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Encouraging a longer time horizon: The Committee for the Future in the Finnish Eduskunta

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Abstract

As recent debates about climate change indicate, public policy-making is often criticized as being predominantly reactive, with politicians responding in piece-meal fashion to current problems. How well legislatures can predict the future or prepare for it is thus a question really worth asking. Focusing on the Finnish Eduskunta, this paper critically examines the role of the Committee for the Future, a unique parliamentary institution that was established in 1993 'to generate dialogue with the government on major future problems and opportunities'. Drawing on parliamentary documents and elite interviews, the paper explores the Committee's role through its unique tasks and working practices, and assesses whether its position has institutionalized within the Eduskunta and Finnish state administration more generally. The paper also evaluates the Committee's impact on Finnish long-term politics, identifies its strengths and weaknesses, and puts forward practical recommendations for turning legislatures into more forward-thinking institutions.

Introduction

A typical view of politics is that members of parliament (MP) are primarily motivated by re-election. Regular elections are of course an essential pillar of democracy, making both MPs and their political parties more responsive to voters. Yet the alleged inability to see 'beyond the next elections' constitutes also a serious challenge for long-term problem-solving. As recent debates about global warming or increased migration flows indicate, policy-making is often criticized as being predominantly reactive, with politicians responding in piece-meal fashion to current problems. Whether legislatures seek actively to assess future risks and opportunities, and then use such

information to improve the quality of a country's anticipatory governance, are thus questions worth asking.

Hence this paper analyses the Committee for the Future (CF), established in 1993 in the Finnish Eduskunta 'to generate dialogue with the government on major future problems and opportunities' (Official webpage of the Committee for the Future). While several legislatures across the world have set up temporary commissions to look into various long-term policy issues from technological development to climate change, CF is the only permanent parliamentary committee in Europe with a specific mandate to study the future.[1] The Committee for the Future is also unique among the Eduskunta committees in the sense that it is not part of the legislative machinery: it does not process draft bills and therefore the government-opposition cleavage is not as important as in the other committees. This also presents a dilemma for the CF: often admired by foreign observers, it needs to prove its worth and support among MPs for its continued existence.

This is why we lean on the concept of 'institutionalization' as our main theoretical framework. Institutionalization has both an internal (established 'ways of doing things') and external (recognition by other actors) dimension. Applied to our case, the institutionalization of the Committee for the Future is achieved through developing internal stability and external legitimacy. But here the CF must also make choices: essentially free to determine its own agenda and procedures, it can decide what issues to focus on and how to conduct its business. As we argue in our theoretical section, the CF faces inevitable trade-offs. If it deals with contested, topical matters it is likely to resemble a normal committee, with the main line of division between cabinet and opposition parties. The other option is to aim at a more consensual, cross-party mode through prioritizing less salient matters. The first strategy entails the risk of the CF losing its unique, deliberative character, whereas the second alternative may result in it becoming a harmless, hardly noticed organ.

Empirically this paper has descriptive, analytical, and normative and practical goals. The main research questions asked are 1) how does the CF work (i.e. how does it try to increase the time-span of Finnish politics), 2) has it achieved both internal and external institutionalization and 3) what is CF's impact in the Eduskunta and in Finnish politics? Following our theoretical section, we briefly introduce the parliamentary context of the Eduskunta. Our empirical analysis draws on parliamentary documents and 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews. In most cases, the information of the documents was coded to numerical form to allow longitudinal observation of CF's tasks and output. The interviewees include current and former members (2) and chairs (4) of the CF, current and former high-ranking operatives of the Eduskunta (7) and a high-ranking operative from CF's correspondent ministry, Prime Minister's Office (1). We aimed at finding the persons that had the best knowledge of the CF's operation, effect and continuity. To find relevant themes and topics, we consulted earlier research (Arter, 2000; Boston 2017) and adjusted the themes to serve our objectives, especially the question of institutionalization. The themes that were covered in the interviews re: 1) the tasks of the CF (process and substance, institutionalization, political relevance), 2) the work practices and organizational culture of the CF (distinctiveness, institutionalization) 3) the political effect of the CF and 4) its over time development and institutionalization. The interviews were carried out in spring 2019. Their combined duration is around 17 hours – around 68 minutes per interview (one interviewee was interviewed twice).[2]

The empirical section both charts the activities of the CF since the 1990s whilst uncovering how it works and interacts with the Eduskunta, the government, and external stakeholders. Linking our findings to institutionalization, we pay special attention to how the functions and position of the CF have changed. As policy-makers across the world grapple with the problem of designing structures for long-term planning and avoiding harmful short-termism (e.g. Gonzáles-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016;

Jacobs, 2016; Boston, 2017), the concluding discussion reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the Committee for the Future whilst putting forward practical recommendations for turning legislatures into more forward-thinking institutions.

Theoretical framework: institutionalizing a novel parliamentary committee

Our theoretical framework is based on the concept of institutionalization. The classic or standard definition of the term was coined by Huntington (1968, p. 12), according to whom it is 'the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability'. Institutionalization has been utilized in a variety of disciplines from organization studies to sociology, and political scientists have used it to examine political systems (Huntington, 1965; 1968), political movements such as trade unions (Levitsky, 1998), political parties (Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1988, Harmel & Svåsand, 1993; Randall & Svåsand, 2002; Harmel et al,. 2018), and also legislatures, including their committees (e.g. Polsby, 1968; Hibbing, 1988; Norton, 1998; Kopecký, 2001; Rittberger, 2012).[3]

Institutionalization should primarily be viewed as a framework through which one can study the evolution and change of political movements and organisations. For example, students of political parties have explored whether parties have persevered after the departure of their founding figures, while scholars of legislatures have investigated whether parliaments can develop both internal maturity and external legitimacy. In line with institutional theory, institutionalization literature has also emphasized the ability of organisations to absorb shocks and outlive other 'critical junctures'. To summarize, an 'institutionalized' organisation or movement has three main components (Harmel et al., 2018; Peters, 2019, pp. 218-233):

(a) internal institutionalization: established ways of doing things, both regarding written rules and social norms; and

(b) external institutionalization: recognition and also acceptance by other actors; and

(c) durability: continued existence, particularly through shocks and hard times.

In terms of causal mechanisms, one can obviously argue that (c) is strongly conditional upon (a) and (b), as the stability and indeed survival of an institution depends on it enjoying support among its members and, to lesser extent, also among external actors. Most of the literature has emphasized the first component, as organisations – for example, well-resourced interest groups – can achieve durability even without explicit recognition by others. Yet these studies do recognise the importance of external institutionalization, as organisations in most cases need to be perceived as legitimate by relevant outside actors. In fact, institutionalization has often been used by political scientists quite loosely to describe a gradual process wherein an organisation achieves internal stability whilst becoming an autonomous actor with its own rules and norms. This applies particularly to the literature on parliaments, including the article by Norton (1998) on committees, which have very much focused on how legislatures and their various sub-units have evolved over the decades. For example, Polsby (1968, p. 145) in his classic study of the U.S. Congress suggested that an institutionalized legislature meets three criteria: it is well-bounded, i.e. differentiated from its environment; it is sufficiently complex with its own division of labour, codes of conduct, and shared norms; and it uses universalistic rather than particularistic working methods, with members following rules and precedents. Subsequent studies have adapted Polsby's criteria, but much of the literature has been quite vague in its operationalization or measurement of the concept.[4]

Let us next delve deeper into the first two components and adapt them to our case of a parliamentary committee. Internal institutionalization refers to the way in which the institution works. It should establish routines, division of labour, and patterns of behaviour that are not reliant on the founders of the institution (that often strongly shape the way the organisation functions) or indeed on individual persons. Instead, the institution should have stable practices that are also perceived as legitimate by

its members. Already Huntington (1968) underlined the importance of 'stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour', while subsequent research has emphasized the interaction between written rules and behaviour: even when there are no actual written codes of conduct, there should be a shared understanding of how to proceed in social situations – or what March and Olsen (1989) referred to as the 'logic of appropriateness'. Hence what matters is that the members of the institution recognise the rules and behave accordingly.

Transferring these general notions to the environment of parliamentary committees, they by default do have written rules, with even national constitutions containing regulations about committees. Typical standing legislative committees may have existed for decades, and often parliaments have a set of standard rules of procedure that apply to all committees, with individual committees then supplementing them, if needed, with their own specific rules. Such rules of procedure normally detail matters such as committee decision-making, agenda formation, speaking order, and types of committee outputs. Hence MPs, when changing committees, are familiar with the 'way of the house' and can adapt to the new committee without difficulties. Institutionalized committees should thus display organizational maturity, with a set of established procedures and norms. (Norton, 1998) In terms of the Committee for the Future, the Eduskunta has its own standing orders that also contain rules about committee work. The CF should have also developed stable practices and 'committee culture' over the years. However, more crucial here is the atypical, non-legislative character of the CF. The agendas of legislative committees are normally crowded with government bills, leaving precious little time for other matters. The Committee for the Future, on the other hand, can shape its own agenda and decide what it does – at least according to official statements. Compared with legislative committees, it is thus arguably even more significant in terms of institutionalization that the MPs in the CF, or those thinking about seeking a seat in it, approve its working methods. In our

empirical analysis we thus examine the 'routinization' of committee work and how the interviewed MPs and other persons close to the CF view its internal proceedings.

Turning to external institutionalisation, it refers to the organisation being perceived as relevant and legitimate by outside actors. For political institutions to survive, particularly in periods of crisis, they need to cultivate support among the broader political elite and the public. Without external recognition, institutions and movements are likely to break down, with their members perhaps seeking alternative channels of influence. What matters again is the intertemporal dimension: external recognition should be based on long-term expectations – outside actors should consider the institution as having relevance in the long run, not just in the present moment or in the past.

Viewed from the perspective of parliamentary committees, both case studies and comparative research indicates that they have become more powerful bodies inside legislatures in recent decades (Longley & Davidson, 1998; Norton, 1998; Martin, 2014). Jurisdictional reshuffles aside, standard legislative committees normally do not need to worry about their position: they remain the backbone of parliamentary work, processing government draft laws that fall under their respective spheres of competence. Even if an individual committee suffers temporarily from a bad reputation inside the legislature, such problems can be normally addressed through changing the committee chair or other personnel. For the CF, however, the situation is again more challenging, with external institutionalization – arguably not just in the Eduskunta but also among external stakeholders – highly important for its survival. It is not needed for legislation, so it has to prove its worth in other ways. As its name implies, it should do something meaningful in terms of preparing for the future. This could refer to outputs such as committee reports and/or to providing an exciting forum for discussing future-related matters. Here it faces a potential trade-off: it can either 'play it safe' by focusing on less salient issues or it can take risks and deal with topical matters that cause divisions in the

Eduskunta. The advantage of the former alternative is that the CF will not raise tensions in the parliament, and outside observers, including MPs, might value its consensual, cross-party mode of operation. The downside is that the CF might become a marginal actor devoid of any real impact and purpose. If, on the other hand, the CF deliberately tackles salient questions, such as immigration or climate change, then it might start resembling the legislative committees, with the government-opposition cleavage dominating its proceedings. At the same time the CF would undoubtedly generate more media interest. In order to assess the external institutionalization of the Committee for the Future, we rely on interviews as well as explore its agenda and the impact its work has in the Eduskunta and in the society at large. We also pay attention to the 'attractiveness' of the CF and whether its status and impact have varied since its establishment.

The Committee for the Future: establishment and context

The Eduskunta is itself without any doubt an institutionalized legislature. Its internal structures have evolved gradually over the decades, and recent constitutional reforms have strengthened its position in the Finnish political system. Overall, party discipline is strong, with MPs expected to follow the party line in both the plenary and in the committees. The Eduskunta along with other Nordic legislatures can be classified as a 'working' parliament as opposed to 'debating' parliaments like the UK House of Commons. Working parliaments are characterised by standing orders that emphasise committee work over plenary debates, with a parliamentary culture where MPs focus on scrutiny of documents in committees instead of grand speeches on the floor. In addition, working legislatures are, on average, more consensual, with party-political cooperation taking also place between governing and opposition parties (Arter, 1999, pp. 211-217; Bergman & Strøm, 2011; Raunio & Wiberg, 2014).

Institutionalization applies also to committees. In the Eduskunta, committee deliberations are a compulsory part of the legislative process, precede the plenary stage, and committees must report to the plenary on all matters under consideration except private members' bills and motions. Committees meet behind closed doors and ministers do not hold seats on committees. According to Section 35 of the constitution, for each electoral term the Eduskunta appoints the Grand Committee (the European Affairs committee), the Constitutional Law Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Finance Committee, the Audit Committee and the other standing committees provided in the Eduskunta's rules of procedure.[5] Currently there are 16 committees. In line with the 'working parliament' thesis, committees are the central arena for constructive argumentation and party-political cooperation, including between government and opposition parties (Helander et al., 2007; Pekonen, 2011).

Despite its uniqueness, previous literature has paid only scant attention to the Committee for the Future. Arter (2000) provides an informative and detailed account of its formation and the 1990s when it functioned as a temporary committee. Boston (2017, pp. 401-415) meanwhile examines the CF as part of his general analysis of the 'Finnish foresight model'. The decision to establish Government Reports on the Future and the CF need to be understood in the context of the severe economic recession of the early 1990s that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Caught (unprepared) in a new situation and with the economic and political environment of Finland changing fast, there was broad support in the Eduskunta for the governmental future reports and the CF that was first appointed as a temporary committee in 1993. The first governmental future reports were considered a success, and in general there was a shared feeling among MPs that the CF was bringing a new dimension to parliamentary work. The Committee for the Future was thus turned into a permanent committee in 2000, but in many ways it was a 'shaky start' and there was opposition towards the CF throughout the 1990s. Many thought that the CF was simply unnecessary, as surely existing standing committees could exercise long-term planning as part of their standard legislative

scrutiny. Others rejected the idea of a permanent committee that had no legislative or budgetary duties. (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017, pp. 407-408.)[6] The requirement of the government to produce future reports and the subsequent formation of the CF were strongly influenced by two parliamentarians with academic backgrounds. Eero Paloheimo (Green League) and Martti Tiuri (National Coalition), both from Helsinki University of Technology, had a long-standing interest in the 'future', and they lobbied hard to build a cross-party majority of MPs behind the CF (Arter, 2000).[7]

The Committee for the Future is thus since 2000 a permanent standing committee with 17 MPs and a staff of 4 clerks. Assignments to the CF follow the same procedure as in the case of other committees. With the exception of the Grand Committee, Finance Committee, and Audit Committee, all committees of the Eduskunta have 17 members that are appointed for the four-year electoral period, and the composition of each committee reflects the relative strengths of the party groups. Within party groups MPs are asked to indicate their preferred committees, and group leaders try as far as possible to accommodate such wishes. Some committees, particularly those with broader jurisdictions, have more staff (6-10), while several committees have four clerks. Thus, although in terms of staff resources the CF is small compared to many parliamentary technology assessment (TA) units (Boston, 2017), it is on par with most standing committees of the Eduskunta. According to its website, the CF 'serves as a Think Tank for futures, science and technology policy in Finland. The counterpart cabinet member is the Prime Minister.'[8] It defines its mission as generating dialogue with the government on major future problems and opportunities. The primary task of the CF is to prepare the response of the Eduskunta to the Government's Report on the Future, which is presented once per electoral term. It also issues statements to the other committees about the national budget, the annual government report, and various 'future' matters when requested; discusses future trends and related issues; analyses research and methodology looking at future; and serves as the parliamentary body responsible for assessing technological development and its societal consequences. However, as the

CF proclaims on its website, 'the most important efforts are devoted to [the] Committee's own issues, its own projects. The power [to} decide its own agenda is one of the pillars of the strength of the Committee. 17 parliamentarians themselves stake out policy lines for the future. The time perspective is long and the scale of issues broad.' How the CF makes use of its freedom, and whether indeed it manages to 'stake out policy lines for the future', are among the questions we analyse in our empirical section.

Empirical analysis

Tasks: what does the Committee for the Future do?

The CF does not scrutinize legislative proposals and budgets. Because the work of the Eduskunta revolves around these tasks, the CF operates largely outside of the ordinary parliamentary process. While independence enhances its potential to raise future-sensitive issues, outsider status limits CF's policy impact. This tension is a key for understanding CF's unique role.

The CF's principal task is to prepare the Eduskunta's official response (the Future report, *tulevaisuusmietintö*) to Government's future report (*tulevaisuusselonteko*), which on the Eduskunta's request has been issued once per electoral term since 1993. The 'dialogue' around the reports forms the formal-institutional 'backbone' of CF's existence. (Tiihonen, 2011.) The founders of CF understood well that in order to consolidate the CF its work needed to build around an official government matter, which, on the other hand, could not threaten established institutions, especially other committees. The report mechanism (*selontekomenettely*), which had been recently introduced alongside ordinary government bills to enhance information flow between the government and the Eduskunta provided a perfect tool because despite of its official nature it was broad enough not to cause turf wars between the committees (interviews).

Government's future report is a declaration of government's will on a specific yet broad issue that has significant bearing on the future. The prime minister, along with the rest of the cabinet, sets the theme, which is usually announced in accordance with new government programme. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) directs the preparation process. (Prime Minister's Office, 2007, pp. 22-24). The dialogue between CF and PMO is ongoing, opening a possibility for the CF to influence the theme of the report, for example through its previous report that is usually issued at the very end of the electoral term. The CF tried and sometimes managed to affect government's agenda already in the 1990s (Arter, 2000) and due to the 'thickening' of the Finnish foresight network, the 'dialogue' has since deepened and now provides more opportunities for the CF to influence the report. However, the government still decides how far it is willing to follow. (Interviews) So far governments have submitted seven future reports. The reports differ significantly in terms of themes, scope and policy focus, often reflecting topical issues (Boston, 2017, p. 404). The first report (1993) dealt with Finland's changing external environment and the two reports from the 1995-1999 electoral term studied Finland's place and role in the world (Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995). Other themes include population development and work (2001), the challenges of aging population (2004), carbon neutral future (2009), sustainable growth (2013) and the future of work (2017, 2018). The reports are substantial in their scope and depth. Since 2004 their length has varied from 59 (2004) to 180 pages (2009), with the reports issued in the 2010s 70 to 90 pages long.

The government issues its report around the middle of the term. However, through 'the dialogue' the CF has learned about the report's contents and CF's own research and assessment activities that it initiates in the beginning of the term (see below) usually correspond thematically in order to 'develop capacity' for answering the government's report (Hietanen & Tiihonen, 2014). After receiving the report, the CF calls dozens of experts to weigh in on its theme. Compared to other committees, the CF clearly emphasises academic experts instead of the usual interest groups that give evidence to the

Eduskunta committees (Seo, 2017, pp. 131-132). If the report is too narrow (in relation to what was communicated with the government), the CF may expand its reply considerably and thus deal with a broader array of topics. (Interviews) The CF's reports are also extensive and detailed (Prime Minister's Office, 2007, p. 17), roughly the same length as the government's reports.

Within the formal confines of the 'dialogue', the CF's main tools for influence are resolutions (*ponsi*, *toimenpidealoite*), which it may place into its report. After the plenary has approved the CF's future report, the resolutions turn to general instructions on what the Eduskunta wants the government to focus on. The government reports to the CF in its annual reports on how it has reacted to the resolutions and the resolutions stay in force until the CF 'kills' them – also over the next elections, providing thus a tool for genuine intertemporal policy-making. (Interviews) However, due to their often abstract and general character, which lays executive responsibilities horizontally over several ministries, the execution and monitoring of the resolutions has posed problems (Prime Minister's Office, 2007, p. 46). While the generality of the resolutions may reflect political compromises, it may also result from the broadness of the future report's themes.

Overall, the future 'dialogue' has been deemed relevant, if not the easiest way to enable future-oriented interaction between government and the Eduskunta (Prime Minister's Office, 2007, p. 44). Its main problem is timing. The CF submits its future report usually at the very end of the term when the plenary is usually busy with other, often more important, issues. Hence the time allocated to debating the CF's detailed, complex and long report tends to be short. However, as was noted, the CF's report may direct the themes of the next government's future report. When this works, the 'dialogue' can produce significant policy continuity between governments. Also, the CF can interact with individual ministries by disseminating its substantial research reports (see below) to serve as background information in ministries' policy work. (Interviews)

The CF's second official task is to, when requested, issue statements (*lausunto*) regarding government bills on which another committee is preparing a report. A core task of ordinary committees, issuing statements has never been a significant task for the CF that tends to consider them a minor issue, even a time-consuming redundancy that 'merely serves the Eduskunta's formal process' (interviews). In 2000-2018 the CF issued 82 statements, averaging 4.3 per year. In 2009-2017 all committees issued, on average, 19.6 statements per year. 81 of CF's statements were responses to government annual reports (*vuosikertomus*), reports (*selonteko*), budgets and assessments (*selvitys*) – only one statement dealt with legislation. This reflects CF's weak stance in ordinary parliamentary affairs. A deeper involvement would require a more legislative orientation from the CF – something it has actively avoided. However, in late 2010s, along with the CF's administrative reform, it has tried to move closer to the Eduskunta's everyday operations. (interviews) In 2000-2009 the annual average of statements was 3.7, in 2010-2018 five. During past three years (2016-2018), under the new general secretary, the CF has produced seven statements per year.

The first CF (1993-1995) focused almost exclusively on the future report, but when CF 2 was instituted in 1996, a major emphasis was put on technology assessment (TA). In 1999 when the CF 3 was instituted, its task description expanded to also include more general 'analysis and evaluation of future development factors and models'. (Arter, 2000; Tiihonen, 2011.) Nowadays, TA and other assessment activities are usually collapsed under the heading of CF's 'own projects', research and assessment endeavours, which the CF may, in principle, freely initiate on any topic it chooses. Every new CF begins by designing a work plan of project themes and establishing sub-committees responsible for the projects. Although the agenda is affected by the government's future report, existing projects and resolutions, and likely at least in case of sensitive topics, the parliamentary parties, too, the agenda formation process is marked by extreme openness and commitment to

deliberative practices among the members. Before setting the final agenda for the electoral term, the CF hears experts and deliberates extensively, usually for over six months. When the projects begin, they utilize open seminars, workshops, expert hearings and consultations with stakeholders and wider public to scrutinize their topics. A general secretary and a permanent science advisor assist the MPs, and the CF has a small annual research budget (around 70 000 euros). 'Own projects' give the CF a possibility to take a more proactive stance on future politics (interviews).

In 2000-2018 the CF produced 76 publications on 'remarkable range of topics' (Boston, 2017, p. 410), from gene- and nanotechnology to ICT ethics and municipal democracy[9]. 60 per cent of the reports were extensive and thorough, over 50 pages long – 36 per cent well over 100 pages long. The longer reports, often commissioned from external experts, are published as books and are often praised for their quality. For example, OECD considered CF's recent work on radical technologies as one of the best technology foresight reports in the world (Committee for the Future, 2018). The amount of projects and reports has increased considerably: in the 1990s the CF produced only few publications, in 2000-2004 its output increased to 10 publications (two per year and around 60 pages per report), in 2005-2009 to 3.8 per year (average length 90 pages), and in 2010-2014 to 7.6 per year (105 pages on average). In 2015-2018 the annual average amount decreased (to 4,25), but the average length increased to 135 pages. As CF's own resources have not changed, the increase is likely explained by external help, which the CF acquires increasingly through its networks and 'crowdsourcing' initiatives, as Boston (2017) and interviews suggest.

While the 'future dialogue' continues to form the CF's formal-institutional backbone, 'own projects' have developed into CF's main task (Boston, 2017; Committee for the Future, 2018; interviews). According to one interviewee, this relates to the projects' proactive nature, which provides counterbalance to the Eduskunta's work that is mostly reactive. However, many noted that the reports

rarely receive much attention in the Eduskunta, because few have time to assess the detailed works and they are difficult to connect to other parliamentary matters. While the CF wishes to gain public visibility for its work via media, the typically long, detailed and general nature of the reports creates obstacles (interviews).

Practices: how does the CF operate?

As standing committees' formal rules mostly relate to legislation, the CF can largely create its own working practices, which are rather unique, too. First, unlike ordinary committees, which are known for their exclusive and even secretive nature, the CF emphasises openness and inclusiveness. Members' can freely choose their projects, and open seminars, workshops and online discussions are used to add depth to the preparation processes (Tiihonen, 2011, pp. 5-6, 16, interviews). The Committee is also an avid international networker. In 2010-2017 (excluding 2013) it took 39 international trips, one in every two months on average. This 'smartening up process' is a fundamental feature of the CF's 'journey', and 'crowdsourcing' adds a democratic element to the process and also provides resources. (Interviews) For example, in 2013 the CF utilized an online platform to gain citizen input regarding off-road traffic law (Aitamurto & Landemore, 2013). Later, it mixed online participation with expert hearings and thematic studies to produce a report on the future of welfare state (Seo, 2017). While we found no significant increase in events (2003-2018) and seminars (2010-2017), the Internet provided an entirely new frontier for the CF (interview). According to annual reports from 2010-2014, the CF put great effort in social media-based engagement and transparency initiatives (especially on Facebook and YouTube). According to the 2014 report no other committee in the Eduskunta has engaged with citizens in similar fashion. However, its extravagant initiatives have also attracted ridicule and the initiatives have not been considered suitable for ordinary committees (interviews).

Another distinct characteristic of the CF is its commitment to non-partisan, deliberative style of discussion, which it coined already in the 1990s, despite facing ideologically sensitive topics like globalization (Arter, 2000). The interviewees raised several reasons for the peculiar style. First, the CF produces reports, assessments and scenarios on broad themes, not specific and binding laws. Second, instead of proceeding through confrontation, the CF aims at analysis, which is, naturally, influenced by the different worldviews of the CF members but still distant from 'petty party politicking'. And third, on average the CF attracts MPs that are more interested in analysing broad topics than engaging with 'petty party politics'. The combined result of these factors is that the CF operates more like an academic seminar than a parliamentary committee. In addition to expert hearings, which are conducted in more scientific style compared to ordinary committees' hearings (Arter, 2000, pp. 151, 157), the CF has made explicit use of futures research methods like scenario building (Tiihonen, 2011).

Finally, CF's work is characterized by slowness and liberal attitude towards schedules, as it does not need to follow the hectic pace of legislative process and its 'products', reports and assessments, reach far beyond single electoral terms. Parliamentary 'think tank's' work speed is considered as a luxury, as it allows leisurely deliberation. 'It is an antithesis to Twitter politics'. (Interviews)

Internal institutionalization: distinct organisational culture and identity

Can the CF be regarded as an internally institutionalized parliamentary committee, i.e. has it developed an 'established way of doing things' that is not reliant on particular individuals? Already in the 1990s the CF got engaged with the future 'dialogue', 'own projects' and 'scientific', non-partisan, open and democratic working practices (Arter 2000). In her longitudinal assessment former general secretary Paula Tiihonen (2011) highlighted same characteristics and suggested that the CF has developed an identity that provides continuity. We concur: the CF has consolidated a clear set of

tasks and practices that are rigid enough to be regarded as institution-like. From two future-oriented professor MPs' wild dream, it has developed into a full-fledged 'parliamentary think tank'. Its organizational culture and identity build on its political objective, which is to observe societal and technological trends that ordinary committees cannot detect. The operating practices which support the task – openness, science driven non-partisan deliberation, slowness, etc. – have consolidated and are defended headstrong if challenged.

According to Tiihonen (2011, p. 14) CF's most significant internal threat is that MPs become so unsatisfied with its influence or the quality of its work that they do not want to participate anymore. Although the parties can and frequently do appoint members that do not wish to participate, a committee's survival depends, in part, of the establishment of distinguishable system of expectations, which MPs use in assessing the reasonableness of their membership. Earlier research found that the members of the CF were generally well aware of the limited legislative impact of the CF and its low status in committee hierarchy. Yet, they were satisfied with its performance, especially because the CF has been a good place to learn and raise awareness about broad long-term issues and to discuss about them openly. (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017) Our interviewees also clearly recognized that the CF is not a place for political influence, in traditional sense. The main reasons for joining CF relate to the way it works. Its open, slow and broadly themed working process allows learning about the future in a relaxed atmosphere, which is not tainted by 'petty party politics'. The CF has developed a distinguishable and respected system of expectations, too.

External institutionalization: broader support, posing no threat

What about external institutionalization, has the CF consolidated a sense of relevance and legitimacy among relevant external stakeholders? Initially, the CF raised serious doubts in the Eduskunta for its loose tasks and practices, and minor role in legislation (Arter, 2000, pp. 152, 158). On the other hand,

the desire for parliamentary long-term assessment was so strong among MPs that the CF was formally established and consolidated even against the wishes of the powerful Constitutional Law Committee. (Tiihonen, 2011.) While the CF is well acknowledged for bringing positive international reputation for the Eduskunta (Vainio, 2007, p. 259; Tiihonen, 2011; Committee for the Future, 2018), its value and status inside the Eduskunta has remained unclear.

Our interviews clearly indicate that the CF has now consolidated its position within the Eduskunta. However, its status relates to a bundle of factors that are less functional than institutionalization theory suggests. The CF has always enjoyed support among MPs and while it could be abolished simply by changing the Eduskunta's standing orders, such motivation does not exist. While CF's operation style might still raise eyebrows, the importance of its topic, the future, is widely recognized, and even if one does not recognize it, one cannot say it publicly. As the CF does not pose a threat to MPs, parties or other committees, no one is incentivized to push for its dismissal while a significant share of MPs is always eager to take part in its work. The 'old school' for whom the CF seemed odd is now being replaced by younger MPs and clerks for whom the CF makes more sense, because future sensitivity and openness in decision-making have become respected goals. The CF's positive symbolic status that builds on its international recognition enhances its position within the Eduskunta. While the CF's often detached input and approach are still not fully tolerated, even those who criticize it have gotten used to its presence.

Another important external network for the CF is the government and especially the PMO, its correspondent ministry, to which the CF was 'tangled in many ways' already in the 1990s (Arter, 2000, pp. 160-162). PMO's evaluation report from 2007 saw the 'dialogue' as appropriate and worth continuing and strengthening, and the interviewed MPs and civil servants considered that it had provided a good frame for Finland's future politics and also consolidated CF's position (Prime

Minister's Office, 2007). Our interviews also suggest that the CF has institutionalized in the eyes of PMO and other ministries, too, and due to the re-organization of the national foresight system and the emergence of a network-based operating procedure the bond has deepened in the 2010s. In 2017, the CF's official duties strengthened considerably when it was made the official correspondent committee for the government's Agenda 2030 report (sustainable development). While some have suggested that the 'dialogue' is too slow and should be replaced with a more 'agile' form of interaction, only the Eduskunta can remove government's obligation to produce the future report.

Influencing Finnish politics?

CF's impact on Finnish politics has always raised doubts (Boston, 2017). In the 1990s few believed that the CF had much direct influence on the Eduskunta (Arter, 2000) and our analysis suggest that this continues to be the case: the CF is still too detached from ordinary work of the Eduskunta. In the late 2010s the CF tightened its connection with the Eduskunta by engaging more deeply with committee statements. While this might enhance its legislative influence, it might also jeopardize its unique role. As many of the interviewees pointed out, the CF was never meant to be an ordinary legislative committee, it was specifically designed to detect and raise awareness of wider societal trends.

Mostly, the CF's impact is indirect. For its members, the 'journey' is a 'learning process', which can influence legislation through MPs' other committee and group assignments. For example, an MP that learns about environmental crisis in CF can bring his knowledge to the Finance Committee. Earlier research suggests that the CF has also occasionally succeeded in affecting government programmes (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017). Our interviews reveal a similar belief. Interviewees named reports – on social welfare reform, digitalization of education and population development – whose notions have later emerged in government programmes. Also, through the 'dialogue' the CF is well connected to

ministries where its reports and resolutions probably enjoy a larger readership than in the Eduskunta. According to one interviewee, CF's work is well known in 'ministries and ministerial cadres' and this is more important than wider or more public recognition, as policies are prepared in ministries. But while CF's publications can increase awareness among political elites and wider public, the interviewees noted that sometimes even very good reports have no effect at all, or the effect might emerge only several years later. Politics intervenes the processes.

Here, CF members' status within their parties is a very important factor. If a CF member becomes a cabinet minister, like Juha Sipilä (CF member in 2011-2014) who was selected to chair the Centre Party in 2012 and became the prime minister in 2015, policy linkage may be significant. As a premier, Sipilä ignited policies on the themes he worked in the CF. Overall, the idea of 'raising future leaders' was a significant factor when interviewees assessed CF's influence. Four out of six prime ministers appointed since 2000 were former CF members. Jyrki Katainen, who chaired the CF in 2003-2007, even after becoming a party leader in 2004, and served as the prime minister in 2011-2014 noted in the CF's 25th anniversary ball that, '[T]wo electoral terms in the Committee for the Future left a powerful mark on me. It affected my way of viewing societal challenges. It taught about future phenomena and significantly affected my political priorities in my subsequent tasks' (Committee for the Future, 2018, p. 20). An interviewee confirms this. Katainen's cabinet included two other MPs that served in the CF at the same time.

Concluding reflections

Future sensitive policy-making has become a hot topic as our awareness of societal 'megatrends' like climate change, globalization, and migration has increased. How to overcome political myopia and design institutions facilitating far-sighted politics are questions that are receiving much more attention than before (e.g. Boston, 2017; Caney, 2016; González-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016; Hovi et al., 2009;

Jacobs, 2016). The Finnish national foresight model has often been considered as a forerunner, especially because of the Committee for the Future, Europe's only permanent parliamentary standing committee dedicated for future matters.

In this paper we analysed whether the CF, an 'odd bird' that emerged in early 1990s with its peculiar tasks and practices that defy ordinary parliamentary work, has institutionalized internally and externally. We found that it has established and consolidated a distinct set of tasks, practices and rewards for its members, and while some of its antics still raise eyebrows, its existence is not questioned. But perhaps a more important question is whether the CF has indeed managed to extend the time span of Finnish politics? The influence of CF is difficult to measure, but our analysis indicates that its impact is largely indirect, i.e. it is dependent on whether individual MPs, external stakeholders, or particularly the government adopt insights from its deliberations and outputs. Aside its resolutions, which at best work as general guidelines, the CF does not produce any binding decisions or laws. While Caney (2016) has correctly argued that the mere existence of a parliamentary 'think tank' can 'nudge' decision-makers towards forward-oriented thinking, it cannot really curb the root cause of political myopia – sectional interest representation under short electoral intervals (Jacobs, 2016). If a government decides to neglect its advice and instead pursue policy that suits its supporters, it can do so, legitimately. Considering this, the CF can also be seen as a 'harmless sideshow' detached from the usual parliamentary business. It poses no threat to anyone, and this contributes to its longevity.

What lessons can we draw from the Finnish experience? To conclude this paper, we discuss briefly different ways of facilitating more future-oriented parliamentary decision-making (for more detailed elaborations, see Boston et al., 2019; Caney, 2016). Each of the following proposals is based on the

premise that MPs themselves carry out the deliberations instead of delegating them to the government or external stakeholders.

1) Adopting the Finnish model. As our analysis has shown, a specific 'future committee' can become institutionalized, but the challenge is how to connect it more directly to parliamentary work. One option is that the future committee would routinely produce statements on government bills, evaluating them in terms of long-term consequences (Caney, 2016, p. 136). Yet this would simultaneously make the future committee more like a normal legislative committee, something that the Finnish CF has deliberately tried to avoid.
2) 'Future' as part of standard legislative scrutiny. Regardless of whether a specific future committee exists or not, the parliament could demand that each government draft bill would also include an assessment of its potential long-term effects. This would make forward-oriented thinking a routine part of the legislative process (Boston et al., 2019, p. 147). The danger is that both the government and the MPs might nonetheless focus on the short-term effects of laws, paying much less attention to the 'future' part of the bills.
3) Identification of future issues by the whole parliament or by individual committees. At the start of the electoral term or the annual parliamentary session, the plenary could adopt a short list of 'future' topics for closer inspection. The parliament could then appoint working groups consisting of both MPs and external experts that would produce a report for the plenary. Alternatively, this could happen at the level of the committees, with each committee identifying select topics that would be scrutinized in terms of their long-term consequences. It is obviously difficult to predict how motivated MPs would be to invest their time into such work. Another possibility is thus that the government would be obliged to produce such reports, with the legislature then obliged to debate and approve them.
4) Organising a special 'future week'. In this scenario, the parliament, perhaps together with select external stakeholders, would hold a public session where MPs could debate various

future-oriented issues. The event would be broadcast live, thus providing an incentive for the MPs to take it seriously. Specific oral question times dedicated to individual long-term governance issues would be another altarnetive. Yet the same motivation problem as in the previous option above would probably apply.

It is perfectly understandable that MPs focus on issues that have tangible legislative or budgetary consequences. The Finnish Committee for the Future certainly deserves credit for trying to reduce political myopia. The absence of similar bodies in other legislatures suggests that introducing a long-term perspective to parliamentary work is not easy.

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[1] The closest is the Scotland Futures Forum, the futures think-tank of the Scottish Parliament. Established in 2005 and bringing together both MPs and external experts, it works on a non-party basis, with the aim of looking 'beyond the electoral cycle to stimulate debate on the long-term challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces.' The Scotland Futures Forum was very much inspired by the Committee for the Future of the Eduskunta (Groombridge, 2006; Boston et al., 2019, pp. 121-125). For more information, see http://scotlandfutureforum.org/. The German Bundestag has since 2004 appointed a Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development, which has 17 members from the parliamentary groups. (Boston et al., 2019, pp. 216-219).

2 We are grateful to Johannes Ahvo from Tampere University for his excellent research assistance. Full list of analysed documents are available from the authors. Due to mutual agreement, the interviewees' names are not disclosed in this paper.

[3] As institutional theory has become the main approach to study organisations, there is a vast literature studying in some way the 'institutionalization' of various political institutions and movements. Hence the literature we cite are only examples of a much wider range of research.

[4] For a critique of how institutionalization has been applied in research on legislatures, see Judge (2003; 2008).

[5] The Constitution of Finland, 11 June 1999, 731/1999, available at https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf.

[6] In fact, in December 1999 the Constitutional Law Committee voted 13-4 against giving the CF permanent status. In the final plenary vote the permanent status of the CF was approved with 96 votes to 73. (Arter, 2000, p. 153)

[7] Paloheimo was the first chair of the temporary committee upon its establishment in 1993 while Tiuri chaired the CF from 1996 to 2003. According to Tiuri particularly MPs with background in law were initially against the CF, as they saw that the Eduskunta should deal only with law-making. Paloheimo and Tiuri disagreed about the direction of the CF's work: the former emphasized environmental issues while Tiuri prioritized technological development. (Kunttu, 2007, pp. 352-355).

[8] https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/lakiensaataminen/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/default.aspx.

[9] CF's publications can be found from: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/naineduskuntatoimii/julkaisut/Sivut/Tulevaisuusvaliokunnan-julkaisuja.aspx