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Vision 2023: Turkey's national Technology Foresight Program: A contextualist analysis and discussion

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Abstract

Likewise many other developed and developing countries, a national Technology Foresight Program was carried out in Turkey under the name of Vision 2023. This paper analyzes and discusses the Vision 2023 Technology Foresight Program from a contextualist perspective. The contextualist perspective suggests relationships between the context, content and process of change; and thus proposes that any change activity should be designed, organized and implemented by considering these relationships. This viewpoint is seen as a necessary condition for the achievement of change in organizations and society. In this respect, the Vision 2023 Program is considered in its own national and organizational contexts by discussing (i) how the factors in these contexts affected particular decisions taken on the content and approaches adopted in the process and (ii) how problems emerged when these relationships were dismissed. Through the analysis, the paper suggests that a Foresight program should be organized, designed and practised by considering the effects of the external contexts (e.g. national, regional and/or corporate contexts) and structural and behavioral factors stemming from these different context levels along with the nature of the issue being worked on, which constitute the content of the exercise.

Keywords: Foresight; Contextualism; Vision 2023; Turkey; Science and Technology policy

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1. Introduction

As practiced *institutional Foresight* is an outgrowth of a long and historic tradition of *foresight*. Stemming from the unavoidable human trait of *foresight* as a concept, and from *planning* and *forecasting* as a structured activity, institutional Foresight essentially implies some form of "participative vision-based planning process" [1, p.15]. Institutional Foresight has been adopted widely in the last couple of decades particularly at the national level and has become an activity associated with participative public policy-making. The activity is widely acclaimed in government circles research councils, national academy of sciences, government advisory boards or other government departments have organized and carried out institutional Foresight exercises lengthily and allocated scarce resources based on the advises coming from those exercises.

Referring to the rapid diffusion of Technology Foresight Martin and Johnston [2] and Martin [3] identify three drivers:

- Escalation in industrial and economic competition. Due to the competition in the global economy, innovation and development of new technologies are becoming more crucial for industrialized and industrializing countries. This is where the primary role of Foresight arises as to identify emerging technologies, which are likely to have significant impact on industry, the economy, society and the environment over coming decades, at an early stage
- Increasing pressure on government spending. Because of limited government resources, like other areas of public spending, research and technology cannot be fully funded by the government. Foresight is presented as a process to help in the identification of funding priorities
- Changing nature of knowledge production. The identification of emerging technologies and the prioritization of research and technology areas point to the increasing need for communication, networks, partnerships and collaboration among researchers and between researchers, industry as the performers and users of the research, government and other relevant stakeholders. Foresight offers a means for developing and strengthening those linkages. In this context, Martin and Johnston [2] see Foresight as a useful activity for "wiring-up" and strengthening National Systems of Innovation[1]

Keenan [4] mentions two further drivers to acknowledge the wide adoption of activities around the globe:

- Bandwagon effects. To a considerable extent the diffusion of institutional Foresight is due to the competition between countries. As one country has undertaken a Foresight exercise, 'competitor' countries feel the need to follow this trend
- Millennium effect. Governments all over the world initiated exercise to appear to be prepared for the new opportunities and challenges in the twenty-first century

[1] How capable the current Foresight practices to fulfil this function is discussed extensively by Saritas [1,25], who introduces the concept of "Systemic Foresight".