



(HOW) CAN FUTURES THINKING HELP GOVERNMENTS RECOVER AND REINVENT?

Public Sector Foresight Network & Association of
Professional Futurists

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Agenda

1. Introduction to strategic foresight at the OECD
2. Looking back: three features of foresight for Covid-19
3. Looking ahead: Foresight for net-zero transitions



Strategic foresight at the OECD



OECD Analysis

- Support to directorates and committees
- Cross-cutting themes

Government Collaboration

- Best practices
- Global foresight on shared priorities

Global Dialogue

- High-level meetings
- Future of OECD



Strategic foresight

- ✓ An approach to think systematically about the future to inform decision making
- ✗ Not predictions or forecasts
- ✓ Exploring and preparing for alternative plausible futures (and doing it together!)



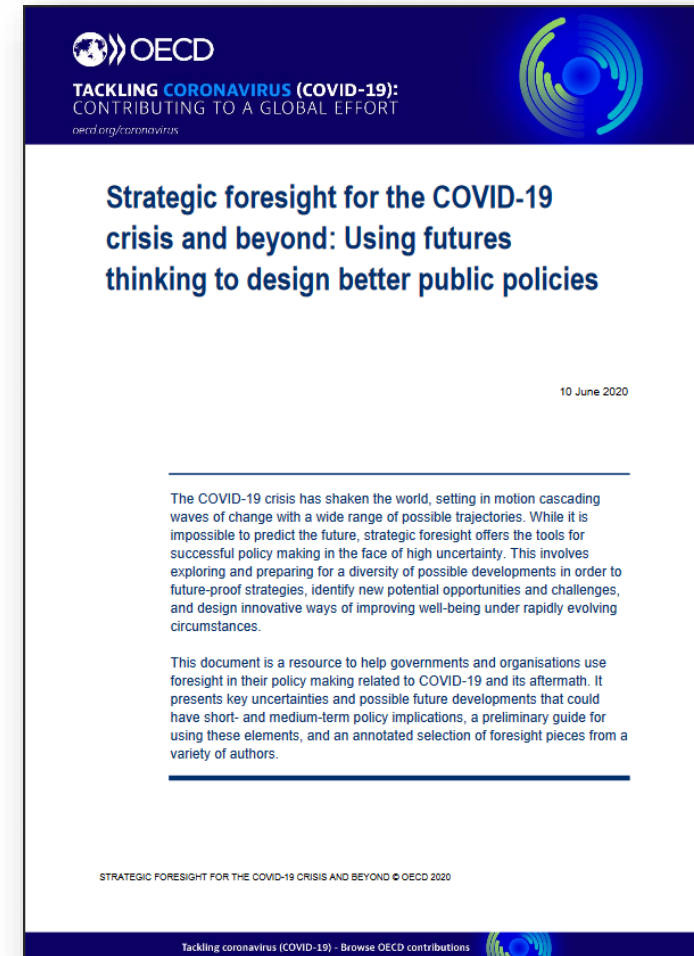
Strategic foresight for decision making

- Responsible government decision making requires foresight
- This involves:
 - engaging proactively with the future
 - imagining and preparing for the unexpected
 - designing adaptive, forward-looking strategies



Foresight for Covid-19 and Beyond: Three Features

- OECD Covid-19 resource hub
 - 10,000+ downloads since June 2020
- Health scenarios
- Collection of uncertainties with multiple possible developments
- Guide on how to use them
- Bibliography






Feature 1: Leaning into uncertainty

FROM THE COMMUNITY / DATA, DIGITAL AND TECH

Uncertainty is here to stay — make the most of it

An introduction to navigating uncertainty for responsible policy making



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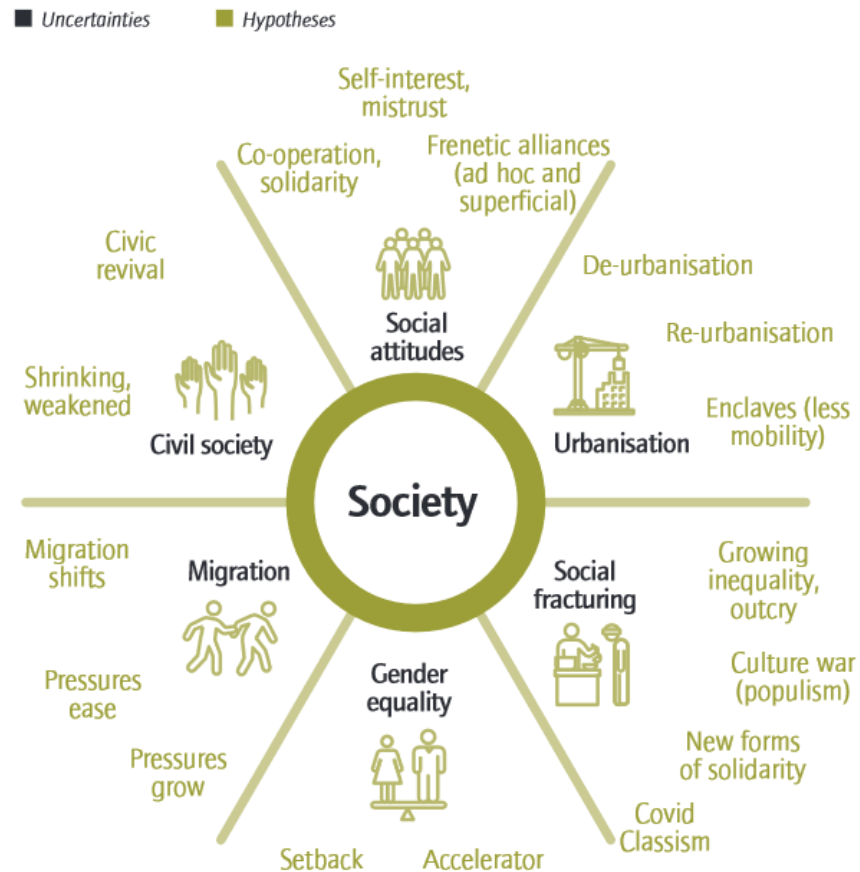
This article is written by Alanna Markle, Strategic Foresight Junior Analyst, on behalf of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Strategic Foresight Unit.

- Inviting colleagues to join in
 - Workshops
 - Scanning club
- Giving structure to the uncertainties that emerged



Feature 2: Easy to digest, globally relevant content

Figure 7.2 Covid-19: Principal uncertainties, according to the OECD



Source : OECD (2020) Strategic foresight for the Covid-19 crisis and beyond: Using futures thinking to design better public policies. Summary table by C. Degryse (ETUI).

- Will the crisis trigger a change in societal attitudes towards co-operation on public goods, or will self-interest dominate?
- What will be the level of social fracturing, and along which fault lines?
- Will COVID-19 cause migration pressures to grow, ease, or shift?
- Will COVID-19 be a setback or accelerator for gender equality?
- Will the course of urbanisation evolve toward de-urbanisation, or re-urbanisation?

Strategic foresight for better public policy: Beyond the COVID-19 crisis

Adapted from [OECD 2020. Strategic foresight for the Covid-19 crisis and beyond](#)

Strategic foresight allows for the consideration of **UNCERTAINTIES** that may be relevant or impactful for future ways of working. Uncertainties beyond the Covid-19 crisis include:

GLOBALISATION

Will new trade links emerge to address local supply shocks? Or will many countries insulate themselves from the global economy by fostering self-sufficiency?

COURSE OF URBANISATION

Will a significant portion of urban dwellers move to rural and suburban areas? Or will cities emerge as winners due to repurposing of office space for residential accommodation?

DIGITAL SOCIAL MIXING

Is Covid-19 the start of a virtual reality renaissance that will reduce in person socialising? Or will there be a whiplash of people craving in personal interactions?

ROBOT LABOUR

Will humans be seen as a risk factor in the economy and increasingly replaced by robots? Will global competition reduce earnings for teleworkers?

FINANCIAL RECOVERY

Will people celebrate the end of the crisis with roaring twenties style spending? Or will Government bailouts and support lead to generational indebtedness?

Create 'what-if' statements

Take one side or perspective of each uncertainty and create a what-if statement. For example:

- What if the proportion of people willing to live in large urban centres falls significantly?
- What if demand increases for more spread out urban centres with co-working spaces situated bicycling or walking distance to home?

Identify early signals

Identify signals that will represent early indicators that the what-if development is coming to pass. These signals can come from data, news sources, expert analyses. For example:

- Population of large urban areas reported to fall.
- Rents being reported to fall in large urban areas

Identify consequences

Identify the second- and third- order consequences that might arise from the what-if statements coming to pass. For example:

- If populations in urban areas fall, we might see job applications being dependent on teleworking.
- Permanent teleworking could increase staffing applications from low-tax countries where salaries are more competitive.

Explore implications

Explore the implications and consequences. For example:

- What current plans will be disrupted if this occurs?
- What opportunities could emerge?

Consider actions

Consider actions that need to be taken to avoid or prepare for the challenges ahead. Pay particular attention to actions that are relevant for many different scenarios. For example:

- What current policies will have to be revisited?
- What issues need to be flagged so that we can better prepare?

Benefits of strategic foresight

Allows for identification and exploration of potential future developments and their implications for decision makers today.

Aims not to predict the future, but to encourage forward-looking policies that are effective under a wide range of possible future conditions.

Can create consensus about vision and encourage robust, adaptive policies that perform under diverse conditions



Foresight for successful net-zero transitions

- Governments and organisations around the world are adopting ambitious commitments to net-zero GHG emissions by 2050
- How to ensure that these strategies are successful in the face of high uncertainty and rapidly changing conditions
- Use foresight to expand awareness of possible future “disruptions” in the 2030-2050 period, and the new opportunities and challenges they could bring for green transition strategies

Thirty initial “possible disruptions” 2030-2050

Social	Human augmentation	Solar radiation management	Power grid breakthroughs	Well-being economies	Authoritarian reigns
Technology	Climate despair	Energy storage breakthroughs	Transparent environment	Flat financial system	Multitrack world
Green-tech	(Re)generation	Heavy transport and aviation breakthroughs	Silent spring - biodiversity loss	Artificial invisible hands	Platform governments
Environment	Virtual worlds	Carbon capture and storage breakthroughs	Heat waves – too hot to live	Accelerated global convergence	Corporate connectors
Economy	Cyber slowdown	Carbon capture and storage failure	Rapid sea level rise	Debt contagion and financial crisis	Modern monetary theory
Governance	“Flubola”	Bioeconomy breakthroughs	Hothouse earth	Social and solidarity economies	Divided world

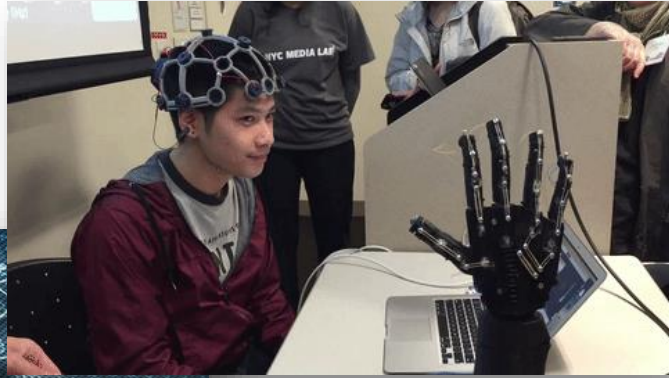
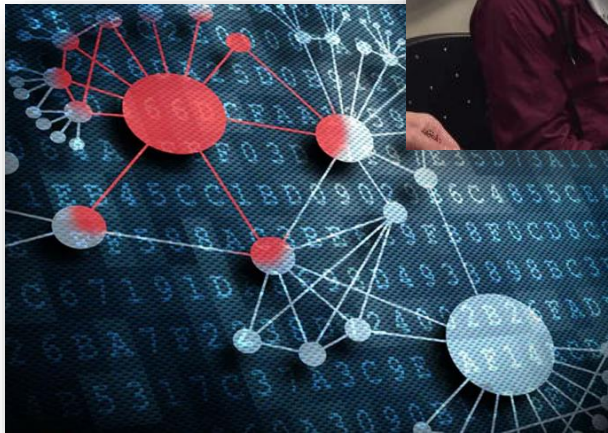


Hothouse Earth – potential implications

- Vigorous and proactive adaptation strategies may be needed in order to prevent societal collapse and ensure well-being while maintaining progress on mitigation
- Seek mitigation and adaptation strategies with greatest mutual synergies, flexibility
- Research and test solar radiation management techniques so they are ready if needed as (short term) last resort



Other potential disruptions...



- Human augmentation
- Cyber slowdown
- Virtual worlds



Next steps

- Refine and expand foresight toolkit for successful net-zero transitions
- Pilot toolkit with governments and organisations:
 - Build locally-relevant scenarios (e.g. combining two “disruptions each”)
 - Explore challenges and opportunities and what is needed for successful transition under each scenario
 - Stress-test and enrich net-zero transition strategy
- Continue dissemination and refinement as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen foresight for net-zero and beyond



Opportunities for collaboration

1. Share best foresight work to help strengthen “disruptions”
2. Join or host workshops to explore implications of disruptions for net-zero strategies
3. Pilot toolkit (or similar concept) with your government/organisation/clients
4. Link with other efforts to apply foresight to addressing climate emergency and other emerging global risks



Questions

- What do you think of this approach to applying foresight to support the net-zero transition?
 - Strengths to emphasise
 - Weaknesses to anticipate and address
 - Linkages with other efforts
- How could this support or connect with your work?
- How best to work together in global foresight efforts to support successful just transitions to a net-zero world?



Thank you!

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