

# FINNISH NATIONAL FORESIGHT PROCESS AND PRACTICES FOR EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING - HOW TO INCLUDE FUTURE GENERATIONS?

## PROCESO Y PRÁCTICAS DE PREVISIÓN NACIONAL FINLANDESA PARA LA TOMA DE DECISIONES BASADA EN LA EVIDENCIA: ¿CÓMO INCLUIR A LAS GENERACIONES FUTURAS?

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<https://doi.org/10.47623/ivap-rvpg.5.2023.ab.04>

Received: 2023/02/27

Accepted: 2023/03/27

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**Laburpena:** Artikulu honek Finlandiako gobernuaren eta aurreikuspen parlamentarioaren ikuspegi orokorra ematen du: haren jatorria eta motibazioa, bai eta antolaketa, agentzia, prozesua eta praktikak ere. Aurreikuspen-ekosistema nazionalak gobernu-aurreikuspeneko eta aurreikuspen publikorako esparrua eskaintzen du, hau da, politikak aurreikusteko eta aurreikuspenekin lotutako erabakiak hartzeko esparrua. Etorbizunera begirako ikuspegia duten bi mekanismo aurkezten dira artikuluan, bereziki erabaki publikoak hartzen laguntzeko sortu zirenak: 1) Lehen Ministroaren Bulegoa eta etorkizunari buruz Gobernuak egindako txostenak, eta 2) Etorbizunerako Legebiltzarreko Batzordea. Gobernantza aurre-hartzailea behar dugu. Gobernu guztietan, hirietako, nazioetako eta erakundeetako gobernanta osoan, etorkizunera begirako ikuspegi eta metodo sistematikoak sartu behar dira. Finlandiak 1980an egin bezala, herrialde guztiek dute Etorbizunaren Ikaskuntzarako Elkarte bat ezarri aurrera egiteko aukera; bertan, jatorri oso desberdineko kideek hartzen dute parte, etorkizunari buruzko elkarriketa inklusibo batean, mintegien, argitalpenen eta abarren bidez. Gaur egun, ziurgabetasun sakoneko aro bat bizitzen ari gara, noiz eta etorkizunak ekarriko dizkigun ustekabeetara begira proaktiboki prestatzea funtsezkoa denean. Gainera, etorkizuneko erresilientzia da ate-joka ditugun krisiei aurrea hartzeko eta aurre egiteko beharrezkoa dugun gaitasuna, krisi horietatik ikasteko eta berrantolatzeko beharrezkoa dugun gaitasuna. Gaurko erabakiak etorkizuneko gobernanta kontuan hartuta hartu behar ditugu. Horrenbestez, egun, erronkarik behinena etorkizuneko belaunaldiak aurreikuspen-mekanismo horretan sartzea da. Aurreikuspen publikorako, ebidentzia diren egitateak dira garrantzitsuak. Hala ere, irudimena ere behar da, etorkizuneko garapen alternatiboak behar bezala eskaneatzeko, eta horiei heltzeko zer politika behar diren eztabaidatzeko. Gainera, politikak formulatzeko ardura dutenek aurreikuspen-metodoen ezagutzetza eta aplikazioez balia daitezke, ez bakarrik aurreikuspen-azterlanak erabiltzeaz. *Gako-hitzak:* aurreikuspen politikoa, etorkizunerako Batzordea, etorkizuneko belaunaldiak, etorkizunaren erresilientzia.

**Abstract:** This article presents an overview of the Finnish government and parliamentary foresight: its origin and motivation, as well as organization, agency, process and practices. The national foresight ecosystem provides the framework for government and public foresight work i.e. for policy foresight and related decision-making. Two forward-looking mechanisms which were specially introduced to support public decision-making are presented: 1) the Prime Minister's Office and Government Reports on the Future, and 2) the Committee for the Future in Parliament. We need anticipatory governance. To all governments, to all governance in cities, nations, organisations – systematic futures approaches and methods should be introduced. Each country could also thrive from establishing a Society for Futures Studies as Finland did in 1980, comprising members from very different backgrounds into an inclusive futures dialogue via seminars, publications etc. Currently, we are living the age of deep uncertainty when proactive preparation for various unexpected futures is crucial. Moreover, futures resilience is the capacity needed for anticipating such crises, coping with them, learning from them, and for re-organisation. We need to make today's decisions as bearing in mind the governance for the futures. Accordingly, the most recent challenge is to include future generations into this foresight mechanism. For public foresight, facts as evidence matter most. However, in order to adequately scan alternative future developments and to have conversations on what policies are needed to tackle those, also imagination is needed. Furthermore, policy-makers themselves could benefit from the knowledge and applications of foresight methods, not just from using foresight studies.

*Keywords:* committee for the future, future generations, futures resilience, policy foresight.

**Resumen:** Este artículo presenta una visión general del gobierno finlandés y la previsión parlamentaria: su origen y motivación, así como la organización, agencia, proceso y prácticas. El ecosistema nacional de previsión proporciona el marco para el trabajo de previsión gubernamental y pública, es decir, para la previsión de políticas y la toma de decisiones relacionadas. Se presentan dos mecanismos con visión de futuro que se introdujeron especialmente para apoyar la toma de decisiones públicas: 1) la Oficina del Primer Ministro y los informes del Gobierno sobre el futuro, y 2) el Comité para el Futuro en el Parlamento. Necesitamos una gobernanza anticipatoria. A todos los gobiernos, a toda la gobernanza en ciudades, naciones, organizaciones, se deben introducir enfoques y métodos sistemáticos para el futuro. Cada país también podría prosperar mediante el establecimiento de una Sociedad de Estudios de Futuros, como lo hizo Finlandia en 1980, compuesta por miembros de orígenes muy diferentes, en un diálogo inclusivo sobre futuros a través de seminarios, publicaciones, etc. Actualmente, estamos viviendo la era de la profunda incertidumbre cuando la preparación proactiva para varios futuros inesperados es crucial. Además, la resiliencia futura es la capacidad necesaria para anticipar tales crisis, hacerles frente, aprender de ellas y reorganizarse. Tenemos que tomar las decisiones de hoy teniendo en cuenta la gobernanza para el futuro. En consecuencia, el desafío más reciente es incluir a las generaciones futuras en este mecanismo de previsión. Para la previsión pública, los hechos como evidencia son los más importantes. Sin embargo, para escanear adecuadamente los desarrollos futuros alternativos y tener conversaciones sobre qué políticas se necesitan para abordarlos, también se necesita imaginación. Además, los propios responsables de la formulación de políticas podrían beneficiarse de los conocimientos y las aplicaciones de los métodos de previsión, no sólo del uso de estudios de previsión.

*Palabras clave:* comité para el futuro, las generaciones futuras, la resiliencia del futuro, la previsión política.

**Summary:**

1. Introduction.—2. Organization and agency in the Finnish national foresight system.—3. Key process and practices as futures dialogues between the government and Parliament.—4. Government report on the future: Finland of Future Generations.—5. Conclusions.—6. References.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of the Finnish government and parliamentary foresight provision, reflecting on its strengths, challenges and development prospects. As data, both official documents and informal observations from interviews and first-hand experience are being used, including a national foresight 2020 evaluation (Pouru-Mikkola *et al.*, 2023). The method is hermeneutical historically orientated analysis, with an evaluation and anticipation of further trajectories and requirements needed.<sup>1</sup> First, in this introduction i.e. section 1, the origin and motivation of building the national foresight network is described below. Then the organization and agency of the Finnish national foresight network is presented in more detail in section 2. Key process and practices as futures dialogues between the government and Parliament are highlighted in section 3. The most recent government report on the future is briefly opened up, with its innovative stake on future generations in section 4. To conclude, section 5 shows some critical issues and avenues as options for further developments.

The origin and motivation of the Finnish national foresight system is manifold and intriguing. During the past few decades already, a small country with only 5.6 million population has globally aroused an increasing interest in its foresight activities in government and public administration (see e.g. Heo & Seo 2021; Heinonen 2020). Historical roots point to political circumstances dating back from several centuries. As a nation Finland is geo-politically located in Northern Europe, between two major nations Sweden and Russia (and formerly Soviet Union). Finland was inhabited around 9000 BC after the Last Glacial Period. As a consequence of the Northern Crusades, Finland became a part of Sweden beginning from the late

13th century. We adopted a lot of customs and an additional language from our western neighbouring country and the Swedish language is still the second official language in Finland. After centuries, in 1809, as a result of the so-called Finnish War between Russia and Sweden, Finland became part of the Russian Empire as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. During that period the Finnish art flourished in its various forms, and the idea of independence began to take hold. In 1906, Finland became the first in Europe to grant its citizens universal suffrage, and the first in the world to award all adult citizens the right to run for public office. The 1917 Russian Revolution created a window of opportunity for Finland to declare independence from Russia in 1919. During World War II, Finland lost parts of its territory to the Soviet Union, but maintained the most valuable for a sovereign nation - the independence. This fight for independence is directly related to forward-looking approach in the national attitude which we call 'sisu'. It means perseverance, never giving up, rising from the ground, relying on one's own action and strength – that could be labelled as 'futures robustness'. (Heinonen 2008). Let us add here the climatological context of Finland, varying from humid continental in the south to the boreal in the north, with harsh and cold winters. So, the forward-looking orientation has also been dealing with survival in not only challenging geo-political, but also living conditions in general. All this has not only directed the Finnish motivation towards futures building capacities, but also towards diplomacy, for example, Finland hosting the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975. Last but not least, Finland as a welfare country places great emphasis on democracy, human rights, freedom of press, equality and education. My claim is that Finland's pioneering position in European public foresight is also drawing from the role of knowledge creation in society, and the curiosity for novelties –whether it is the case of technology foresight in mobile telecommunications, or social innovation of giving free maternity packages to families with a new-born baby— investment in future generations.

## 2. Organization and agency in the Finnish national foresight system

The need for foresight in today's turbulent world is more acute than ever. The importance of foresight is also recognised now in several countries and by several organisations. Strategic foresight and public foresight are in the limelight. The EU Commission started to publish Strategic Foresight Reports annually (EC 2020; 2021; 2022). The first report by EC (2020) presents the Commission's strategy to integrate strategic foresight into EU policy-making. It identifies lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, introduces resilience as a new compass for EU policy-making and advocates the role of strategic foresight in strengthening the resilience of the EU and its Member States. The report emphasises the importance for achieving our strategic long-term objectives in the context of the digital, green and just transitions. For resilience as strategic foresight aspiration see also Heinonen *et al.* (2022). The three annual Strategic Foresight Reports follow a logical sequence. While the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report focused on resilience across four interrelated dimensions – socio-economic, geopolitical, green and digital, the 2021 report stressed the EU's open strategic autonomy as part of the geopolitical dimension of resilience. Then, the 2022 Strategic Foresight Report looks at the long-term interaction and reciprocal reinforcement – i.e. 'twinning' – between the digital and green transitions in the current geopolitical context (especially regarding Russia's military invasion to Ukraine). The twin green & digital transition is probed for how sustainable digital technologies could enable a carbon-neutral EU by 2050. Moreover, the OECD has a Government Foresight Community, and UN Secretariat-General published 'Our Common Agenda' (2022) with foresight elements to be pursued.

Even though futures studies started in 1950s in the USA with strategic and military interest and methodologies such as scenarios and Delphi, it soon spread to other pioneering countries such as France, UK, Germany, and Japan with a wider sphere and application fields. Finland took up futures studies in late 1970s and through various steps developed in to a whole of three strong pillars: academic futures research, corporate foresight, as well as public and strategic foresight. The Finnish national foresight system started as a network, first managed by Sitra (the Finnish Fund for Independency), connecting several actors in the field comprising these three pillars. The Finnish national foresight system renewed its activities and organisation in 2008. Today it functions both as a balanced interactive network and a system with freely flowing communication. The network provides a plat-

form within the foresight eco-system, inviting citizens and NGOs to engage with its activities.

Public foresight has always and will in the future, too, continue to draw on academic futures studies. This is the core of the evidence-orientated public foresight approach. Therefore, the academic foresight units and actors are introduced here first, while the key actors – Prime Minister's Office and the Parliamentary Committee for the Future – are presented in the next chapter.

Today, the Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC) with the University of Turku is the largest academic Futures Studies unit in the Nordic countries, and unique in the world providing both master's and doctor's degrees in futures studies. FFRC's activities include research and education, as well as societal interaction and networking.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, the Centre became a department inside the University of Turku. This was a pivotal step in consolidating Futures Studies as an academic discipline. Professor Pentti Malaska, the Finnish pioneer in Futures Studies and the first Finnish member of the Club of Rome, promoted futures studies both nationally and globally – and both academically and in whole-of-society. He claimed that it is our duty to show that the "world is a better place with us humans than without us." His biography acts as a foresight handbook of visionary heritage to corporate representatives, public administrators, as well as all futures researchers (Pouru *et al.*, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Malaska was a radical, visionary thinker whose research interests crossed a wide range of academic disciplines, from mathematics and electrical engineering to philosophy, ecology, and strategic management. His work boldly crossed sectoral boundaries between the academic world, the business world, and societal influencing. This wide range of courageous vision-making on the one hand, and pursuit of concrete action on the other, is present in many research projects on technology foresight. An appropriate example is a study commissioned by the Committee for the Future to anticipate societal transformation by exploring 100 radical technologies (Linturi & Kuusi 2008). For public foresight, facts as evidence matter most. However, in order to adequately scan alternative future developments and to have conversations on what measures and policies are needed to tackle those, also imagination is needed to build upon the base of evidence. This is because too limited approach is likely to miss some worthwhile opportunities. On the other hand, scientific evidence may not be void of biases – van Woensel (2020) claims that emotions can affect the understanding of scientific evidence.

FFRC hosts graduate students from over thirty-five different countries. Futures Studies graduates find employment in many sectors in Finland. They may continue as researchers or doctoral students.<sup>4</sup> Academic futures studies and FFRC in particular is a solid pillar in the national foresight system. Many of the graduates are employed into public administration. This is because the public sector has become more open to adding futures capacity to

their staff competencies. For example, the Association of Finnish Municipalities has hired officials who have foresight training. Young futures researchers may also get a job in the private sector, since more and more companies have awakened to the necessity of corporate foresight for their strategy planning. Within the academic futures studies there are naturally other actors within the Finnish foresight system, including several other universities and universities of applied sciences. Several research institutes are also actors in the academic foresight system, notably VTT Technology Centre, ETLA, VATT and Centre for Consumer Society Research at Helsinki University.

The second pillar in the national foresight system is all about public foresight, at many levels and in many units. The main actors are the Prime Minister’s Office and the Parliamentary Committee for the Future. This dynamic futures dialogue is presented in more detail in the next section.

The major actors in the Finnish national foresight network are, to a large degree, the same institutes that were active in the launch of Futures Studies in Finland: besides FFRC, the Academy of Finland, Tekes (now Business Finland), Sitra, the Economic Institute of Finland VATT, and the Technical Research Centre of Finland VTT. Cit-

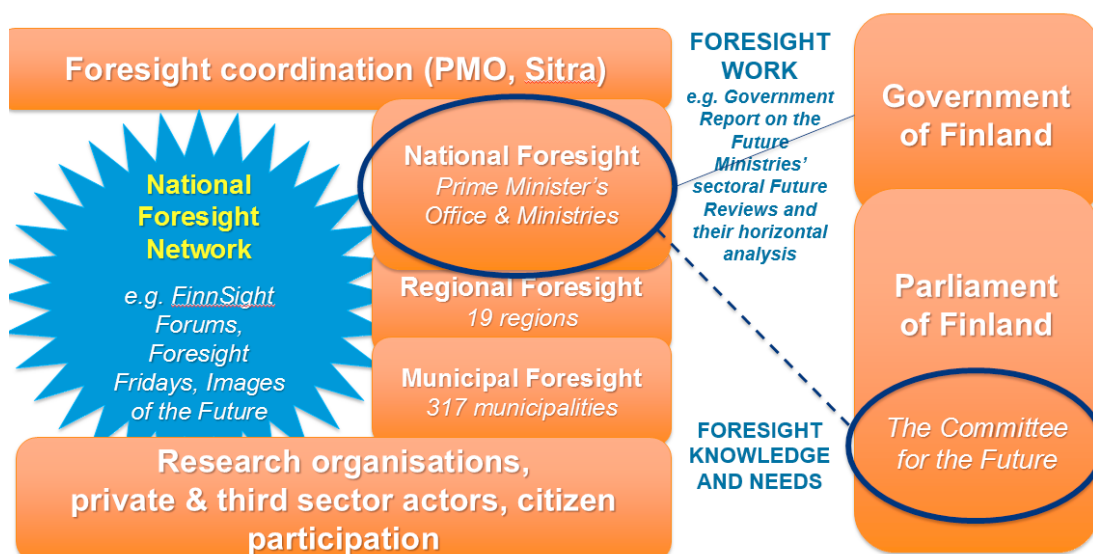
ies, municipal authorities, and regional councils are likewise oriented in futures thinking and exercises. Besides the academic pillar and public units, the national foresight system covers also private companies, as well as citizens. In 2018, the main Finnish national newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, appointed a permanent futures reporter to cover futures-related topics. This is an example of the wide ramifications for actors interested in foresight, and can have access to the national foresight system.

The Academy of Finland has played a key role in setting up and organizing the field of Futures Studies in Finland. It launched a comprehensive reorganising of research funding, which had a major impact on Futures Studies. The newly formed Strategic Research Council (SRC) funds larger cross-disciplinary consortia. The emphasis here was to improve the societal impacts of research, renew the fields of science, and include researchers at different stages in their careers in the projects. The SRC provides funding for long-term and programme-based research aimed at finding solutions to the major challenges facing Finnish society. The main themes of SRC research programmes are decided by the Finnish government to be launched in 2023 as the following:

Figure 1

The Finnish National Foresight System and its various units in interaction

## NATIONAL FORESIGHT PROCESS IN FINLAND



Source: Prime Minister’s Office.

- Children and young people – healthy, thriving and capable makers of the future
- Security and trust in the age of algorithms.

The cross-cutting priority in both themes is equality.

A major step for Finnish Futures Studies was the establishment of the Finnish Society for Futures Studies in 1980, on the recommendation of the Government's Central Board of Research Councils. Fourteen Finnish institutions of higher education were among the founding members, and fourteen additional institutions and almost 700 individuals have since joined the Society. The aim of the Finnish Society for Futures Studies is to influence the long-term development of Finnish society by promoting futures research and its utilisation.<sup>5</sup> The Society is both a scientific association and an NGO, engaging in a futures dialogue through its manifold activities: seminars, Top Ten Futures, local discussion groups, and publications. The most recent Top Ten Futures seminar was organised on the 'Age of Deep Uncertainty', where the opening talk was given by Minister Sirpa Paatero emphasising the im-

portance of proactive preparation for various compelling, even unexpected futures.

Several of the Society's members are from the public sector and can benefit from the use of foresight in their own work. For any country that is eager to develop Futures Studies, a national association is a recommended first step—followed by concrete, engaging, and inclusive activities.<sup>6</sup>

Finnish futurists have focused a lot on the use of methods in appropriate ways. The aim is to find the best methods possible to fit the application and help decision-making. Often several methods are applied in combination, for example, as a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. This is in line with the Finnish government's exhortation to embrace the culture of experimentation. The government itself has experimented with making new legislation using crowdsourcing. Policy-makers themselves would benefit from the knowledge and applications of foresight methods, not just from using foresight studies.

Figure 2

### Minister Paatero talking on the whole-of-society need for resilience in a seminar by the Finnish Society for Futures Studies at the House of Sciences



Source: Own elaboration.

It soon became evident that the network is not sufficient, a whole system is what is needed. Regarding collaboration structures in the Finnish foresight system, the survey, interviews, and workshops unanimously came to the conclusion that at the core of the system is the openly and loosely operating national foresight network that brings together diverse foresight actors from different fields (Pouru-Mikkola *et al.*, 2023). The existence of such a network is regarded as achievement, since it requires broad consensus about the importance of foresight. In a relatively small country like Finland, people working within administration and policy tend to know each other quite well, making it easier to create trust and collaborate. Accordingly, the network's main strength was considered to be embedded in its openness and capacity for creating cooperation (Pouru-Mikkola *et al.*, 2023).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Key process and practices as futures dialogues between the government and Parliament

We need anticipatory governance. To all governments, to all governance in cities, nations, organisations – systematic futures approaches and methods should be introduced and applied. Public foresight has become a 'must' and anticipatory governance is the framework where it is embedded. This is a tall order: anticipatory governance (AG) is challenging exactly because it is intended to govern for something that does not yet exist. (Fuerth 2009; Glenn 2022). Anticipatory governance is an evolving concept nationally and globally at the governmental, inter-departmental and agency-levels. In practice, it relates to the systematic embedding of 'foresight throughout an entire governance architecture, including policy analysis, engagement, and decision-making' (OECD 2019, p. 3). According to Heo & Seo (2021) anticipatory governance means using the future to create multicultural, learning, intelligent and inspired organisations.

Currently, the Finnish national foresight network —having grown into a system— is now fully functioning as a process which gives it its unique characteristics. It is —and should be— continuously seeking to enhance itself, so it is at a dynamic stance, not in a static position. The core dynamic within the national foresight system builds upon the continuously ongoing futures dialogue between Government and Parliament (Com-

mittee for the Future). It represents anticipatory governance.

During each electoral period (usually 4 years), the Government prepares and submits to Parliament a Report on the Future, which aims to identify issues that will be important for decision-making and require particular attention in the future. Then the Committee for the Future gives its own assessment on the official futures report, with some responses that bind the government. This in a nutshell is the key futures dialogue and a social innovation of Finnish policy foresight.

The government report on the future also serves to open and instigate discussion for the coming years. The Government issued its first report in 1993. There is variation in the topics and the process of how the report is being made. For example, in 2009, the report addressed climate and energy policies with the vision of 'Finland of Low Emissions'. In 2018 the government report focused on disruption of work, while in 2013 report the key topic was how to achieve wellbeing from sustainable growth. The most recent report, published in 2023 on 'Finland of Future Generations', will be described in the next section. In this section the interplay and futures dialogue between these two key actors is highlighted.

The Committee for the Future was established in 1993, first as a temporary committee, then enacted as a permanent one.<sup>8</sup> Committee for the future is 1) a tool for parliaments and their members to increase future-orientation in decision-making, as well as 2) to review phenomena, developments and alternatives that could be relevant for the future and relate these to decision-making.

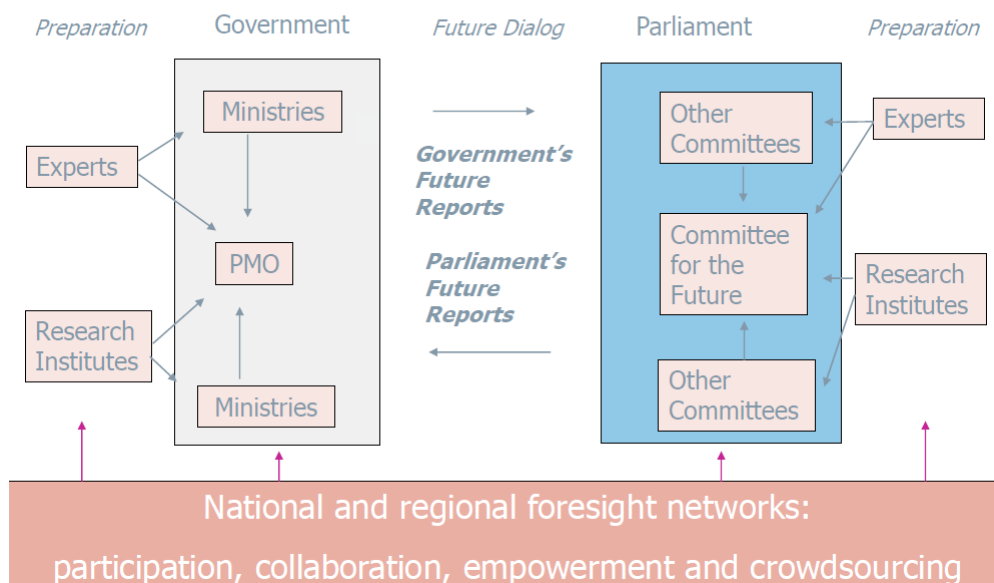
The Committee for the Future's counsel, Olli Hietanen, moved over to the committee from the FFRC first as a permanent advisor on the committee. Now that he is counselor, another researcher from FFRC, Maria Höyssä, is a permanent advisor to the Committee. Thus, academic research is guaranteed to regularly interact with parliamentary and government foresight. The FFRC provides the Committee with foresight information, participates in its futures projects and assists on methodological issues and futures work.

Counselor Hietanen even claims that it is nowadays "rather an exception if a person does not embrace long-term thinking." One of the committee's tasks is the development of Futures Studies and Foresight as a discipline and methodology. The committee members work in close collaboration with the FFRC, as mentioned above, and participate actively in the work of the National Foresight Network and its coordinating body, the Government Foresight Group.

Figure 3

### Simplified graph of the Futures Dialogue between government and parliamentary Committee for the Future

#### Since 1994: Dialogue on the future: Government's and Parliament's Future Reports



Source: Prime Minister's Office.

Technology foresight is a key foresight field addressed by the Committee for the future. The Radical Technology Inquirer (RTI) methodology has been utilized in several technology foresight projects of the Committee for the Future (Linturi *et al.*, 2022; Linturi & Kuusi 2018). The project publications are relatively well known and used by practitioners. RTI methodology builds on the model of socio-technical transformations (Geels 2002), and shows a way to use the concept of socio-technological regimes in long-term (+20 years) technology foresight. The Committee claims that there is a need for such long term perspective, particularly in public policy and planning, where it is not enough to consider the impacts of radical technologies on single lines of industries, but to reflect how they drive change across the whole spectrum of human activities. It is noteworthy that the data-gathering of RTI is crowdsourced: a Facebook group continuously gathering evidence for various new radical technologies has currently over 2,000 members. Many Committee reports are based on the updated RTI methodology, and the online platform for accessing the results in English is: <https://tulevaisuuspankki.fi/en>.

This kind of futures dialogue between government and parliament, attended by the whole national foresight system points to the importance and fruitfulness of anticipatory governance. We need to make today's decisions as bearing in mind the governance for the futures. This means **anticipatory governance**, in other words. To all governments, to all governance in cities, nations, organisations – systematic futures approaches and methods should be introduced and applied. On 12-13 October 2022, other similar units from other countries were invited to Finland –Helsinki World Summit– for the first international world summit where a joint statement was made to be sent all parliaments in the world to start parliamentary foresight work<sup>9</sup> (see the full report of the World Summit Committee for the Future 2022). Such futures committees are using research, this started international parliamentary futures committees dialogue and co-operation. In fact, each parliament could have a Committee for the Future, which is what Jerome Glenn, the keynote speaker in this first World Summit and CEO of the Millennium Project has proposed.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 4

The World Summit of Committee for the Future in Helsinki<sup>11</sup>



Source: Committee for the Future in Parliament.

The goal of the World Summit was to introduce the future committees of different countries to each other and to identify themes that the committees want to discuss together. For example, the possibilities of technology in achieving more environmentally friendly and equal development, the need for transnational regulation of digital business and the use of algorithms, as well as the importance of parliamentary cooperation in proactive decision-making and responding to sustainability challenge, were among the topics addressed.

The world summits launched now on the initiative of the Finnish Committee for the Future are intended to form an international forum for parliamentary discussion on future policy. The committees that have a mandate in their own parliaments to deal with long-term issues would meet in the summits. The faster different crises arise in different parts of the world, the more important it is to create opportunities for a dialogue on the future. One of the goals of the World Summit is to encourage the creation of new future committees in parliaments. At the end of the first Summit, the committees issued a joint statement, with which they wanted to ensure that the just started international parliamentary dialogue on the future will continue. The World Summit of the Committees of the Future 2022

stated the following in their joint statement of 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022<sup>12</sup>:

- Achieving peace and a balance between the well-being of the people and that of the planet require increased future-orientation in decision-making. Parliaments are the most appropriate institutions to support this.
- Committees of the Future are a tool for parliaments and their members to increase the future-orientation in decision-making. Committees of the Future review phenomena, developments and alternatives that could be relevant for the future and relate these to decision-making.
- Phenomena driving the future development of countries are often transnational. Inter-parliamentary and inter-cultural futures dialogue is therefore useful for recognising emerging challenges and common interests. It is also a means to learn about new ways to do futures-related work in different parliaments.
- The Committees of the Future continue to meet in World Summits of the Committees of the Future.
- Committees of the Future encourage the creation of new committees of the future as well as other

mechanisms to support future-oriented decision-making in parliaments around the world.

- Any committee of the future can host a World Summit of the Committees of the Future. The World Summits will be arranged every October.
- The next host will be decided in each World Summit.
- The host of the next official World Summit of the Committees of the Future will be Uruguay 2023.
- The committee that hosts the World Summit can freely design the agenda of the meeting and to invite any committee of the future, including new entrants.
- We encourage the Committees of the Future to stay actively in touch with each other between the World Summits.

#### 4. Government report on the future: Finland of Future Generations

The most recent government report addresses Finland of future generations (PMO 2023). This Report on the Future, which is based on extensive work and interaction with several stakeholders, consists of two parts in more than 350 pages. The first part deals with the ministries' joint foresight activities, the purpose of which is to create a common understanding of future developments. The second part focuses on key issues identified in the ministries' foresight activities and probes potential solutions.

The ministries' joint foresight working group plays a key role in drawing up the first part of the Government Report on the Future. The Prime Minister's Office is responsible for coordinating this work process. Ministries' representatives, for their part, work together with experts in their administrative branches and networks. There is also close collaboration between the National Foresight Network, the Government Foresight Group and a variety of national and international experts.

The report is discussed jointly by Parliament and the Government to get feedback, and it also provides material for wider public debate. The report procedure enables Parliament to express its opinion on both the ministries' foresight activities and the key topics selected by the Government.

Government Report on the Future, prepared between the period of 2019-2023 and adopted on 19 January 2023, aims to build a shared understanding of what Finland will look like in the next generations. The report's systematic reflections on the future lay the foundation for

proactive governance. The Government Report on the Future plays an important role in the Government's foresight activities. Instead of trying to predict the future, the report aims to open up new perspectives, challenge assumptions and increase awareness of potential future trends and their impacts.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and the fundamental change in the security environment in spring 2022 have led to increased uncertainty in our operating environment. The situation has highlighted the importance of the central government's ability to handle uncertainty in an agile way and the need for more proactive decision-making. In recent years, Finland's ability to prepare for and respond to crises has been recognised around the world. Foresight is an essential part of knowledge-based strategic decision-making, and it is important to continue and strengthen this work," highlights Prime Minister Sanna Marin (Press Release 2023).

The first part of the Government report was prepared by public officials as belonging to their official duties in cross-administrative cooperation between all ministries. This working procedure, which was used for the first time in this term's report, aims to strengthen the central government's ability to prepare for the future.<sup>13</sup> Several measures are proposed that must be taken regardless of what kind of future lies ahead. They are concerned with the following six general questions that aim at developing foresight capabilities:

- How can we influence our operating environment so as to successfully promote peace, security, stability, wellbeing, sustainable development, democracy and human rights?
- How can we keep the welfare society's value proposition in the future?
- How can we create an operating environment that generates sustainable growth?
- How can we safeguard the funding base of the welfare society and address the sustainability gap?
- How can we mitigate climate change, combat biodiversity loss and transition to a low-carbon economy in a just manner?
- How can we secure the opportunities of future generations to lead socially, economically and environmentally sustainable lives?

The first part of the report will support the ministries in their strategy work. Drivers for change are identified in the PESTE framework, i.e. according to political, environmental, economic, technological and social dimensions. Then, anticipation is made of alternative developments of the identified uncertainties affecting the future of Finland. This analysis is likewise presented in the PESTE framework. Based on these reflections, four different scenarios for how the future may develop are depicted. The

scenarios are potential development paths rather than forecasts, and it is possible to influence many of them. As a background, fifty dialogues<sup>14</sup> on the future of Finland were conducted to support the preparation of the report. In its Programme, the Government pledges to test out novel ways of interaction to encourage people to participate more effectively and extensively in reforming society. Representatives of different generations (young people in particular), genders and people from a variety of backgrounds were invited to participate. This was because people who, for one reason or another, do not usually take part in discussions on the future would get thus involved in reflecting on the future of Finland. This kind of working mode can be said to represent democratisation of public foresight processes.

The main question for the future is how we can ensure that future generations will also have the opportunity to lead a sustainable life. The second part of the Report on the Future therefore explores how future generations can be better taken into account in legislative drafting and how foresight can play a more important role than at present.

Taking into consideration future generations stresses accountability for political choices. Intergenerational justice is an essential part of the principle of sustainable development: for development to be sustainable, it must not jeopardise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The report benchmarks international examples of institutions that are taking future generations into account. It also suggests ways to enhance solidarity between generations. The issue of future generations has been addressed widely for instance in various think-tanks and NGOs. For example, the youth-led group, Futures for Friday, puts future generations/intergenerational justice at the centre of its campaign (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/>). This topic will also be discussed in FFRC Conference in Turku 2023 on 'Empowering Futures – Long-term Governance, Democracy, and Futures Research'.<sup>15</sup> We urgently need long-term futures thinking to sustain possibilities for alternative and creative solutions for complex crises and accordingly empower futures. These crises we are currently facing have tight interconnections with the futures of democracy, trust, power and sustainability. Furthermore, futures resilience is required to tackle not only complex crises, but dual and polycrises. In a research project funded by the Academy of Future —the RESCUE Project<sup>16</sup>— the aim is to find innovative and just nature-based solutions to sustainable crisis management for cities (Heinonen *et al.*, 2023). Urban governance should be more proactively prepared for continuous uncertainties and unexpected events by raising its resilience. Surprises are the new normal (Heinonen *et al.*, 2017) and resilience is our best strategy for preparing for the futures. A dynamic foresight process is indeed about learning and self-evaluation. Boston *et al.* (2019) claim that a vigorous learning culture that values foresight, insight and oversight is vital within all political institutions. Foster-

ing such a culture will require ongoing support for rigorous research and evaluation of the existing accountability systems and structures.

## 5. Conclusions

To conclude, it can be said that the Finnish national foresight system is a recognised and internationally benchmarked evolutionary process. Especially, the futures dialogue between the Government and Parliament that is at the core of this process, represents unique policy foresight and can be labelled as a social innovation of anticipatory governance. The Committee for the Future has now entered the next level – engaging international similar committees into a process of world summits and continuous conversations. Two points have to be raised here. The Finnish foresight system cannot be directly generalised to fit other countries, because foresight is context-dependent. On the other hand, there are, however, several aspects that could be further developed for a better outcome and functioning of the system. According to an evaluation (Pouru-Mikkola *et al.*, 2023), the Finnish policy foresight system would benefit from clarifying the operations model, collaboration structures, and the shared value proposition. The trust in collaboration appears to be at a high level in the Finnish system, as it is in whole society. Although the challenges stemming from competing for the same resources are widely recognized, the existing networks and co-operation within the foresight system are highly valued. Interaction through seminars is recognized as essential for collective knowledge creation, emphasizing the importance of mediating events in systems (Dufva and Ahlqvist, 2015). However, the Finnish foresight system consists of professionals from different sectors and administrative levels with different approaches and motivations for conducting foresight. This makes it challenging to find a shared purpose for foresight system collaboration, which undermines the motivation of some actors to participate. The foresight system would benefit from a clearer indication of the collective vision, purpose, and value proposition for the actors. In addition, the development of common platforms and means of sharing knowledge would be crucial to avoiding overlapping work and decreasing competition for the same resources. From a geographically scattered foresight system's perspective, the non-use or infrequent use of digital communication platforms between physical meetings can be considered a severe barrier to collaboration development (Pouru-Mikkola 2023). Besides, even if the system is based on free flow of information, there remains a lack of sufficient communication and informa-

tion sharing. Significant communication gaps were identified between and inside the municipal, regional, and state levels of foresight.

Regarding the Government report on the future, the main explicit novelty was that the concept of safeguarding future generations' preconditions for living in an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable society should guide present lawmaking. In fact, to go deeper, forward-looking approach could be embedded into all stages of the policy-making and preparation of legislation. A few critical comments can be given, too, especially concerning its level of boldness, or rather the lack of it. The use of foresight methods was appropriate and systematic, for example in applying morphological analysis of driving forces to provide a basis for different scenarios. And yet, the scenarios presented turn out to be quite cautious and conservative. They did not include radical disruptions or discontinuities, or geopolitical upheavals. In the future, more attention should be given to such uncertainties arising from a cluster of weak signals, black swans (sudden unexpected events), and impacts of polycrises (combined implications from dual or several crises happening simultaneously) (Heinonen *et al.*, 2022; Karjalainen *et al.*, 2022). Efforts for building and enhancing futures resilience should be adopted both in preparing the next Government report on the future and in the whole national foresight system as its core interest and activity. Any nation interested in strengthening policy foresight and developing anticipatory governance could benefit from this approach. The final conclusion for policy foresight is that a balanced approach of using both evidence-based foresight material from academic studies and more openly gathered intuition-based anticipatory insights from citizen level is recommended to be used in alignment and as added to methodological experimentations. Here a wider anticipation of uncertainties, unexpectedness and improbabilities embedded seriously into horizon scanning of driving forces and their interconnectiveness is a critical necessity which actors in policy foresight cannot ignore.

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- 2 The FFRC has grown from three people when established in 1992 to over sixty staff members, hundreds of research and developmental projects, and more than a thousand publications.
  - 3 An award for promoting Futures Studies in Finland was established in his name a few years ago.
  - 4 The thesis topics of doctoral candidates range from, for example, digi-native journalism to privacy, solar energy start-ups in Africa, understanding social change through long waves, more versatile foresight maturity level in organisations and networks, as well as studying the atmosphere of empathy and trust in the language and communication culture of the public sector and the municipal sector, to name a few.
  - 5 In the 1990s, the Society compiled a directory on Finnish Futures Studies.
  - 6 In recent years it has also strengthened its publishing activities. The Society started with publishing dissertations of futures researchers and is now moving towards production of methodological books.
  - 7 Not surprisingly, personal meetings were considered more significant than digital (Yammer). Pouru-Mikkola *et al.*, 2023.
  - 8 When the Committee was founded in 1993, it was the world's first parliamentary committee dealing with future policy. Later, future committees have been established in other parliaments, too.
  - 9 The next world summit was agreed to be held in Uruguay.
  - 10 Jerome Glenn from the Millennium Project had already earlier suggested that the Finnish Committee for the Future could and should be the *primus motor* in catalysing parliamentary public foresight worldwide.
  - 11 <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/The-World-Summit-of-the-Committees-of-the-Future.aspx>.
  - 12 The Countries signing the joint statement were in alphabetical order: Austria, Canada, Chile, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Thailand, Uruguay and Vietnam.
  - 13 In earlier terms, the government report on the future has been in many parts commissioned to external experts, though naturally addressed interactively with government officials and ministries.
  - 14 The Prime Minister's Office and Timeout FoundationLink to an external website teamed up to organise 50 dialogues on the future of Finland. These virtual discussions were held in various parts of Finland in collaboration with regional and local operators using the Timeout methodLink.
  - 15 <https://www.utu.fi/en/news/news/welcome-to-the-futures-conference-2023-empowering-futures-call-for-papers-is-now-open>.
  - 16 <https://www.rescue-finland.com/>. See also Heinonen *et al.*, 2022; Karjalainen *et al.*, 2022.

## Notes

- 1 The author's observant capacity is derived from her involvement as participant to the Finnish national foresight network starting from the 1990s, to some of the government foresight report processes such as making scenarios for the 2019 report, as well as invitee to several hearings by the Committee for the future in parliament.