

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018-2023

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A SUMMARY



1. Economic Think Tank

Finance Think is a non-profit economic research & policy institute, with a mission to enhance the impact of economic and social trends and policies on citizens in Macedonia and the Western Balkans region, through economic research, evidence-based and data-driven advocacy, and steering critical debate on economic processes.

FINANCE THINK 2012-2017

Addressing economic challenges

25 individual or collaborative research studies on a range of pressing economic/development/social issues

Steering economic debate

>500 media appearances on hot economic issues, as interviews, statements, expert opinions, citations; >1000 participants at our public events

Supporting researchers, journalists, women, youth, socially marginalized, unemployed

>350 people benefited directly from our work through trainings, workshops and seminars

Unearthing excellence

Two prestigious international awards and three prominent domestic awards

Networking at a regional scale

Founder of FISCAST network; participating in a multitude of domestic and international research/cause networks

2. Organizational Tenets

Vision

Our Vision is to steer economic thinking for increased wellbeing tomorrow.

Mission

Our Mission is to enhance the impact of economic, social and development trends and policies on citizens in Macedonia and the Western Balkans region, through research, evidence-based and data-driven advocacy, and steering critical debate on economic processes.

Finance Think is guided by these principles and values:

Outreach and Inclusiveness

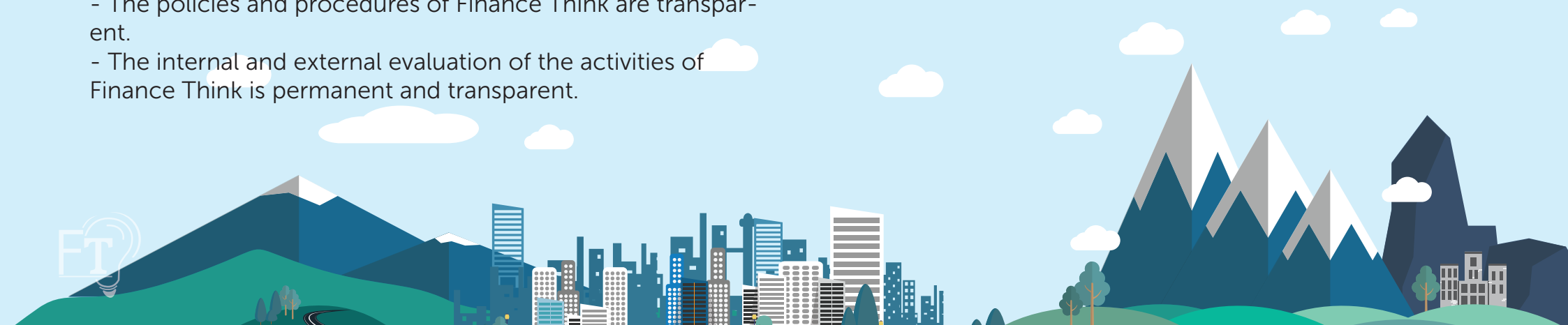
- The results and findings of Finance Think's work are disseminated in a way that can be understood by the non-specialists, and thus lead to better public understanding of the economy, policies and reforms.
- The products of Finance Think are cutting-edge and innovative.
- The think tank provides cooperative and nurtured professional environment, recognition of all employees as professionals, and does not perform any kind of discrimination.

Transparency and Efficiency

- Finance Think manages its operations in a cost-efficient manner, and focuses on outcomes and impact. It gratefully recognizes the support it receives and is keen on delivering value-for-money in the pursuit of its mission.
- The policies and procedures of Finance Think are transparent.
- The internal and external evaluation of the activities of Finance Think is permanent and transparent.

Research Application, Quality and Ethics

- The research agenda is linked and integrated with the mission of the think tank, and the researchers are aligned with the strategic objectives that guide the research environment and the funding mechanisms.
- The research is applied, innovative, oriented to the policies and high-qualified.
- The research is interdisciplinary, collaborative and peer-reviewed.
- The researchers are focused on their research for the good of the mankind and for expanding the borders of the scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of the thought and expression, as well as the freedom to identify methods for addressing the identified problems, according to the recognized ethical principles and practices.





Independence. Finance Think has the legitimacy of an independent, impartial economic think tank. It has no institutional or political affiliation, and its only dedication is to serve its mandate.



Leadership and Operational Experience. Finance Think has accumulated strong and diverse leadership and operational experience in managing national and regional research programs and working with individuals and institutions across the country and the region. The leadership and operational capacity is sourced in first-class economists leading and working for the think tank.



First-Class and Diverse Advisory Board. Finance Think has a first-class, diverse Advisory Board. Finance Think's governance structure strengthens its independence and focus on quality.



Partnerships and Global Network.

Finance Think builds on a strong domestic, regional and global network. It is the founder of FISCAST, the network on fiscal accountability and transparency and has many local and regional network partners, thus combining local and global reach.



Staff. Finance Think has a small, competent and versatile staff. It is a nimble structure whose role is to initiate, coordinate and facilitate research-based work conducted by many other partners and organizations, and to learn from Finance Think's past operations and experience.



Public Image. Finance Think enjoys a reputation of balanced, credible and open-minded institution in the public discourse, media and the policymakers. Its opinions expressed in the public debate are understood only through the lenses of competence and are hence propagated through a diversity of channels.



3. Strategic Orientation

Finance Think's overarching strategic long-term goal is to contribute to change in policies for increased living standard of the citizens of Macedonia and the Western Balkan.

Finance Think sets the following strategic goals for the period 2018-2023 to serve achieving the overarching goal (mission). The operationalization of the strategic goals is left for the Annual program of activities, to be adopted at the beginning of each calendar year, while their evaluation for the Annual report of activities, to be drafted at the end of each calendar year.



MISSION
(Overarching goal)

STRATEGIC GOALS
(Five-Year Strategic Development Plan)

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES
(Annual Program of Activities)

Strategic direction 1

To contribute to improve economic, social and development policies and reforms through producing evidence, based on research and driven by data. Specifically, this strategic objective is founded on conducting first-class economic – empirical and policy-oriented – research, founded on sufficient theoretical basis and executed by the means of the state-of-the-art economic methods, while being relevant and beneficial for domestic and/or regional policymakers.

What

This strategic objective is broken down on the following social and development objectives:

- 1.1. Increasing the supply and quality of economic research, based on sound and state-of-the-art economic methods and techniques;
- 1.2. Increasing the capacity among target groups for conduct of economic research;
- 1.3. Increasing confidence of economic experts in economic policies and reforms.

Why

Research on economic, social and development phenomena in Macedonia is poorly developed. Research based on rigorous methods is lacking or insufficient both in academia and the CSO sector. In particular, the skills for data analysis in the former are deficient. Investing in quality research, both within Finance Think and through equipping stakeholders with such skills, may have high returns in terms of the proper identification of problems, bringing about adequate solutions based on sound evidence, passable mobilization of resources, improvement of governance and policies, as well may increase the quality and quantity of the democratic debate.

How

- Investing skills and effort in high-quality peer-reviewed research publications, like journal articles, policy studies, policy briefs, books, booklets and manuals;
- Investing skills and effort in producing regular publications like the Macro-monitor, Graphometrics, FT Comment, FT Opinion and others;
- Investing skills and effort in converting complex results and findings into information understandable for the general public through visualizations like graphs, infographs, GIFs, videos, podcasts and so on.
- Engaging prominent economic experts in the various initiatives of Finance Think;
- Engaging national and regional journalists in the various initiatives of Finance Think, who write for the local or international media;
- Investing in cooperation between Finance Think and other think tanks, specifically on economic/social issues from other countries.

Strategic direction 2

To increase the effect of Finance Thinks' products on target groups (skills), policymaking (policies and reforms), and society (awareness). Specifically, this strategic objective is founded on the premise that Finance Think's work is done for the benefit of the society, channeled through influence onto the policy formulation and implementation process, through affecting the discourse of the public debate, and through direct impact onto the skills and work of immediate target groups.

What

This strategic objective is broken down on the following objectives:

- 2.1. Increasing the take up of research results by policymakers;
- 2.2. Increasing the number of reforms being inline with FT recommendations/ advice;
- 2.3. Increasing the positive impact of FT's work on immediate target groups;
- 2.4. Increasing the debate on economic, social and development policies and reforms.

Why

Policymaking in the economic, social and development (mostly, education and healthcare) areas in Macedonia has been lacking proper founding on research results, evidence and data. Economic policies have been frequently made ad-hoc, or by replicating policies that succeeded elsewhere. Policymakers, in addition, lacked capacity to take up credible recommendations from research. The economic debate has been long shallow, polarized and biased. Effectuating the work of Finance Think onto policymakers, target groups and the society as whole may bring yields for the congruence, strength and the democratic values of the society.

How

- Nurturing direct positive, impartial and balanced relationships with the policymakers, with multilateral and bilateral consultative processes;
- Nurturing relationship of mutual confidence with journalists and supporting them to proliferate findings and results arrived at through regular research work;
- Investing skills and effort for direct work with target groups within the initiatives of Finance Think;
- Wide participation in media, through interviews, statements, expert opinions, citations and so on;
- Wide activity on the social media through posting and twitting;
- Conduct of an array of public events like economic forums, round tables, annual panel debate, press cafes and so on, attended by policy-makers, opinion leaders, experts and wide public;
- Balancing in conveying policy recommendations and advice between direct meetings with policymakers and through media participation

Strategic direction 3

To develop the institutional capacity of Finance Think, in terms of research, advocacy, funding and communication, to have a stronger impact on economic reforms and the effects policies have for citizens. Specifically, this strategic objective is founded on the premise for a permanent investment in building capacities and networks, both organizational and individual, for the purpose of better research, increased domestic and international visibility and increased overall reputation.

What

This strategic objective is broken down on the following objectives:

- 3.1. Increased demand for FT research materials from the government;
- 3.2. Securing financial sustainability of FT;
- 3.3. Investing in the quality of FT materials;
- 3.4. Increased capacity for operational and strategic planning.

Why

Strong economic think tank is the basis for building credibility in everything produced and supplied to policymakers to further utilization. Moreover, strong think tank may feed the discourse of the public debate in a proper, balanced and impartial manner, with the ultimate objective to build better economy and society. The space in Macedonia with economic think tanks has been largely unpopulated; some efforts have been borne by non-economic think tanks, but initiatives soon faded out because of insufficient skills for economic analysis and hence incapability to supply credibility and confidence in results offered. Investing in strong economic think tank may hence advantage not only the founders and employees, but also the society as whole.

How

- Receiving formal and informal positive feedback from the government and the other stakeholders on various aspects of the Finance Think's work;
- Putting forth a set of coherent and congruent regulations favoring transparency and accountability of the institute;
- Elevating the process of strategic and operational planning and reporting;
- Permanent investment in staff's skills and knowledge;
- Investing in cooperation between Finance Think and other think tanks, specifically on economic/social/ development issues from other countries;
- Exposure to the international academic and CSO scene, through participation in regional and international forums, conferences and networks.

4. A complete package of services

Finance Think established the policy platform Finance Impaq with the objective to contribute to the process of economic, social and development policy formulation, implementation and evaluation in the thematic fields of living standard, employment, inclusion, equality. The platform is founded on the rational-comprehensive model of policymaking articulated in political science, whereby the flow of four distinctive phases is followed: problem identification; policy options formulation; selection and implementation; policy monitoring and evaluation.

Field Diagnostics for Policy Formulation

Finance Impaq interferes with policymakers in doing due diligence before deciding on a course of action. This is because economic policy is just like any other tool; some policies work well for some problem, but not for others. Hence, proper problem identification and formulation includes defining the root cause of the problem in order to apply the right tools to fix it.

- Field investigation of the environment (systems and practices)
- Questionnaire and sample design
- Documentary screening of regulations, practices, past options
- Conduct of field screening to identify policy options
- Direct work with stakeholders (e.g. employees of the public administration) to identify obstacles and bottlenecks

Monitoring and Support of Policy Implementation

Finance Impaq supports and monitors the process of economic policy implementation directly with the implementers and other stakeholders. Implementation may require that executive government agencies carry out policy, by adopting rules and regulations, providing services and products, public education campaigns and so on.

- Assistance in drafting rules and regulations
- Hands-on support in field policy implementation
- Delivery of capacity-building activities (trainings and workshops) to secure proper policy implementation
- Budgeting the costs of the policy
- Monitoring of & reporting on policy field implementation

Impact Evaluation

Finance Impaq pursues rigorous quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of policies - both expected benefits and unintended effects, so as to see if they have solved the problems identified and accomplished their goals. Impact evaluation is a demanding econometric assessment of how an intervention affected outcomes. The method requires a counterfactual of what those outcomes would have been in the absence of the intervention.

- Randomized Control Trials – Experimental Methods
- Quasi-Experimental Methods
- Non-Experimental Evaluation Design
- Advice and generating political support for continuation or expansion of programs, both within and beyond national boundaries

Other Methods for Policy Evaluation

Finance Impaq has been designed to serve an array of methods used throughout the development practice (e.g. social protection schemes, labor market legislation, job training, education, migration, access to credit, health outcomes, gender analysis) to measure the effects of economic, social and development policies for various aspects of economic and societal wellbeing. These are usually pursued when impact evaluation is not feasible due to practical or financial limitations.

- Rigorous descriptions of micro-data
- Regression designs of various types
- Regression discontinuity design
- Parametric (e.g. quintile regressions) and non-parametric techniques
- Performance evaluation
- Simulation

The economists
of Finance Think have
gone through a 3-month
rigorous training on
impact evaluation by the
Partnership for Economic
Policies, Canada



5. SWOT analysis

The following analysis depicts the internal and external environment of Finance Think cross-tabulated with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Association.

STRENGTHS

SD1: PRODUCING EVIDENCE

- Endowment with state-of-the-art rigorous and specific economic research methodologies and embedded skills for analyzing a variety of economic phenomena;
- Engagement in a multitude of research networks;
- Capability to engage in: i) producing evidence demanded by government, business sector, international organizations; ii) regional (Western Balkan) alliances for shared problems (e.g. unemployment, emigration)
- Creation and inclusion of CSO networks for pursuance of joint causes;

SD2: IMPACT

- Positive public visibility and articulated position in front of the policymakers;
- Positive public image of credibility, independence, non-partiality, supply of evidence, balanced opinion;
- Innovative, creative products and visualization of tangible data and findings
- Ameliorated channels for cooperation with economic journalists
- Opinion-maker and champion;

SD3: CAPACITY

- Economic staff with established background in economic research (published in peer-reviewed journals, presented at international conferences and workshops);
- Simple management structure, favoring stimulating and positive working environment

WEAKNESSES

SD1: PRODUCING EVIDENCE

- Insufficient pure-research funding
- Inexistence of government matching funds for project contribution where needed
- Restricted access to micro-data at the State Statistical Office

SD2: IMPACT

- Sometimes, the youth of the team comes at the expense of experience
- Relative closure of institutions for sharing information and data

SD3: CAPACITY

- Insufficient physical space
- Frequently, insufficient delineation of responsibilities
- Insufficient mid-level management capacity
- Need for further improvement of institutional alignment
- Insufficient human resource capacity (quantity) to attend/grasp part of valuable trainings (for NGO representatives and/or economists)

SWOT analysis

OPPORTUNITIES

SD1: PRODUCING EVIDENCE

- Changing environment created by (majority of) donors, favoring research-based policy analyses and advocacy at the expense of pure activism;
- Emerging demand for services in the economic/social analysis area, including field work;
- Emerging need of the business sector for research service;
- Increased demand for research/data-driven evidence by Government;
- Potential for regional cooperation;
- Unpopulated market

SD2: IMPACT

- Increased governmental and societal awareness about the role of and benefit from the work of the CSO sector;
- Underutilized some of the tools (e.g. the blog) and potential for new tools (e.g. forum)
- Capacity for interacting at field level (e.g. work directly with the public administration on certain reform)
- Introducing new working tools (e.g. communication/task platforms; design tools etc.) to improve personal and institutional productivity

SD3: CAPACITY

- Growing number of various trainings involving travel abroad
- Growing number of invitations by partner or potential partner organizations to attend various networks, initiatives and causes

SD1: PRODUCING EVIDENCE

- Non-economic competitors emulating FT's work, hence throwing confusion on the market (imitators and improvisators);
- Insufficiently-qualified economic professionals on the labor market

SD2: IMPACT

- Always-looming risk of political etiquette in a society flavored with polarization tendencies;

SD3: CAPACITY

- Over-crowded office may impair inter-personal relationships;
- Insufficient capacity by partner organization, either to deliver similar quality or in the technical processes (e.g. financial non-transparency)

THREATS

6. A summary

Vision

To steer economic thinking for increased wellbeing tomorrow.

Purpose

To enhance the impact of economic, social and development trends and policies on citizens in Macedonia and the Western Balkans region, through research, evidence-based and data-driven advocacy, and steering critical debate on economic processes.

Values

Three core values: **Research application, quality and ethics; Outreach and inclusiveness; Transparency and efficiency**

Assets

Six crucial assets: **independence; leadership and operational experience; first-class and diverse Advisory Board; assorted partnerships and global network; versatile and competent staff** and repute **public image**.

Three Strategic Directions

To contribute to improve economic, social and development policies and reforms through producing evidence, based on research and driven by data. To increase the effect of Finance Thinks' products on target groups (skills), policy-making (policies and reforms), and society (awareness). To develop the institutional capacity of Finance Think, in terms of research, advocacy, funding and communication, to have a stronger impact on economic reforms and the effects policies have for citizens.

Research-Based Services

A complete range of services combined to deliver results: **field diagnostics for economic policy formulation; monitoring and support of policy implementation; impact evaluation; and other methods for economic policy evaluation.**

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