

EFMN Correspondents' Day 2008

Dear EFMN correspondents and EFMN friends,

I would like to welcome you to this year's EFMN correspondents' day in Brussels on behalf of the whole EFMN consortium and thank you for attending this important event for our community.

The EFMN is running for four years now approaching its contractual end in its current setup. This poses some uncertainty how the EFMN will continue in the future. But looking back at what has been achieved since 2004 the network looks strong enough to play a constructive and important role in foresight over the coming years. Over the last year the EFMN partners worked hard to consolidate the information collected and mapped over the last four years. The number of around 2000 collected foresights is impressive and the target of 160 briefs will shortly be met. The visibility of the network has steadily improved with more and more interest from foresight practitioners also outside Europe. This conclusion is supported by the over 1,500 unique visitors per month the EFMN website currently attracts.

After 4 years it is time to look back at what has been achieved and where lessons can be learned. The EFMN is a forerunner in systematically mapping foresight exercises at such scale, providing a central memory of exercises for the community. This forerunner role meant that processes and content were developed in an exploratory journey. Many valuable insights have been gained that we want to share with you. This was the primary reason for publishing a 'special issue' in the journal 'Futures' about the results and lessons learned of the last 4 years. And it is with pleasure that we will present you the publication and key messages at the correspondents' day.

The EFMN Correspondents' Day, set-up to strengthen the largely virtual EFMN community, provides a learning forum discussing every year a topic of special interest. This year we chose the topic of 'Weak Signals in Foresight'. The topic receives increasing attention from policy-makers and firms to yield results in practice. Furthermore, several projects sponsored under the FP7 programme embark on identifying weak signals.

We therefore are proud to provide you with interesting presentations included in the programme, covering methodological issue in weak signals identification as well as two case studies. One presenting experiences of weak signals identification at a Finnish timber firm as well as another case study presenting the experiences made as part of the UK Horizon Scanning activities. Additionally, latest results from EFMN activities that are of high interest to you will be presented.

In this sense I wish us all an inspiring event, which will lead to new initiatives and contacts for the future.

Maurits Butter
{mospagebreak title=Conference Programme}

Conference Programme
Day 1 - 12:00 – 17:45

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Lunch buffet from 12:00 – 13:00 at conference facility

The day will start with an open lunch buffet for correspondents to meet before the official opening of the day.

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Opening of correspondents' day 13:00 – 13:20

Maurits Butter – TNO, the Netherlands

Title: The EFMN from 2004-2008

In a short welcoming introduction, the EFMN correspondents' day will be opened and a short review about EFMN will be given.

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Presentation Key Messages Journal EFMN Special Issue 13:20 – 14:00

Luke Georghiou – PREST, UK

The EFMN has produced a journal special issue publishing the EFMN results of the last 4 years. The special issue will be introduced to the audience by Luke Georghiou. Some key messages are presented by Maurits Butter.

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Presentation key note speaker on weak signals 14:00 – 15:00

Mrs Elina Hiltunen – Nokia, Finland

Title: Weak signals – what is it and how can it be identified?

This presentation will present methodological ideas and insights of weak signals and develop ideas how these can be better classified and identified.

The presentation of 30-40 minutes will be followed by an open discussion of the results of 20-30 minutes

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Break 15:00 - 15:30

During the break an opinion poll on most important future issue was held. A questionnaire was distributed and analysed later in the day, feeding into next year's EFMN issue analysis.

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Presentations of featured correspondents 15:30 – 17:00

These presentations will be held by correspondents that will present experiences and insights of recent foresight projects related to weak signal analyses.

This year's presentations will be held by Anssi Tervonen and Alun Rhydderch.

Each presentation ca 25-30min leading to open discussion.

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Anssi Tervonen – Data Rangers, Finland

Experiences of using weak signals in foresight building at M-real in 2001-2005

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Alun Rhydderch – DIUS, UK

Weak signals identification for policy – the UK Horizon Scanning Activities

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Short break 17:00 - 17:15

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Pecha Kuchas 17:15 – 17:45

Participants will present their latest projects and ideas to the audience in Pecha Kucha format.

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End of formal presentations: 17:45

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Informal event from 20:00

To allow for informal networking between correspondents' as well as the EFMN partners, a dinner has been arranged at the restaurant of the university foundation.

The cost of this event is free of charge.

Day 2 - 9:30-15:00

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Presentation of EFMN mapping results 2008 9:30 – 10:10

Raphael Popper – Manchester University, UK

Title: Results of EFMN mapping report 2008

Part of this year's EFMN mapping compares the results of the mapping for Europe to other world regions. Additionally, the lessons learnt from the mapping since 2004 will be presented including future improvements and ideas.

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Presentation of EFMN issue analysis results 2008 10:10 – 10:30

Dr Anette Braun – VDI, Germany

Title: Results from the issue analysis 2008

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Pecha Kuchas 10:30 – 11:00

Participants will present their latest projects and ideas to the audience in Pecha Kucha format.

Bob Frame of the Land Care Research Institute in New Zealand

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Presentation of EFMN briefs production 11:00 – 11:30

Dr Susanne Giesecke – ARC, Austria

This presentation will reflect upon the Briefs production process, community building, and experience with different approaches.

Furthermore, a closer look will be taken at the content and context of the Briefs and related foresight activities.

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How to make the best use of the EFMN website 11:30 – 12:00

Dr. Patrick Crehan – CKA, Belgium

Practical tools and tips to get the most out of the EFMN website.

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Lunch buffet from 12:00 – 13:00

A lunch buffet during the break will be provided for you.

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Presentation by the Commission 13:00 – 13:45

Pierre Valette – DG Research / L.2

This presentation will give the Commission's view on the new context of Foresight and implications for future work programmes.

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Presentation of opinion poll on weak signals 13:45 – 14:15

This presentation will briefly present the results from the opinion poll on the most interesting / most important future issue, conducted during the previous day.

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Final conclusions, EFMN outlook and future vision 14:15

Maurits Butter – TNO, the Netherlands

This presentation will summarise the EFMN correspondents' day and provide an outlook of the EFMN for the next years.

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End of Correspondents' day 2008 – ca 15:00
{mospagebreak title=Overview of Presentations}

Overview of presentations

Elina Hiltunen (Nokia, Finland)

This presentation will discuss weak signals and their complex definition, introducing a new concept to weak signals thinking: the future sign. The future sign, originating from Peirce's semiotic model of the sign, includes various aspects of change. Kuusi and Hiltunen further refined the model elaborating the signification process by clarifying the various aspects of change (including signals). In addition Elina will present results from a number of studies that she conducted including how to identify weak signals and a new method for weak signals dissemination within organizations called 'Futures Windows'.

Elina Hiltunen works at Nokia, corporate strategy, as a futurist. She has previously worked as a researcher at Finland Futures Research Center finalizing her PhD thesis on weak signals and organizational learning. Elina also founded her own consultancy, 'What's Next Consulting', focusing on anticipating future changes and inspiring companies to innovate. As a consultant she has worked on the Finnish pavillion for the World Expo 2010, UPM and Finnish health and wellness fairs etc. Elina has developed innovative tools for futures consulting called 'Futures Windows' and 'Futuropoly'. She also co-developed 'trendWiki', a software for collecting weak signals and trend analysis in companies. Elina is also an active speaker, blogger, and writer.

Anssi Tervonen (Data Rangers, Finland)

M-real was in 2001 approximately the tenth biggest pulp and paper company in the world with 10 000 employees focusing on fine paper and packaging. At corporate research a common foresight process was used as one source for the annual strategy process. This led to questioning what weak signals were and why they should be collected as part of a foresight process. For that purpose a clearly defined process was defined but failed to produce significant impact for strategic management. The presentation will therefore address questions of how such a process should look like and what has been learned.

Anssi Tervonen has a degree in industrial engineering and management as well as strategic management from the Technical University of Lappeenranta. He completed his thesis with the timber firm M-real for which he started working

as research engineer, responsible for developing new innovation processes and support tools. He was mentored by Jyrki Kettunen, who currently retired as futurologist and former research director at M-real. After five years at M-real Anssi with two of his colleagues started his own company called Data Rangers. Data Rangers focuses on data mining and reporting technologies including text mining and feature extraction.

TrendWiki, an online support tool for weak signals identification was started at the beginning of 2008 and developed with weak signal expert Elina Hiltunen. Currently TrendWiki is currently in pilot phase with five customers employing approximately a total of 100 000 people. The most important pilot customer being the Finnish-based mobile phone manufacturer Nokia.

Alun Rhydderch (DIUS, UK)

UK Foresight and its associated Horizon Scanning Centre work closely with government departments, the research and development community and a wide range of organisations from civil society to provide challenging, long-term visions of the future. These visions help ensure stakeholders develop effective strategies now which will enable them to make the most of future opportunities and to best manage long-term risks.

This presentation will consider the tension between weak signals capture and policy culture. It will discuss different approaches used by the Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre to ensure that inconvenient information is not left out of consideration when formulating policy. Referring to the Centre's use of Fountain Park's Strategy Signals tool, Dave Snowden's concepts (Cynefin framework) and Louise Shaxson's experience (Lines of Argument), it will consider pragmatic approaches to embedding horizon scanning in policy and introduce its dimensions of uncertainty model.

Alun Rhydderch has worked for the UK Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre since it was created in 2005. He initiated and led the International Futures Project, bringing together senior officials and working groups from 13 departments to develop a shared understanding of the uncertainties in the international environment. He is also responsible for the Sigma Scan, a synthesis of future issues and trends relevant to the UK public policy agenda. Previously he worked as a translator in Paris and founded and ran a software development company in Prague, having graduated from Cambridge University in modern and medieval languages.

Dr Anette Braun & Dr Sylvie Rijkers (VDI, Germany)

The EFMN issue analysis aims at identifying and analysing key science and technology issues emerging from international foresight studies that are relevant for European Union (S&T) policies. The results of the screening of the foresights in 2008 will be presented. Additionally, the previous three issue analysis will be used to highlight key lessons learned for foresight practitioners embarking on similar exercises.

Dr. Anette Braun is a macro-economist and political scientist, with a PhD in health economics from UCL (B). Since 1997 she acts as senior policy and technology consultant at VDI Future Technology Center in Düsseldorf. Within VDI Anette Braun was/is coordinator of various European Prospective Research Studies, for instance EFMN. She is responsible for the performance of socio-economic analyses of global trends and drivers in the health and biotech arena, the exploitation, combination and synthesis of findings on health/biotech issues, translation of S&T policy priorities that emerge from the findings into discrete policy areas of the EC. Anette acted as Member of the High Level Expert Group for DG RTD in 2005 on "Foresighting the New Technology Wave", and published various articles and papers on RTD and

foresight, (for instance: Dolly for dinner? Assessing commercial and regulatory trends in cloned livestock, in Nature Biotechnology).

Dr. Sylvie Rijkers-Defrasne is policy and technology consultant at VDI Future Technology Center in Düsseldorf. In this function she coordinates the issue analysis activities of the EFMN. Furthermore she was involved in foresight projects for the Luxemburg Government, the ESTO-Project on Biobanks in Europe and a comparison and assessment of international technology prognoses for the German Ministry for Education and Research. Sylvie holds a degree in Physics from the University of Düsseldorf and Nantes, France, as well as a PhD in Theoretical Physics (University of Düsseldorf). Her special fields of interest comprise Foresight, Technology Monitoring and Policy Analysis.

Dr Patrick Crehan (CKA, Belgium)

Patrick Crehan was born in Ireland and lives in Brussels. He has a background in Mathematical Physics. After a career as a research scientist and lecturer in Europe and Japan he worked at the European Commission in Brussels on the international IST research programme. His job involved linking RTD policy with policies for industry, external affairs and economic development. In addition to developing the annual programme, securing budget and organizing the evaluation of research projects, he initiated strategic actions in Eastern Europe, Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East, Japan, China and the rest of Asia. In 1999 he left the Commission to establish Crehan Kusano & Associates a consulting company specialized in the management of RTD and Innovation. He is an expert in foresight and in the management of RTD and Innovation. He is an entrepreneur and a 'business angel'. His other directorships include ACCESS ASIA - A strategic consultancy that helps EU companies develop business in Asia. The current focus of activity is on the food sector in China, ATEJI - a Paris based provider of software productivity tools, The Club of Amsterdam - a global think tank dedicated to exploring complex, long-term issues of importance for business and society, LAMELOW - an Italian developer of intelligent glazing systems for use in construction, Crehan Enterprises - a Brussels-based construction company and Digamma - a Brussels-based construction services company.

Dr Susanne Giesecke (ARC, Austria)

The EFMN Briefs serve as a tool for community building. They are concise descriptions and analyses of Foresight processes, highlighting findings on future developments and challenges of relevance to research, technology and societal issues. During the last four years the EFMN looked out systematically for interesting content-oriented digests from foresight processes that have been implemented in regions, Member States or at international level, on sectors and themes. From call to call the number of voluntary correspondents, covering foresight activities they were familiar with or even actively engaged in, increased steadily representing almost all EU and European countries. In its latest stage the network expanded overseas to North and South America, the Mediterranean countries, even expanding to Asia, Australia and some regions on the African continent. The EFMN Briefs have become a well-known means to foresight practitioners for informing the community of their activities and to acquire knowledge on recent exercises, getting inspired for new subjects and learning from each other.

In this presentation we will reflect upon the development of the Briefs, community building, and our experience with different approaches. Furthermore, we will take a closer look at the content and context of the Briefs and related foresight activities. E.g. our collection of briefs is the only one that is able give account on questions such as: how important is the participatory aspect of foresight and how is it exercised? To what degree are recommendations that come out of a foresight transferred into political action? What difficulties arise during the process of implementation of those recommendations? Finally, we look at those Briefs that give not only account on the output but also of the outcome of the reported foresight activities.

Dr. Susanne Giesecke is Senior Researcher at the Austrian Research Centers – systems research. She is engaged in publicly funded research as well as in consulting projects. Her main focus of work is qualitative innovation research, national innovations systems and competitiveness, technology policy (especially in areas of new and emerging technologies), technology assessment; evaluation of R&D programmes as well as foresight. She is member of the core team of the European Foresight Monitoring Network, especially in the issuing and editing of Foresight Briefs. Susanne Giesecke has worked in projects for both national and European public administrations.

Maurits Butter (TNO, the Netherlands)

Maurits Butter graduated at the faculty of chemical engineering, Technical University Delft. He started his career as an environmental consultant with Dutch consultancy firm Tebodin, where he was involved in the prevention of waste disposal and emissions. In 1994-1998 he worked for the Netherlands' Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment, department of Strategic Planning (VROM). In 1998 he joined TNO as senior advisor innovation policy. He is involved in the interface between technological innovation and policy, focussing on foresight studies and the non technological aspects of technological innovation.
{mospagebreak title=Notes from the conference}

The underlying theme for the day was 'weak signals' and we were lucky to have Elina Hiltunen from Nokia, a recognized authority on the topic, to present a history of thinking on the subject and stimulate discussion as to how this may evolve in the future.

Elina also introduced an interesting and useful tool for developing and supporting a culture of foresight in the organisation called the 'Future Window'.

Anssi Tervonen from the Finnish consulting company Data Rangers, discussed weak signals in the context of his work on web-based tools for 'trend management'.

Alun Rhydderch of the UK Horizon Scanning Centre explained how they approach the issue of identifying trends.

Irina Kuklina, Director of the ICISTE in Moscow provided a Russian perspective on weak signals.

Although Bob Frame from the Landcare Research Institute in New Zealand was not able to attend to tell us about his '100% Pure New Zealand' foresight exercise, his presentation is available on the EFMN site and may be of interest for a variety of reasons including the reference to the use of games and TV screen plays in the context of a foresight exercise.

[Click here to download the presentations made during the event.](#)

[Elina Hiltunen on 'Weak Signals'](#)

Elina described the history of thinking about weak signals starting with the first articles on the subject that appeared in 2000.

The earliest definition of a weak signal as 'an early warning of change' cleverly avoids telling us what 'it is' by describing what 'it does'. This seems to have set the tone for later attempts, based for example on the idea that it 'anticipates processes that have a radical impact on the future'.

There seems to be great potential for confusion on the topic. Although a literature on weak signals exists, there seems to be no generally accepted definition of what a weak signal is and how we might recognise one should it 'come knocking at the door'.

In what sense is it a signal? In what sense is it weak? If a weak signal is 'amplified' by a story published in a newspaper does it stop being weak?

There is a lot of learned discussion as to how 'it' relates to other things – whatever 'it' is. For example it is not a trend but it could signal a trend. It is not a wild-card but there is a discussion as to how 'it' might relate to wild cards. Earlier thinking held that a weak signal should be meaningful-to or present-itself-to pioneers or special groups rather than 'experts' on foresight or some related domain. More recently however the view is that a weak signal should not depend on an interpreter but should be recognizable by someone who has become expert at recognizing such things. Basic questions such as whether or not it is an event, whether or not it is an objective phenomenon seem undecided. More recently the debate seems to have dived into semiotics as part of on-going attempts to pin it down!

There were a few obvious omissions: concrete examples of weak signals or projects where weak signal analysis was applied with impressive or even merely useful results. Participants were asked to write down a list of what they considered to be weak signals. These were read out at the end and we all failed miserably. Most of what was presented was a trend or an event or a wild card or something we would name differently.

I guess the real issue is how to make a discipline out of watching for and interpreting signs that 'change lies ahead' and how to use this discipline to detect new signs or identify possible new changes to inform out thinking about the future. Even if we separate the observer from the observed as a reasonable working hypothesis, there are arguments from Popper based on relativity and from a vast array of thinkers based on information theory, complexity, chaos, morphogenesis and emergence to suggest that there are fundamental limits as to how far 'back' you can reasonably go to objectively identify signs of change.

Maybe a 'weak signal' is something that can only be known with hind-sight, something we can look back and recognise armed with future knowledge, but which was too weak to pick up as a signal farther back in time. Maybe we are doomed to never knowing better at that time or sooner than too late. Perhaps a weak signal is simply an illusion due to the kind of cognitive bias described by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the philosopher-quant who wrote the 'The Black Swan' and 'Fooled by Randomness'.

Most of those who work in foresight are familiar with the concept of a 'megatrend' from the work of John Naisbitt in 1982[1] that has been developed by many other writers since then. Fewer seem to know about the 'Microtrend' a concept developed by Mark J. Penn, who defines it as 'an intense identity group that is growing, and that has needs and wants unmet by the current crop of companies, marketers, policymakers, and others who would influence society's behaviour'. Although it is probably clear that a megatrend is not a weak signal, perhaps a microtrend is?

Some of the EFMN community probably know about the work of Stephen Pinker from The Edge Foundation on dangerous ideas 'ideas that are denounced not because they are self-evidently false, nor because they advocate harmful action, but because they are thought to corrode the prevailing moral order.' The emergence of a 'dangerous idea' may be a weak signal for something else waiting to change, but when?

Is it possible that for now a weak signal is simply 'a literary device'[2] a place-holder for something that will make sense eventually? For now at least the sense-makers are busy sense-making, the discussion is interesting and no doubt will continue to be so, but there may be some work to be done to distinguish clever writing from insights that are useful and capable of application to the day to day of foresight practitioners.

The 'Futures Window'

Elina introduced the 'Future Window' as a tool to present what could in effect turn out to be weak signals. This system relies on a 'future reporter' or that selects and publishes images intended to provoke thinking and talking about the future, via monitors that might appear in the lobby, elevator, toilet or screen saver. The images are gathered essentially from anywhere and from anyone - employees, friends, experts and associates ... they include striking images and shots taken from websites, from taxis, from visits abroad ... for example they included images such as an ad for a brand of beer for dogs that is brewed and sold in Japan ... my own first reaction was 'I wonder what it tastes like?' ... I did not like to talk about it at the time ... but I can imagine it appealing to groups that stretch way beyond dogs to encompass dog-lovers expressing their solidarity to lager-louts, punks, real-lads and gothic women wearing studded collars ... maybe this will

Trend Wiki a Technology for Collaborative 'Trend Management'

Anssi Tervonen of Data Rangers in Finland described the lessons he has learned through his efforts to develop systematic approaches to gathering and managing trend data for foresight, business intelligence and other foresight-like company processes. They are currently working with a wiki-based platform that can be used by many parties, that facilitates real-time gathering, classifying, filtering, dispatching, notifying and reporting on the basis of standardized formats for data and processes. He described his earlier experiments on the basis of the 2001-2005, M-real project in which they pioneered many of their approaches, experimented with the use of agent-based software for the automated gathering of trend-data, and learned many of the lessons that informed the design of their Trend Wiki tool.

There was some discussion about weak signals and the way they might contribute to trend-based learning and knowledge accumulation, but without defining what they are but by comparison with 'market signals'. Due to time constraints we did not get very far into important questions related to subjectivity, data-quality and validation, but this is certainly an important topic for the future and a demonstration of their technology is available online.

The Work of the UK Horizon Scanning Centre

Alun Rhydderch of the UK Horizon Scanning Centre the tools they use to anticipate alternative futures. Their recent work includes the development of 250 'scan issue papers' and 16 'dimension papers' dealing with policy oriented futures research questions. He described some of the techniques they use for identifying 'dimensions of uncertainty' that they use as a tool for motivating and facilitating futures workshops. He referred to the 'sigma-scan' project that concluded with 271 papers synthesizing the best futures work in the world, as well as to the 'delta scan' project that involved 250 scientists in the production of 100 papers with 50 year time horizons on scientific issues. The website is rich with resources and anyone embarking on a foresight exercise in the near future should give it a look.

A Russian Perspective

A representative of the Moscow based Centre for Study of International S & T and Education Programmes described the Russian approach to 'weak signals' and described two ideas, one which likened weak signals to nuclear forces which are strong but limited in size and in time, and another which likened them to gravitational forces, pervasive and weak but often neglected, even though they determine the large scale structure of the universe. She explained what these might be with reference to four topics:

- The environment, agriculture and human health
- Cognition
- The 'road economy' and the 'road-less economy'
- The devaluation of patent law

Game-Play and Screen-Play in 'Landcare Research' Foresight for New Zealand

Bob Frame from the Landcare Research Institute of New Zealand did not make it to Brussels to make a presentation on futures research in New Zealand. Nevertheless Karla Falloon, who is based in Brussels for the next few years to promote S+T collaboration between New Zealand and the EU, took part in the meeting on his behalf and provided a copy of his presentation to the EFMN.

It is a pity Bob could not make it, as there are a number of very interesting elements in his presentation that EFMN community members would have liked to discuss. For me the salient points had to do with the use of games in foresight, the use of TV screen-plays for the dissemination of scenarios and the discussion on the impact of their foresight programme entitled '100% Pure New Zealand'. This 5-year, €4M initiative dealt not just with the environment, but also with issues of identity, culture and colonial history. It involved 27 local authorities, resulted in the environmental accreditation of 200 companies, the involvement of 2,500 stakeholders in game-playing exercises, and 300,000 TV viewers for a series of specially developed screen-plays that presented the output scenarios as conversations set 50 years into the future. The website is quite extensive and the game-playing tools have been made available for download by anyone who wants to follow-up on this very interesting work.

The term 'landcare research' is of interest in that it does not seem to correspond to a traditional field of academic activity. It seems to be a more goal oriented cross-disciplinary initiative that could be of interest to many people involved in environmental, agricultural or rural-development work. The Landcare Research Institute is involved in many projects and programmes such as the prize winning carboNZero programme. Anyone who wants to involve them or any other partner from New Zealand in EU funded or other research projects should get in touch with Karla directly by email.

These are the opinions of Patrick Crehan, writing for the EFMN. Anyone with objections, clarifications or proposed modifications should send me an email.

[1] 'large, over-arching directions that shapes our lives for a decade or more'

[2] Maybe this is a new definition.
{mospagebreak title=Photo Gallery}

Some photos were taken during the event which you can view in our photo gallery.
{gallery}cday2008{/gallery}