

SPECIAL ISSUE ON LONG-TERM RISKS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Political Institutions and Long-Term Policymaking: How Parliamentary Future Committees Can Make a Difference

Vesa Koskimaa  and Tapio Raunio 

Faculty of Management and Business, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

Corresponding author: Vesa Koskimaa; Email: vesa.koskimaa@tuni.fi

Abstract

Responding to the need to make democratic governance more anticipatory, during recent decades parliaments have increasingly made efforts to involve elected legislators directly in addressing future risks and envisioning long-term developments. At the level of general democratic-institutional principles, engaging legislators in national-level foresight is expected to enhance the general legitimacy of future-regarding policymaking almost automatically by broadening the scope of democratic actors involved in policy work. However, even the basic mechanisms through which the impact of legislature-based foresight activities could traverse to policymaking remain largely uncharted and unknown. To develop a preliminary framework for detecting and comparing such mechanisms, we draw from the experiences of the most institutionalised and influential legislature-based foresight unit, the Committee for the Future in the Finnish *Eduskunta*. We extract three general mechanisms through which parliamentary future committees could make a valuable contribution to national-level strategic foresight: (1) they can improve the quality of future-regarding policymaking by broadening and consolidating national foresight “ecosystems”; (2) they can strengthen the transparency and accountability of the foresight work of political executives; and (3) they can enhance the legitimacy of anticipatory governance by connecting broader democratic publics to foresight work through more inclusive participatory processes.

Keywords: Anticipatory governance; committees; legislatures

1. Introduction

In recent decades, countries throughout the world have increasingly begun to invest in anticipatory governance mechanisms such as technology assessment (TA) and strategic foresight. Global crises and societal mega-trends, not least climate change but also digitalisation and viral pandemics, impact countries regardless of their geographical location, and relatedly foresight institutions can now be found in all continents. Traditionally, in most countries foresight work has been carried out by the *executive branch*, with typically some specific government branch or special public-sector agency responsible for instilling more long-term planning in societal decision-making. Measuring the policy impacts of such foresight institutions is inherently difficult, but the literature seems to expect that they carry some capacity to shape public policies.

Gradually, parliaments have also become more involved in future-orientated policymaking. What can be considered as the “first wave” begun in the 1970s when legislatures started erecting TA units that study emerging technologies and teach legislators about

their possible societal ramifications.¹ In the “second wave”, future-orientated thinking expanded to more traditional legislative organs. Following the success of the Committee for the Future (CF) that was established in the Finnish *Eduskunta* in the early 1990s, the early twenty-first century has witnessed a diffusion of legislative organs that involve legislators directly in long-term visioning and planning. Today, eight parliaments have parliamentary future committees (Austria, Brazil, Chile, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Philippines and Uruguay), and two have future-regarding research institutes that connect members of parliament (MPs) to foresight work and scenario building (Estonia and South Korea).² At the supranational level, the European Commission and the European Parliament (EP) increasingly seek to integrate foresight activities to the governance of the European Union (EU).³

Thus far, empirical research on legislative future organs has largely focused on their emergence, organisation and tasks.⁴ A so far largely unanswered question is whether they can impact policymaking and thereby make the involvement of parliaments in national-level foresight activities also politically meaningful (ie not only in terms of general democratic or normative principles). Due to the complexity of policy processes, assessing the impact of strategic foresight is difficult, but the question of impact nonetheless forms a natural and necessary next step in the burgeoning quest to better anticipate future challenges in current-day decision-making. This article makes an initial effort to approach the complex question systematically by detecting mechanisms through which legislative future organs could influence national-level anticipatory governance. The main mechanisms are extracted into a general framework that can be used as a benchmark in future studies focusing on more nuanced theoretical models or empirical comparisons.

The main research question of this largely explorative effort is: how could legislative future organs impact policymaking? We must emphasise from the start that we are not seeking to measure the direct and explicit policy impacts of parliamentary future institutions or even to provide exact variables and measures for such endeavours. Instead, our more modest aim is to identify common processual mechanisms resulting from the establishment and operation of legislature-based foresight units that can facilitate the general policy impact of anticipatory governance. As we detail below, due to the varied, complex and often indirect ways in which these organs connect to “ordinary” governing institutions, in this context the meaning of the notion of impact differs considerably from policymaking activities and the outcomes of standard legislative committees. In addition, we acknowledge the diversity of future-regarding legislative organs (eg TA and other parliamentary research units, special commissioners, committees on climate change or technological development, long-term monitoring tools, etc.)⁵ but focus on the committee

¹ M Nentwich, “Parliamentary Technology Assessment Institutions and Practices. A Systematic Comparison of 15 Members of the EPTA Network” (Elektronisches Publikationsportal der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2016).

² V Koskimaa and T Raunio, “Expanding anticipatory governance to legislatures: the emergence and global diffusion of parliamentary future committees” (2022) *International Political Science Review*.

³ M Fernandes and A Heflich, “How to stress-test EU policies: building a more resilient Europe for tomorrow” (2022) European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) Study, PE 699.474.

⁴ See, eg, D Arter, “The Model for Parliaments in the Future? The Case of the Finnish Committee for the Future” (2000) 42 *Politiikka* 3; J Boston, *Governing for the Future: Designing Democratic Institutions for a Better Tomorrow* (Bingley, Emerald Publishing 2017); V Koskimaa and T Raunio, “Encouraging a longer time horizon: the Committee for the Future in the Finnish *Eduskunta*” (2020) 26(2) *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 159.

⁵ On committees and other legislature-based units that deal with sustainable development, often related to the United Nations 2030 Agenda, see A Breuer and J Leininger, “Horizontal Accountability for SDG Implementation: A Comparative Cross-National Analysis of Emerging National Accountability Regimes” (2021) 13 *Sustainability* 7002; M-C Cordonier Segger, M Szabó and A Harrington (eds), *Intergenerational Justice in Sustainable Development Treaty Implementation: Advancing Future Generations Rights through National Institutions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2021); L Kinski and K Whiteside, “Of parliament and presentism: electoral representation and future generations in Germany” (2023) 32 *Environmental Politics* 1. Various parliamentary research services and

model that has become the most popular “organisational blueprint” for future-regarding parliamentary organs.⁶ We recognise that differently organised future units and practices could impact policymaking through different mechanisms and thus envisage this article as an initial, exploratory effort to be discussed, refined and expanded upon in subsequent studies.

We begin by discussing the increasing prominence of anticipatory governance practices in the legislative arena. To focus and structure our empirical exploration, we review some previously presented general ideas on why parliamentary involvement in national-level strategic foresight should matter. Then, to detect and illustrate the mechanisms that potentially impact policymaking through anticipatory governance practices, we examine the Finnish CF that inspired the formation and organisation of most existing legislative future committees.⁷ Instead of providing a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the CF’s organisation and operation, which appears in several earlier studies cited above, we focus on describing the main general mechanisms through which the committee can impact policymaking. The illustrative presentation draws from eighteen interviews conducted in 2019–2021 with elected and non-elected functionaries of the CF and leading civil servants representing the Finnish parliament *Eduskunta* and CF’s correspondent ministry, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). Combined, the interviews produced over twenty-two hours of material exclusively focusing on the organisation, resources, functions and networks of the CF. We also utilised a wide range of official documents (eg parliamentary rules and procedural descriptions, governmental and parliamentary assessment reports, agendas, outputs of the CF, etc.). Due to the explorative, theory-developing and illustrative nature of the study, no strict coding or organising rules were used in analysing the data. In addition to primary materials, the examination is enriched with observations from previous empirical studies on the CF.

The concluding section summarises and reflects on the findings. They demonstrate that the involvement of a future committee in national-level anticipatory governance system can: (1) enhance future-regarding policy input by broadening and consolidating a national “foresight ecosystem”; (2) increase transparency and accountability of governmental future-regarding strategies; and (3) enhance the democratic legitimacy of future-orientated policymaking by bringing ordinary citizens closer to it via inclusive hearings and other practices. Overall, the study suggests that although a parliamentary future committee is not a “magic lever” that *independently* and automatically can lengthen political time perspectives, through distinct mechanisms it can become politically effective and, at a minimum, it can form a *necessary* part of a democratically sustainable national-level democratic foresight system.

II. Why parliamentary involvement in anticipatory governance should matter

Recently, several scholars have advocated for active participation of parliaments in national foresight work, as this would enhance the democratic legitimacy of anticipatory

advisory bodies utilise scientific evidence and even foresight methods and can involve MPs in their work, but their main function is providing advice and information to legislators, not studying the future per se (as noted by M Acosta, M Nestore, ME Jarquín-Solís and R Doubleday, “A typology of advisory bodies in legislatures and research perspectives” (2022) *Journal of Legislative Studies*; J Ganzvles, R van Est and M Nentwich, “Embracing variety: introducing the inclusive modelling of (parliamentary) technology assessment” (2014) 1(3) *Journal of Responsible Innovation* 292).

⁶ V Koskimaa and T Raunio, “Curtailing political short-termism in legislatures: a trade-off between influence and institutionalization?” (2023) 11 *European Journal of Futures Research* 8.

⁷ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 2.

governance that governmental expert-driven foresight processes easily endanger.⁸ We are therefore not the first to highlight the potential contribution of legislatures to national-level strategic foresight work. However, although existing research has largely focused on more theoretical and conceptual discussions of the potential general democratic contributions of these relatively new and novel institutional innovations, our empirically informed examination focuses on more detailed effects of parliamentary future organs (ie mechanisms through which they could impact policymaking). Considering the generally change-resistant nature of legislatures, our approach is likely to reflect the institutional realities of the near future better than models based on mere theoretical-normative reflection.

Still, our discussion must begin with acknowledging existing research because, in addition to normative ambitions, it describes some general mechanisms through which parliamentary foresight could impact the future-sensitivity of democracy. We use this insight as a broad analytical frame that focuses and structures our more detailed empirical examination. The first general idea of how parliaments could impact future-regarding policymaking can be deduced from the comprehensive studies of Boston that chart all existing and conceptualised institutions for future-regarding governance.⁹ Drawing on the Finnish case, Boston has emphasised the capacity of parliamentary future organs to raise and keep future issues on the agenda via their institutionalised reporting mechanisms. As Boston notes, although such reports may not directly impact policies, with such institutions in place policymakers at least cannot prevent long-term visions from surfacing from time to time and gaining some public exposure. Parliamentary future committees could thus contribute to the agenda-setting side of politics.

Another potential avenue by which parliamentary future organs could impact policymaking can be deduced from the comprehensive framework of Caney.¹⁰ His “fivefold package” is also strongly inspired by the formalised “future dialogue” between government and parliament that forms the institutional backbone of the Finnish national foresight system. Caney’s largely theoretical proposition seeks to enhance the Finnish system’s future-sensitivity by redefining certain institutional prerogatives of the main actors. Like other previously mentioned studies in the field, it envisions a new model rather than analyses the potential impacts of existing institutions. Of the five steps of the process two relate specifically to the functioning of parliaments. First, according to Caney, a Finnish-style future committee is mandatory for a genuine national-level foresight system, but instead of just responding to government’s future manifesto (step 1), the committee’s scrutiny and monitoring powers should be expanded to all policy initiatives processed by the parliament. Caney’s second improvement concerns the publicity of the committee’s work and introduces a “visions for the future day” by which opposition parties and the general public also scrutinise and comment upon the products of the “future dialogue” in a deliberative fashion. For Caney, legislature’s impact primarily rests on significantly the stronger monitoring and scrutinising capacities of future committees.

Next, we move forward and envisage mechanisms through which these general objectives – enhanced agenda-setting and policy-monitoring capacity – could materialise. First, we consider the input or agenda-setting side. In addition to Boston’s publicity-centred mechanism,¹¹ we can explicate a more indirect and less institutionalised way for

⁸ S Caney, “Political Institutions for the Future: A Fivefold Package” in I González-Ricoy and A Gosseries (eds), *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2016); KS Ekeli, “Giving a Voice to Posterity – Deliberative Democracy and Representation of Future People” (2005) 18 *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 429; M Rose and J Hoffmann, “Seven Building Blocks for an Intergenerationally Just Democracy” (Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations, 2020).

⁹ Boston, supra, note 4; J Boston, “Assessing the options for combatting democratic myopia and safeguarding long-term interests” (2021) 125 *Futures* 102668.

¹⁰ Caney, supra, note 8.

¹¹ Boston, supra, note 4.

parliamentary future organs to enhance the agenda-setting capacity of anticipatory governance practices: the broadening of the pool of future-orientated policy actors. Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that a national foresight system typically brings together a rather predictable set of “usual suspects”, with the governmental foresight body interacting with research institutes and select non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private companies. Often the focus is on predefined, rather confined topics such as climate change, or their agendas are shaped by the direct needs of the incumbent government.¹² Although such practices may facilitate a stronger connection to policymaking, they simultaneously constrain the agenda-setting capacities of the foresight institution by confining its efforts to a government’s political aims. Under tight government control, foresight becomes a reactive activity and closely tied to day-to-day politics.

Including the parliament in the national-level strategic foresight “ecosystem” can widen its focus in several ways. Most obviously, it also incorporates the views of opposition parties. If the parliament establishes a designated future committee with the capacity to design its own agenda, it can broaden the substantive scope and actor network of the “foresight ecosystem” even further. Moreover, there is a potential spillover effect, with MPs seated in the future committees taking their knowledge and recognition of the value of foresight work with them to other positions. In addition to broadening the foresight “ecosystem”, involving parliaments in national-level foresight can bring added value by consolidating the “ecosystems”. Compared to a purely executive-driven governance system in which non-elected professionals (from academia, lobbies and especially various public-sector agencies) play a central role in creating and confining policy information,¹³ a foresight system that enjoys the “backrest” of popular legitimacy and wider actor networks initiated by MPs can become significantly more open, durable and effective. Overall, parliamentary involvement can therefore contribute to the emergence and consolidation of a large set of actors engaged in foresight work that sustains itself through regular contacts and outputs.¹⁴ Such networks should broaden the scope of policy-relevant foresight information.

Turning to monitoring and scrutiny, the logic here is essentially the same as in the case of normal parliamentary committees. Through their committee work, MPs develop special policy expertise that facilitates more informed scrutiny of the government’s actions.¹⁵ When the government must report to the parliament, MPs can scrutinise and debate over the documents and offer their own views on them. Besides executive-driven foresight systems lacking these interactions, marginal ownership even amongst cabinet ministers can be a real problem, especially if the foresight unit is a quasi-independent research organisation consisting of bureaucrats and/or scientists, as has often been the case. Based on these logics, parliamentary involvement should improve the transparency and accountability of national-level strategic foresight and result in better-quality foresight work by the government.

Finally, we should note that as future committees operate largely outside of the normal legislative business and possess greater control over their practices, they are also freer to engage in consultations with ordinary citizens and to experiment with innovative practices of democratic engagement such as crowdsourcing.¹⁶ By tying larger portions of

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ RAW Rhodes, “Understanding Governance: Ten Years On” (2007) 28(8) *Organization Studies* 1243.

¹⁴ SOIF, “Features of effective systemic foresight in governments around the world” (School of International Futures, 2021).

¹⁵ S Siefken and H Rommetvedt (eds), *Parliamentary Committees in the Policy Process* (Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge 2022).

¹⁶ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 4.

mass publics into anticipatory governance practices, parliamentary future organs may thus also enhance democratic engagement and legitimacy, as earlier studies have noted.¹⁷ We now turn to explore whether and how such mechanisms operate in the functioning of the CF.

III. Empirical analysis

Our illustrative case study of Finland is structured in line with the three broad dimensions – broadening actor network, accountability of governmental foresight work and engagement with citizens – identified in the previous section. As was noted above, we do not examine in detail the emergence, organisation or the operation of the CF. Instead, to add nuance to our theoretical frame, we focus exclusively on the mechanisms through which the CF can provide added value for the broader Finnish national foresight system that today is a strongly interconnected multi-level structure for anticipatory governance connecting the government, ministries and the parliament, as well as NGOs, research institutes and regional authorities, into a coordinated process for producing foresight information and utilising it in policymaking.¹⁸ The system has often been considered a global forerunner to be emulated.¹⁹ However, it should be noted that instead of emerging overnight through a coordinated decision, the system evolved over a long and meandering process during which new layers were added gradually and sometimes spontaneously as relevant policy actors were incorporated under its broad umbrella. Although parliamentary foresight units can emerge without a supportive network, their institutionalisation and impacts are probably conditioned by their broader operating context.

I. Broadening and consolidation of the foresight network

In Finland, the gradual emergence of a broad and well-organised future studies community predates the establishment of the CF in 1993,²⁰ yet the latter has become the anchor and a public centrepiece of the national foresight system. In addition to its novelty even on a global scale, the CF's special status relates to the fact that it was initiated and developed specifically by MPs who also continue to secure its survival. This has had a crucial impact on the consolidation of both the formal “future dialogue” that the CF has with the government, tying it to an ongoing exchange, and the broader national foresight system that gradually developed around “the dialogue”, also connecting ministries and non-state foresight actors into a coordinated joint foresight endeavour. The implicit commitments of the CF to work in a non-partisan manner and to utilise scientific advice and participatory

¹⁷ Caney, *supra*, note 8; Ekeli, *supra*, note 8; Rose and Hoffmann, *supra*, note 8.

¹⁸ Boston, *supra*, note 4; K Heo and Y Seo, “Anticipatory governance for newcomers: lessons learned from the UK, the Netherlands, Finland, and Korea” (2021) 9 *European Journal of Futures Research* 9; V Koskimaa, “The Finnish National Foresight System” in M MacKenzie, M Setälä and S Kyllönen (eds), *Democracy and the Future: Future-Regarding Governance in Democratic Systems* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2023).

¹⁹ For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) recent guide to better foresight strongly emphasises the Finnish model (“Strategic Foresight for Better Policies: Building Effective Governance in the Face of Uncertain Futures” (OECD, 2019)). At the 2019 Government Foresight Community meeting of the OECD, the Finnish foresight system was presented as the “cutting edge” of public-sector foresight work (OECD, Government Foresight Community annual meeting 2019, Main takeaways of the meetings of 7 and 8 October 2019). A recent report by the European Parliament also highlighted the Finnish model (Fernandes and Heflich, *supra*, note 3).

²⁰ The early institutionalisation of a broad-ranging future studies network was an important facilitator of the foresight system. The Finnish Society for Futures Studies was established in 1980, whereas Tutkas, the Association of Researchers and Members of Parliament, had been founded a decade earlier in 1970.

tools in scenario-building have made it an appealing partner to more visionary external stakeholders that do not have to “choose sides” when interacting with MPs. These attributes – which are rather common to parliamentary future institutions²¹ – are exceptional in the parliamentary sphere, in which activities are normally characterised by a strict government–opposition divide and party discipline. This openness can broaden the group of actors that can provide foresight information to the system’s processes, potentially enlarging the agendas of future-regarding policymaking.

Emphasising the potential to broaden the scope of actors involved in foresight work, it is important to note that non-state actors have played an important role in the establishment and development of the foresight system.²² The idea of a parliamentary future organ was first put forth in a citizen initiative by various “future-friendly” societal actors,²³ and already by the 1990s the CF regularly interacted with non-state actors in the “future dialogue” process, especially when working on TAs.²⁴ These contacts have intensified and broadened over time to include a wide circle of NGOs, researchers and businesses. For the CF, these links are crucial, as non-state actors provide an opportunity to “outsource” expertise and research costs.²⁵ These interactions have also contributed to stronger links between external stakeholders and governmental foresight actors. In 2005, the involvement of non-state actors was institutionalised in the creation of the National Foresight Network,²⁶ which was later integrated into the national foresight system under the coordination of the PMO.²⁷ Overall, the consolidation of these networks has significantly expanded the scope of foresight information available to MPs and the executive branch, broadening potential agendas of anticipatory governance.

The emergence and consolidation of the broader national-level foresight system, in which the CF has played a central role, has also impacted positively on the scope of tasks and permanence of the CF itself, enhancing its independent agenda-setting capacities. Apart from providing a response to the government’s Report on the Future (see below), the CF carries out so-called “own projects”, and since 2018 it has been the official correspondent for the government’s Agenda 2030 reports. When working on its “own projects”, the CF operates essentially like a scientific seminar, engaging external experts thoroughly, and each project produces a broad but detailed report, which can be over 100 pages long, dealing with various topics from nanotechnology to municipal democracy. Reflecting the CF’s commitment to operate in a deliberative, scientific and non-partisan fashion, the reports rarely make explicit political recommendations. However, interviews suggest that the reports are generally well-regarded within relevant ministries, and therefore they carry a general capacity to inspire governmental initiatives. In addition, the deliberative and non-partisan operating ethos of the CF can contribute to finding common ground even on more polarised issues, providing for the system a possibility to expand political horizons beyond limited government–opposition dynamics. Although this does not exactly enlarge the agenda, such cooperation may introduce alternatives that were not possible without it.

Finally, alongside the CF’s international reputation, its own research and other activities have contributed to its institutionalisation – viewed both from within and

²¹ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 6.

²² P Tapio and S Heinonen, “Focused Futures from Finland” (2018) 10(2) *World Futures Review* 111.

²³ Koskimaa, *supra*, note 18.

²⁴ D Arter, “The Model for Parliaments in the Future? The Case of the Finnish Committee for the Future” (2000) 42 *Politiikka* 3.

²⁵ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 4.

²⁶ M Wilenius, “Yhteiskunnallisen ennakoinnin rooli tulevaisuuden haasteiden tunnistamisessa” (Tutujulkaisu 1/2005); PMO, “Valtioneuvoston ennakointiverkosto 2007–2011: Loppuraportti” (Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 8:2011).

²⁷ Koskimaa, *supra*, note 18.

outside of the parliament – and this has enhanced the longevity of the whole foresight system, providing a secure opportunity for future-regarding ideas to enter the political marketplace. For comparison, as one interviewee noted, Sweden’s executive-driven foresight efforts have been short-lived, as incoming governments have usually stopped the projects of previous governments and directed resources elsewhere. Under such conditions, organised foresight actors have little incentive to invest in long-term cooperation whilst the governors have no obligation to hear them. In Finland, an MP-driven, formally recognised and consolidated parliamentary foresight unit secures a constant flow of demands and ideas from a broader network of actors that also contributes to governmental foresight work.

2. Transparency and accountability of governmental foresight activities

The CF was initially established over a procedure that mimics the reciprocal interplay between government ministries that provide input in the form of legislative proposals and parliamentary committees that scrutinise them. Formally, the CF’s main task is to provide a parliamentary response to the Government Report on the Future. This has over the decades evolved into a multifaceted and ongoing “Future Dialogue” between the *Eduskunta* and the government. The Government Report on the Future is a broad yet often detailed assessment of a specific topic presented once per electoral term. Even though the government chooses the topic, the CF can influence the choice of themes through its ongoing interactions with the PMO. Importantly from the viewpoint of scrutiny and monitoring, after the report is submitted to the parliament, the CF assesses it and issues a formal reply (a broad and detailed document also called “Future Report”) in which it can also table binding resolutions and raise issues not included in the report. The CF conducts its own thorough review process, which involves consulting various experts, especially from academia.²⁸ Although the Future Dialogue differs significantly from ordinary legislative process, it provides transparency to national foresight work and enables the parliament to impact the government’s long-term visions and strategies. The mere existence of such a formal and public process increases the transparency and accountability of the government’s foresight efforts.

Over time, line ministries have become more involved in national-level foresight work, and here we find again a link to the parliament. Since early 2000s, ministries that previously only assisted in the “future dialogue” indirectly have produced their own “future reviews” outlining the most significant future problems and solution alternatives for them in the ministries’ spheres of jurisdiction. They are published once each electoral term, in advance of the elections, to impact government negotiations.²⁹ This is significant, for the government programme has become highly important in structuring the work of the cabinet.³⁰ Meanwhile, as was previously noted, the PMO has made increasing efforts to coordinate national foresight work more thoroughly. In 2007, it took control of the Government Foresight Network that was established in 2004 to coordinate and develop ministries’ foresight activities. In the 2010s, ministries’ foresight activities were consolidated into a process known as the “Ministries Joint Foresight Activities”, and the PMO’s coordination capacity was enhanced with a creation of a new unit – the “Government

²⁸ HS Seo, *Reaching Out to the People? Parliament and Citizen Participation in Finland* (Tampere, Tampere University Press 2017).

²⁹ T Bergman, “*Tapahtumien kulkua on mahdotonta ennustaa*”. *Mahdollisuudet, haasteet ja uhat ministeriöiden tulevaisuusnäkemyksissä koskien väestön ikärakenteen kehitystä Suomessa* (2011) Master’s thesis, University of Jyväskylä.

³⁰ T Raunio, “Finland: Forming and Managing Ideologically Heterogeneous Oversized Coalitions” in T Bergman, H Bäck and J Hellström (eds), *Coalition Governance in Western Europe* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2021).

Foresight Group” – which comprises a permanent secretary, a professional secretariat and a council of experts.³¹

As the role of the ministries in national-level foresight work has increased, so have contacts between the CF and the ministries, enhancing the CF’s and also the public’s capacity to stay aware of the government’s activities. In its official response to the Future Report of Juha Sipilä’s government (in office 2015–2019), the CF requested that the government strengthen the input of the ministries in the preparation of government’s Future Report.³² Shortly after this, the CF also recommended that ministerial foresight activities should be given a more prominent role in the ordinary policy preparation processes at the ministry and government levels.³³ These changes reflect the transformation of the Finnish governmental system over the last thirty years from a more reactive system towards one that emphasises long-term strategic planning and coordination between governments over time. Through its central role in the founding, consolidation and operating of the national foresight system, the contribution of the CF to this development can be regarded as significant. Without its active involvement, the system would probably not have developed to the level that it is at today, at least in terms of coherence, openness and transparency. Overall, the CF has pushed the entire executive branch to invest more resources in future-orientated policymaking. The “future dialogue” instils much-needed transparency and accountability in foresight work, which has also expanded to a wider audience through the parliament’s more public role.

Many of our interviewees indicated that sometimes the CF’s indirect influence has been considerable, with parliamentary foresight exerting positive spillover effects on the views of various policy experts, from ministries to NGOs. The interviewees also noted that many former CF members have gone on to occupy powerful positions in the government, including two former prime ministers: former CF chair Jyrki Katainen, who was prime minister from 2011 to 2014; and former CF member Juha Sipilä, who was prime minister from 2015 to 2019. As prime ministers, both continued to advance the themes they had learned about in the CF whilst instilling more “strategic”, long-term planning in the work of the government. Nonetheless, the direct policy impacts of the foresight network have often been considered quite limited,³⁴ with both policymakers and non-state actors feeling that the connection between foresight activities and public policies is weak.³⁵ The Finnish foresight system is therefore not an ideal institutional solution, but already in its present form it has clearly contributed to more future-orientated policymaking – and the CF has been at the heart of this process.

3. Democratic engagement and legitimacy

From a more normative and general point of view, when MPs – who are directly elected by voters and accountable to them – gain a formal mandate to regularly study and reflect upon alternative long-term scenarios and make broad policy recommendations to the government, ordinary citizens arguably become more tied to future-regarding policymaking compared to a situation in which mostly non-elected government experts envision

³¹ Koskimaa, *supra*, note 18.

³² Committee for the Future, “Committee Report on the Future, Part 1: A Shared understanding of the transformation of work” (A Committee for the Future Publication, 2017).

³³ PMO, “Hallituksen strategisten johtamisvälineiden kehittämishankkeen suosituksset” (Valtioneuvoston julkaisuja 1:2019).

³⁴ PMO, “Valtioneuvoston tulevaisuusselontekotyön kehittämismahdollisuuksia” (Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 3:2007); PMO, “Yhteistä ja jatkuvaa ennakointia: Ehdotus kansalliseksi toimintatavaksi” (Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 1:2014).

³⁵ L Pouri, M Minkinen, B Auffermann, C Rowley, M Malho and A Neuvonen, “Kansallinen ennakointi Suomessa” (Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2020:17).

and design long-term policies. The actual strength of this general legitimising impact depends on public's awareness of the activities of the parliamentary future organ – a link that has been deemed inadequate due to the low level of publicity of the CF³⁶ – and the extent to which it engages more directly with citizens.

The CF, free from the normal “behavioural” pressures affecting parliamentary committees (strict partisan discipline, etc.), enhances the legitimacy of future-regarding policymaking also through its more inclusive and direct participatory practices that complement or even amend the opinions of organised stakeholders with the views of the ordinary public on a variety of agenda items. For example, in 2013, the CF utilised an online platform to gain direct citizen input regarding the preparation process of the off-road traffic law,³⁷ and later it mixed online participation with expert hearings and thematic studies to produce a report on the future of the welfare state.³⁸ More generally, too, the CF utilises practices that significantly increase public engagement compared to ordinary parliamentary practices. The CF regularly organises various events and seminars, invests strongly in social media-based engagement and transparency initiatives and frequently interacts directly with various special associations, especially youth organisations and schools. This all stands in striking contrast to the practices of ordinary *Eduskunta* committees, which have displayed little interest in reaching out to general citizens whilst fervently defending their almost absolute secrecy.³⁹ Compared to a situation in which only a government-nominated expert organ studies future alternatives, parliamentary future committees offer far more opportunities for engaging directly with citizens.

IV. Summary of findings and concluding reflections

Contributing to the difficult but necessary next step in considering the impacts of parliamentary future organs whose number has increased steadily during the 2010s,⁴⁰ this article sought to identify the general mechanisms through which parliaments could bring added value to broader anticipatory governance practices from the viewpoint of policymaking and not just through their general legitimating function. After charting some general logics from previous studies, we enriched and nuanced them with a focused exploration of Finland, as this is the only country with a more institutionalised parliamentary future committee. The experiences of the CF reflect the role that such committees could realistically play in the current political-institutional reality, and thus our empirically informed effort brings important nuance to earlier, largely theoretical accounts. Learning from the CF also matters because it has inspired essentially all other exiting legislature-based foresight units around the globe.⁴¹

After exploring the mechanisms through which the CF could shape policymaking, we can argue with confidence that the CF has at least influenced the structures of Finland's anticipatory governance system, which is increasingly connected to the country's “strategic” governance practices. Although strategic foresight had already gained momentum in Finland before and also independently of parliamentary input, it seems rather unlikely that such a system would have emerged and especially become

³⁶ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 4.

³⁷ T Aitamurto and H Landemore, “Democratic participation and deliberation in crowdsourced legislative processes: the case of the law on off-road traffic in Finland” (2013) The 6th Conference on Communities and Technologies (C&T), Workshop: Large-Scale Idea Management and Deliberation Systems.

³⁸ Seo, *supra*, note 28.

³⁹ T Raunio, “Committees in the Finnish *Eduskunta*: cross-party cooperation and legislative scrutiny behind closed doors” in ST Siefken and H Rommetvedt (eds), *Parliamentary Committees in the Policy Process* (Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge 2022).

⁴⁰ Koskimaa and Raunio, *supra*, note 2.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

consolidated without a direct parliamentary mandate and connections. The establishment of the CF, which was explicitly driven and demanded by MPs, has significantly broadened and consolidated the network of actors and processes involved in national strategic foresight, thereby expanding the scope of policy-relevant foresight information in the agendas of the Finnish anticipatory governance system. Especially through the Future Dialogue, the CF also provides transparency and accountability to foresight work, and it has more generally pushed the PMO and the entire government towards more comprehensive and ambitious anticipatory governance practices. Another main mechanism relates to the CF's institutionalised tradition of experimenting with participatory instruments that enhance direct engagement with citizens, thereby further increasing the range of actors it interacts with and the general legitimacy of the broader foresight system.

The gradually but constantly increasing number of legislative foresight organs around the world – in Europe, South America and Asia – indicates that MPs are not content to leave foresight work to political executives. As we have argued in this article, this development can offer various significant improvements for future-regarding policy-making and not just for the general legitimacy of anticipatory governance. Parliamentary future committees can consolidate wider foresight networks that expand the input side and agendas of policymaking by broadening the range of foresight actors, enhancing the monitoring and accountability of anticipatory governance by routinising more transparent reporting practices and incrementally making the national decision-making culture and practices more inclusive of and receptive to the interests of future generations and more legitimate for current voters.

Of course, another question is how much these mechanisms actually impact policies. We have deliberately been careful in estimating the influence of the CF, as exact causal mechanisms concerning policy flows are difficult to uncover in complex modern societies. It is probably fair to acknowledge that the CF's direct policy impacts have been selective at best, and is hard to disentangle these impacts from the overall impacts of the national foresight network, which in turn are hard to disentangle from ordinary policy preparation, as government ministries oversee both functions. Regarding the CF's policy impact, the strongest case can perhaps be made for the “big ideas” that the highly differentiated, detailed and expert-driven policy machine of the government might easily miss but that could emerge through the CF's more eclectic “visioning”. However, as we underlined in Section I, in this study we only wanted to provide an initial idea of the mechanisms through which a future committee's political impact could potentially take effect, and we leave the development of more nuanced theories regarding impact channels and measures to future studies.

Competing interests. No competing interests surfaced during the execution of this study.