rationale being this will embed a culture of vegetable consumption within everyday life as well as providing practical access to sources of plant protein. Another related theme emerging from the SPI workshops is a requirement for public education programmes to explain the benefits of plant based diets. Interestingly in Denmark (UCPH), a caveat was made that the promotion of plant-based diets should also underline a continued role for animal proteins. This mixed picture presents a significant challenge for public information messaging.

In addition to stimulating demand, there is a consistent body opinion from across the SPIs that resources will need to be invested in the supply side of the market. For example, plant breeding improvements are seen as necessary both to supply appropriate quantity but also to improve the quality and consistency of the produces growers are able to deliver. Distribution and marketing channels will also need significant focus with an interesting discussion developing in Germany between the farmers and other interests over who should take responsibility for selling the product. The farmers would like control over this process whilst they appreciate trading commodities is not traditionally a core strength of the farming community.

3.3 Delivering a sustainable dairy farming sector

The VISIONARY consortium has established SPIs which look at the role of both the farmers and the consumer in the delivery of a sustainable dairy industry. The dairy sector has received particular attention from environmental NGOs and sections of the media with regard to negative environmental impact. There appears a very strong consensus across our SPI community regarding appropriate interventions and direction of travel.

Participants focussing on the production side of the equation have identified a need for increased advice and technology provision to farmers and processors; but also a need for increased legislative production and land husbandry standards. The emphasis within the SPI dialogue has been weighted towards advice and technology rather than regulatory instruments.

Our SPIs (Italy) addressing demand side issues have concentrated on the necessary conditions to raise consumer awareness of, and support for, dairy systems which have a positive relationship with the natural environment e.g. 'alpicultural' models such as the *malga pasture* system typical of the eastern Italian Alps.

3.4 Enabling shorter decentralised supply chains

Our SPIs investigating mechanisms for facilitating shorter supply chains have generated insights which have considerable synergies with the SPIs focused on other topics, particularly organic and plant based transitions. From a demand side perspective, raising consumer awareness of the benefits of localised

short supply chains is seen as key, together with a need for better labelling to inform consumer choice. Shoppers need to understand what *sustainable* means and how local food webs can deliver sustainable outcomes. An emphasis on targeting school aged children with suitable information is a core message emanating from the dialogue with SPI participants.

Improving access to the consumer will be a structural supply side issue which local producers will need assistance with. It is here where state support for local food hubs such as the Tamar Grow Local model (UK) and the Local Gastronomic Points concept (Romania) is considered vital by our SPI participants. Stimulating demand from public sector institutions has also been identified as a potential game changer in the expansion of shorter supply chains notwithstanding the budgetary constraints characterising many public procurement contracts.

4 Socio-cultural tensions between SPI participants relevant to building social capital with the SPI grouping

In nearly all cases, either no tensions or only minor tensions were observed. Where tension was identified, this tended to be amongst stakeholders with direct vested interests. In particular, tension was most noticeable in scenarios involving interaction between farmers and advisory service providers, regulatory bodies and their governed stakeholders (those providing subsidies and those receiving them).

Additionally, tensions emerged amongst stakeholders with varying degrees of competition. For instance, within organic farming, FiBL reported tensions between conventional and organic farmers, as well as between organic farmers and newcomers to the sector. Tensions extended to interactions between large-scale processors and their smaller counterparts. Another layer of tension surfaced between upstream and downstream stakeholders. For example, processors reported feeling attacked by farmers. Importantly, these instances of tension did not compromise the overarching effectiveness of the workshops. As underscored by UPV, tensions were brought to the forefront without the discussions becoming excessively strained, with a notable receptiveness among participants to listen to other narratives.

5 Gaps in SPI composition

The VISIONARY consortium has successfully recruited participants from key stakeholder groups pertinent to their respective SPIs. However, engagement of specific SPI participants will remain a challenge due the nature of certain stakeholder typologies. For instance, UNIWARSAW reported farmers were not present during the workshop due to the summer season being the key period of cultivation in Poland. In addition, UCPH and UPV both encountered situations where essential stakeholders withdrew at short notice, leaving minimal time for replacement recruitment. These withdrawals were primarily driven by scheduling conflicts, with departing participants expressing interest in future workshops. VISIONARY partners will continue to maintain regular (appropriately timed) contact with SPI participants to maintain rapport and encourage engagement as the project progresses.

The inclusion of retailer/supermarket representatives has been a key objective for multiple SPIs. Experience, however, suggests sufficient engagement will require considerable time and effort. In some cases, SPI participants have identified additional stakeholder typologies regarded as important to the future process. For example, FiBL has proposed the involvement of politicians in forthcoming workshops. UNIEXE has highlighted the importance of including ‘disengaged consumers’. HCC has proposed to invite tourists who have visited Local Gastronomic Points in their future workshops.

6 Information needs identified by SPI participants to facilitate their contribution to the SPI process

SPI participants did not report any substantive information deficiencies preventing them from participating in the SPI process. Some clarification on certain concepts (e.g. ‘local food’, ‘conventional farming’) would be appreciated which is slated for development in WP2.1.

In summary, it is noteworthy that SPI participants have conveyed their keen interest in the project and particularly value the international dimension to the research and the opportunity to learn from other countries. The VISIONARY project newsletter has the potential to provide a key communications channel with SPI participants. To maximise information relevance to SPI participants, it suggested newsletter content should include a focus on “cases of success” (WP2.4, WP4.4), barriers to interventions (WP2.3, WP4.2, WP6.2) and relevant innovative technology.