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Tuomas Tervasmäki

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Anticipatory policy rhetoric: exploring ideological fantasies of Finnish higher education

Tuomas Tervasmäki

Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

ABSTRACT

This research explores how anticipatory policymaking played out in Finnish higher education reform. The study applies a discourse theoretic framework to explore how policy narrative might prove attractive to subjects by mobilizing ideas, norms, and fantasies through affective identification. Fantasies frame and stabilize our sense-making practices, thereby providing affective belonging and (ir)rationale for our actions. As an empirical case, the analysis of the Vision Development 2030 reform elucidates how the policy documents construct fantasmatic narratives (with reference to obstacles, threats, and plenitude to come) that set the terms of debate in articulating the 'problem' of Finnish HE and in supplying the favorable policy solutions. Scrutinizing a range of ideological fantasies, such as articulating gloomy forecasts and reactivating cognitive and affective memories of past successes, Vision Development sought to evoke subjects' latent emotions and desires, mobilizing them toward a reproduction of the techno-managerialist order. Applying poststructuralist discourse theory and the concept of fantasy in policy studies, the role of desire and affective rhetoric in anticipatory future-making can be critically evaluated and the implications of such policy doctrines contemplated.

Introduction

In policy-making, a range of various future scenarios and visions are regularly produced and used as legitimation. These accounts tend to articulate a horizon of expectations based on hypothetical options possibly including calculating risks, forecasting, and narrating alternative futures (Anderson 2010; Beckert 2016). Aspirations toward planning futures have been called anticipation (Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009), anticipatory action (Anderson 2010) or anticipatory governance (Robertson 2022). For Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009, 248) such attempts belong to regimes of anticipation that 'interpellate, situate, attract and mobilize subjects individually *and* collectively'. Hence, to be successful, political visions must have something appealing, something fantasmatic (Glynos 2011) that tickles citizens' affective register. In other words, anticipatory action

seeks to monopolize subjects' desire and usher one into identification with the anticipatory narrative (Glynos 2001; Stavrakakis 2007).

Education, though often overlooked, has always been important in future linked pursuits such as social and technological reforms (Rahm 2021; Robertson 2005, 2022). Through education people are governed toward desired futures (Rahm 2021). Despite seemingly vast possibilities of a contingent future, certain discourses and ideas have retained a grip on education policies – they have been sticky (Ahmed 2004; Lähdesmäki, Koistinen, and Ylönen 2020). Since the late 1990s, European anticipatory political futures have mainly relied on the sociotechnical imaginaries of *knowledge-based economy* (KBE) (Kallo 2009; Robertson 2005; Shore and Wright 2017). Briefly, this means that success in global competition entails that nation states striving for more highly skilled workforce and innovation capability, especially in technological development (Sum and Jessop 2013). This emphasized the role of education and institutes of higher education as the key drivers of national competitiveness and economic growth (Hunter 2013; Shore and Wright 2017).

Interestingly, criticism of the theoretical problems of the KBE model (e.g. Lauder et al. 2012) or the economic and ecological crises questioning the bases of growth-based regimes have not affected KBE's popularity in policy-making (Robertson 2022; Shore and Wright 2017). Instead, crises may even strengthen prevalent ideologies by offering stabilization through renewal (Bloom 2016). How to comprehend this apparently paradoxical phenomenon? How to approach the appeal and longevity of capitalist order, or in this case, the force of knowledge-based economy in the reproduction of education policy?

In this article, I explore how anticipation works in governing higher education futures. I follow political theorists who approached the inertia of social and political phenomena and stressed analysis of affects in politics (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Laclau 2005; Stavrakakis 2007). Accordingly, I apply the framework of poststructuralist discourse theory and the critical fantasy studies perspective (e.g. Glynos 2021), whereby the construction of effective economic and nationalistic narratives necessitates fantasy frames (Glynos 2011; Stavrakakis 1999) that arouse emotions, mobilize individual and collective passions, and demand action. Ideological fantasies are narratives that frame and stabilize our sense-making practices, thereby imbuing our actions with affective belonging and (ir) rationale. Critical fantasy studies aim at understanding how certain ideas, norms, and fantasies possess us through affective investments.

This framework is utilized in an empirical case study of anticipatory policy rhetoric. I will scrutinize the Finnish higher education policy reform of the center-rightwing Sipilä Government, 'Vision development 2030 – Higher education and research towards 2030', of 2017–2019. The study analyses policy documents and discourse to elucidate the role of desire and ideological fantasies in the construction of higher education policy. The questions informing my analysis are: *What kinds of ideological fantasies were constructed during the policy-making of Vision Development? How did the depicted fantasies aim to engage with subjects' desire? What role do fantasies play in Vision Development?*

What makes this case interesting is the concurrent rhetoric of austerity-ridden politics and anticipatory ideological fantasy: major cuts in the higher education sector were demanded alongside beatific illustrations of increased resources for higher education and harmonious working life in its institutions. Thus, the political rhetoric of double binding – semiotic and affective play of crisis and salvation, austerity and prosperity,

horrific and beatific fantasy – is apparent. As such, Sipilä Government's Vision Development provides intriguing case study of a collective imaginary of the educational future.

The study contributes specifically to the research on anticipatory policy-making and higher education studies. Applying discourse theory and the concept of fantasy in policy studies, the role of desire and affective rhetoric in anticipatory future-making can be scrutinized, likewise the implications of such policy doctrines. As the Vision Development 2030 case study shows, selective use of context-specific historical narratives, such as the Nokia corporation's success, can become a major reference in emotional persuasion to reproduce knowledge-based economy ideals in higher education. Additionally, the research adds to the methodological development of critical fantasy studies (Glynos 2021) in empirical policy analysis (Bloom 2016; Clarke 2020; Remling 2023).

The rest of the research is structured as follows. First, I present the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. Secondly, I briefly introduce the context of Finnish higher education policy and the empirical data of this study. Thirdly, I present analysis of higher education vision documents. I will provide a close reading of two main fantasies explicating the main characteristics, ideological operation, and fantasmatic dimensions of these documents. After results come concluding remarks.

Anticipation in education policy futures

Sociologists have stressed the role of future imaginaries and the governing of expectations in the reproduction and enhancement of the capitalist economic order (Beckert 2016; Robertson 2022). For Anderson, 'the key political question is around how the experience of the presence of certain futures is used to demand, justify and legitimate certain forms of action to secure life (including inaction)' (Anderson 2010, 787). Policy studies have emphasized policy-makers' and policies tendency to construct problems and propose solutions to them (e.g. Bacchi 2012; Nokkala 2016). Moreover, education reform policies frequently tend to refer to the *crisis* of education as a point of intervention and offer means for salvation (Clarke 2019; Clarke and Newman 2010). For example, the results of international assessments like PISA may be perceived as 'shocks' requiring reforms if a national education system performs comparatively worse than expected (Sellar 2015). Within anticipatory action problematization works by making specific future-related problems known, governable and by distinguishing between desirable and undesirable imaginaries (Berten and Kranke 2022). These aspects call attention to how diverse articulations of the crisis and future are constructed and pursued (Beckert and Bronk 2018; Clarke 2019; Clarke and Newman 2010).

In the political economy of higher education, the knowledge-based economy (KBE) paradigm has become a pervasive regime of practices in restructuring national states' politics, formulating policy objectives, and relations between various actors (Robertson 2005; Sum and Jessop 2013). As a socio-political discourse, KBE promotes a fantasy that comprehends education in economic terms, evaluating the economic efficiency and competitiveness of education 'industry' (Sum and Jessop 2013). Universities are comprehended as market actors that must of necessity be managed as enterprises and reorient their activities according to the needs of markets. This shift from public good knowledge

regime to private commodities and competition has been theorized as academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Global policy actors such as international organizations like the OECD and European Union have assiduously promoted knowledge economy in the creation of future imaginaries of education (Amsler and Facer 2017; Hunter 2013; Robertson 2022). By using anticipatory articulation and producing supportive data, they aim to influence and coordinate the future-making of education policies transnationally and nationally (Robertson 2022).

As several theorists have noted, the construction of desiring and unsatiable subject is essential for the ethos or spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2017; Stavrakakis 2007). Capitalist markets urge subjects to improve their material and social conditions, feeding the loop of accumulation (Glynos 2012; McGowan 2016). Accordingly, the desiring subject is also essential to creating higher education markets and extending academic capitalism. However, research on the governance of futures or the political economy of higher education rarely focuses on affective qualities. While policy scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the affective elements of policies and how they move us (Zembylas 2022; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020; Sellar and Zipin 2019[1]), the role of desire and the inertia of social order have received less attention in policy studies (however Clarke 2019; Remling 2023; Saari 2022). Analyzing the construction of fantasmatic anticipatory futures, notably the structure of desire and enjoyment (Glynos 2011), we can access the political tactics of persuasion seeking legitimacy for its proposals and steer human activity in particular normative directions instead of others.

Mobilization of desire and critical fantasy studies

Critical fantasy studies, as Jason Glynos (2021) has recently called this approach, has its roots in poststructuralist discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001; Laclau 1990; Glynos and Howarth 2007), which combines the poststructuralist framework with psychoanalytic political theory. In discourse theory, the social reality and our symbolic structures of meaning, discourses, are understood as ontologically contingent and as constitutively lacking because we cannot fully define and capture the complexity of existence through language (Laclau 1990). This means that our attempts to comprehend the world through socio-symbolic articulations are always partial and incomplete, unable to totalize a meaning. The radically contingent character of the social also treats subjects as inevitably lacking, unable to constitute a complete identity. This state of incompleteness threatens identities and provokes anxiety, although it is also a productive element. The lack drives subjects to new processes of identification; that is to say, it fuels their desire to seek to cover the void and establish partial foundations for their being in the world (Laclau 1990; Stavrakakis 1999).

Fantasies, for their part, provide 'anchoring points' (Remling 2023) for identification, they aim at promising imaginary wholeness and affective belonging (Glynos 2011). Moreover, in Lacanian infused political theory, the concept of fantasy functions as 'the object cause of one's desire' (Sharpe and Turner 2020, 190) – that is to say it links the subject's inner feelings of joy and anxiety to outer objects (Behagel and Mert 2021). If a subject welcomes the lure of fantasy, they establish identification with the discourse's fantasmatic narratives and central signifiers and the discourse engulfs them (Glynos 2001; Žižek[1989] 2008). In this framework, socio-symbolic dimension and affective

dimension are seen as mutually engaged and co-constitutive (Stavrakakis 2007). This means that in social and political practices emotions and passions always get 'caught up in a network of words and signifiers' (Glynos 2012) thus signifying operations always contain affective force (Laclau 2005). Sedimentation of meanings creates continuity in time, certain ideological 'stickiness', that affects individual and collective perceptions of these concepts and objects attributed to them (Ahmed 2004; Stavrakakis 2007).

The stickiness of ideological formations and phenomena of inertia and change of the social (Glynos 2011; Žižek[1989] 2008), like domination of knowledge-based economy in higher education policies, can be comprehended through the examination of socio-political practices and the fantasies they articulate. Fantasies are narratives that frame and stabilize our sense of reality (Stavrakakis 1999) and provide affective belonging and (ir)rationale for our actions. Thus, they contain normative accentuation and are unavoidably political. However, fantasies are essential to all action (Glynos 2011; Žižek[1989] 2008). Fantasy structures the subject's desire through a dialectic of plenitude and lack (Glynos 2011; Stavrakakis 1999). It depicts a *beatific fantasy*, a promissory and harmonious ideal to fill the void in the subject, but this promise is conditional – simultaneously a *horrific fantasy*, an impediment to the realization of this ideal, comes on stage (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Stavrakakis 1999). In turn, fantasies function as a protection mechanism from anxiety: fantasy transforms the ontological lack in the subject into 'an empirical lack [...] of particular "objects", whose recapturing promises the restoration of an imaginary full identity' (Eberle 2019, 246).

The more a subject becomes invested in fantasy, the more their views and understandings of life experiences are shaped in accordance with the fantasmatic imaginary (Glynos 2011). In other words, the stronger the grip of ideology, the greater the subject's compliance with and belief in the symbolic authority of the discourse (Glynos 2001; Stavrakakis 2007). Ideological formations tend toward closure and to conceal their contingent conditions of possibility by excluding alternative interpretations and perspectives (Laclau 1990). Furthermore, this act of concealment of discourse's own contingency has been called the central source of strength of fantasies (Sharpe and Turner 2020; Žižek [1989] 2008). The suppression of alternatives may result in dogmatic thinking and subjection to authoritarian rule, both of which restrict critical distance and thinking of alternative possibilities. The problem then is more the depth of one's mode of engagement in fantasy, an 'overinvestment', than its symbolic content (Glynos 2011, 2021).

Application of fantasy in policy analysis

In policy studies utilizing the concept of fantasy has involved the characterization of policy fantasies in topics of international politics (Eberle 2019), education (Clarke 2020), environmental adaption (Remling 2023) or as a part of the analysis of the logics approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007; e.g. Remling 2018; Tiina and Tuomas 2022). Drawing on this body of research, I aim to further explore how to apply the concept of fantasy in document analysis and policy studies.

Jason Glynos (2011) has distinguished three core elements of fantasy: a) narrative structure, b) foundation of guarantee, and c) transgressive aspect vis-à-vis officially affirmed ideals. *Narrative structure* provides an ideal for the subject and refers to the socio-symbolic content of particular fantasies, including the signifiers, norms, and values

it stresses. Typically, fantasmatic narratives take the form of beatific/horrific fantasies and binary oppositions such as 'rules and regulations versus goals and mission' (Clarke 2019, 66). Moreover, the narrative structure of fantasy aims to simplify the social world into manageable, offer protection from anxiety and provide ontological security, in other words the *foundation of guarantee*. In politics, the official language may be excessively 'benign' or 'dry' to arouse desire (Eberle 2019). The *transgressive aspect* aims at strengthening the appeal of fantasy. It promises boundless enjoyment through transgressing socially affirmed norms and ideals, which are prohibitions to enjoyment (Žižek 1997). Transgressive tropes – fantasy's 'obscene supplement' (Žižek 1997, chapter 1) – like articulations about immigrants 'who steal our jobs/welfare benefits/women and ruin our way of life' can escalate desire – resentment, anger, pleasure, and the feeling of 'theft of enjoyment' – and help to forge collective identifications (Eberle 2019; Glynos 2011). Such openly racist expressions in tabloid newspapers and social media can gain indirect support for technocratic anti-immigration policies (Eberle 2019). These three elements seek to attract the subject's desire, promise enjoyment, and make the logic of fantasy affectively compelling. They comprise the *logic* of fantasy that aims at structuring the subject's desire.

By applying these concepts, I explore the *structure of desire and enjoyment* (Glynos 2011) and its operation in Vision Development policy documents. Transgressive elements may be rare in official policy documents, but explicable in the public discourse of higher education as I will argue below. In the construction of national politics, the role of culturally and emotionally loaded signifiers, such as symbols, concepts, presumptions, myths, and stories, is vital (Ahmed 2004; Stavrakakis 2007, 204–205). This research aims to elucidate how fantasies work in anticipatory policy and show the interplay between broader cultural narratives and policy level discourse.

Setting the scene: context of Finnish higher education policy

To analyze national policy-making and the fantasmatic dimension of the culturopolitical narratives used, one must consider particular socio-historical settings since social relations and their conditions of possibilities are inevitably structured within these (Kauko 2013; Stavrakakis 2007). The recent changes in Finnish higher education policy have been copiously scrutinized and documented (e.g. Kallio, Kallio, and Blomberg 2020; Kuusela et al. 2021; Poutanen et al. 2022; Välimaa 2011). Instead of repeating these accounts, I summarize the main trends and discourses of Finnish higher education.

Finland was a latecomer to international trends, but 'modernization' reforms have been extensive thereafter (Välimaa 2011). During the 2000s projections or anticipations of the future have become a major interest in Nordic education policies (Hansen, Sivesind, and Thostrup 2021). In Finnish higher education policies, these anticipations have followed the macropolitical discourses of knowledge economy, global competition, and entrepreneurial university promoted by intergovernmental organizations such as the OECD (Kallo 2009; Terhi 2016). Consequently, ideas of economic growth, wellbeing, and the competitiveness of the state have merged and this 'triangle' has become hegemonic discourse in higher education policy (Kallio, Kallio, and Blomberg 2020; Poutanen 2022). In university governance, these ideas have been operationalized via social practices of new public management: top-down

leadership models, performance management, and market logic have been introduced at the expense of the autonomy of academic communities (Kallio, Kallio, and Blomberg 2020; Kuusela et al. 2021; Välimaa 2011).

While Finnish higher education policy has followed the policy trends of KBE, the national and local institutional policy translations and receptions of these ideas (Kauko 2013; Simola et al. 2017) have two specific characteristics influencing policy construction. Firstly, investing in information and communication technology research and education alongside the development of technological innovations became prominent in Finnish higher education and science policy at the beginning of the 1980s (Lemola 2020). Finland has gained a glorious international reputation for educational excellence and high-tech ICT-technology industries, mainly due to the 'PISA miracle' of 2002 (Simola et al. 2017) and the 'NOKIA miracle', the success of NOKIA corporation, which in 2000 accounted for 4% of Finland's GDP. Nokia's success seemed to create a conviction of a thriving national innovation system (Kauko 2013; Lemola 2020) and R&D investments peaked at 3.8% of GDP in 2010. Hence, Nokia's downfall in 2008–2014 hit the Finnish economy hard, causing significant reductions in the ICT sector and R&D investments. In the media discourse, 'Nokia's fall from grace was comparable [. . .] with Finland's fall from grace' (Poutanen 2018, 342). However, the necessity of technological development persisted despite Nokia's downfall and the corporation retains wide symbolic influence (Lemola 2020; Poutanen 2018).

The second context-specific element is a distinctive model of university democracy: Finnish higher education had a long tradition of tripartite democratic representation of the professors, the rest of faculty staff and the students in the universities' decision-making (Kuusela et al. 2021; Poutanen et al. 2022). In the 1990s and early 2000s demands to modernize and reinforce 'strategic leadership' within universities united policy officials, many university administrative leaders and business interest groups, which then joined forces to prepare legislative changes (Poutanen et al. 2022). Accordingly, the Universities Act of 2009 strengthened professional leadership in academia (the role of rector and university board) and curtailed the university community's participation and influence in decision-making (Välimaa 2011). Academics and students deplored this as it has distanced the academic community from university governance, undermined self-ruling practices and increased 'ill-being' at work (Kallio, Kallio, and Blomberg 2020; MEC 2016). This process of de-democratization of university decision-making has been called a shift from autonomy as self-rule of the academic community to *autonomy as the autonomy of university leadership from the academic community* (Kuusela et al. 2021; Poutanen et al. 2022).

This was the higher education scene in which the center-rightwing Sipilä government (2015–2019) took office. The Sipilä government sought to diminish the role of public authorities and introduce pro-market reforms by reducing norms, i.e. by cutting restrictive legislation (Leino and Åkerman 2022). In his speech at the opening ceremony of the academic year 2015–16 at the University of Helsinki Prime Minister Sipilä (2015) claimed that:

> [t]he only way to save Finnish welfare society is to cut expenses, implement structural reforms, and improve competitiveness and other prerequisites for growth. [. . .] In future, we must be able to do more and better with fewer resources. It is often possible to achieve

greater effectiveness with less money. I know from my own experience that scarcity may also bring about creativity. It is, to a great extent, a question of attitude.

These figures emphasize a fantasy of economic austerity. In higher education, these visions materialized as major budget cuts, leading to redundancies at the University of Helsinki, for example, and norm-axing meant renouncing the long-term development plan for education and research, reducing the sizes of committees planning and coordinating research and innovation policy (Tervasmäki and Tomperi 2018). Yet, political demands for competitiveness are often coupled with futurism: these 'painful but responsible' decisions on downsizing and structural reforms claimed to safeguard the future of the welfare state (Poutanen 2018, 331). Moreover, in 2018 the Sipilä government proclaimed their mission by stating that 'in order to secure the knowledge [level of society] the government is reforming the whole education sector' (MEC 2018). However, it turned out that mere attitude would not suffice to achieve greater competitiveness in universities; since a year earlier, the government had started a vision development desiring an extensive investment leap in R&D funding and would outline the aims for higher education and science policy until 2030 (MEC 2017b).

Vision Development 2030 policy documents

The primary research data of this study comprise two main documents published during the Vision Development process 02/2017–01/2019. The process was led by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) in collaboration with university communities, labor market associations, and industry stakeholders. It included seminars, workshops, and engaging policy building through online platforms, thereby aiming interpellating policy officials, politicians, stakeholders but also academics.

The first vision document (MEC 2017a) was published in October 2017 named 'a memorandum' providing a rationale for the whole vision development. The final report of vision development and the outcome of the process, called 'a roadmap' for higher education and science (MEC 2019) was published in January 2019. The roadmap states main five development themes and their practical objectives to be achieved by 2030. As a secondary source, I scrutinize the OECD's policy evaluation of the Finnish innovation system (OECD 2017) commissioned by MEC at the beginning of Vision Development.

Development of the higher education vision 2017–2019

The 2017 memorandum's narrative structure provides situation analysis problematizing the current state of the Finnish higher education system, beginning by listing the strengths of the Finnish education system: it successfully combines high level knowledge, equality, and effectiveness, citizens have high trust in HEIs and 'Finland has been one of the winners of Globalisation'[2] (p. 5). This statement already sets the stage for crisis; to be a *failure* of Globalisation.

Accordingly, the aforementioned beatific forms of higher education are imperiled, if 'we don't utilize and anticipatorily develop our resources and demand effective results of ourselves', and therefore 'the desire to revive and to reform is the essential baseline of this proposal for Finland' (MEC 2017a, 5). The policy goes on to describe the 'changing

operational environment' and main drivers of change in an anticipatory manner. The context of higher education is perceived as continuously unsettled: digitalization has started the 'fourth industrial revolution' (MEC 2017a, 5), technological development and intensified globalization reshape economy causing new labor demands, and competition for 'knowledge' and skilled workers will follow (MEC 2017a, 7). Global problems, like unequal development of wellbeing, wealth, population growth, and sustainable development are mentioned. However, the perspective on these is primarily articulated in the form of global competition:

> How can Finland, which has strong technological know-how, maximize the benefit from digitalization? (MEC 2017a, 8)

> When both wealthy countries and developing countries have chosen knowledge-based wellbeing as their strategy for success, the opportunities for co-operation and communication will improve. Simultaneusly, competition for knowledge and the utilization of talent resources will intensify. (MEC 2017a, 12)

Previous statements explicate how competition is framed from the national perspective but also from the perspective of western hegemony versus eastern rivals. The latter is articulated in forms of EU/Western/OECD countries versus developing countries like China and India, whose share of talent resources and human capital is increasing (MEC 2017a, 7, 9, 11, 12). This global race requires higher education systems to continuously evaluate and reorientate their actions (MEC 2017a, 7). Similarly, an immensely competitive stance was also noted (Hansen, Sivesind, and Thostrup 2021) in a report on the future of Finnish comprehensive school: where Finland was seen as 'a global forerunner in education', nonetheless this must change because world is in a state of 'creative destruction' and adaptability increases the 'chances of survival' in tough global competition ([MEC]OKM 2015, 17–18 in Hansen, Sivesind, and Thostrup 2021, 7–8). In essence, global competition is perceived as so pervasive as to be existential, thus affecting ontological security.

The latter part of the memorandum (p. 12–21) addresses the shortcomings of Finnish higher education: the quality of education must be improved since other countries have significantly raised their education levels (MEC 2017a, 14). Resources for Finnish higher education institutions are comparatively strong, but 'not optimally deployed' because the 'proportional status of Finnish science is decreased compared to reference countries' (MEC 2017a, 15–16). HEIs are also too dispersed and quality education needs more 'critical mass', in other words, bigger units and centralization of resources (MEC 2017a, 14). Lastly, gaps in the knowledge base are noted:

> Finnish pupils' declining learning outcomes in subjects essential for innovation capabilities, like science and math, are an alarming development. [...] The knowledge-base of the whole population must flourish. (MEC 2017a, 12–13.)

To sum up, the memorandum articulates a narrative of a grand heritage now under threat, *a horrific fantasy of falling behind in global competition*. However, the solution is to be found in a rather familiar form: good old technology-based growth. This momentum is condensed in the following diagnosis of the state of Finnish society:

> Finland's exceptional economic and productivity development from the 1980s to the rupture of 2008 was based on strengthening technology, knowledge and know-how/

expertise and their efficient utilization. The univocal conclusion deriving from studies and evaluations is that Finland has no reason to abandon the strategy of knowledge-based growth and wellbeing. (MEC 2017a, 19)

As scholars of innovation have argued (in Beckert 2016, 180), references to previous successful technologies can establish cognitive – and, I would add, affective – path-dependencies shaping perceptions and legitimate plans for the future. The previous quote exemplifies nostalgia for a return to 'golden age', to a retroactively projected harmonious state. The desire is projected onto a revival of the technological heyday, to a fantasy of technological solutions reminiscent of the golden era of Nokia: the time when its global success so enhanced the Finnish economy, raising the nation from the deep recession of the 1990s; society flourished. In Kauko's (2013, 200) research on changes in higher education policy, a stakeholder informant described the contemporary hybris: 'That whole period of time had – – [a feeling] after the depression of the 1990s that everything is possible now. Nokia [Corporation] started to rise, there were no limits. That is the general atmosphere how people felt.' I assume that vision statements of yearning to era of pre-financial crisis are markers of good times now considered lost. Therefore, revitalization seems to assert its luring rhetoric in the activation of the affective dimension: retrieving enjoyment lost (Stavrakakis 2007, 199). Based on this horrific/beatific narrative structure, a two-pronged competitiveness strategy – a strategy of knowledge-based growth and wellbeing – is stated. I propose that these strategy elements also compose two beatific fantasies central to the narrative structure of vision development: *fantasy of technological solutions* and *fantasy of prosperous university community*.

Strategy of knowledge-based growth: fantasy of technological solutions

Anticipation of future development creates continuity between the 2017–2019 documents: the global pressures of digitalization, artificial intelligence, robotization, restructuring of work, and global problems will change societies and promote fiercer 'competition for talent, jobs and investments' (MEC 2019, 5). According to this prediction technological change and transformation of working life will intensify competition between nation states causing new problems to which new knowledge and scientific innovation will provide solutions.

To expedite such endeavors, Vision Development (MEC 2017a, 2019) establishes three strategic objectives to be achieved in 2030: firstly, total investments in RDI should increase from 2.8% (2017) to 4% of Finnish GDP. Secondly, 50% of young adults (25–34-year-olds) should complete tertiary education. Thirdly, opportunities for lifelong learning and career skills should be improved.

The desired utilization of investments in research and education appears selective. The conclusion of the 2017 vision memorandum states '[w]e will strengthen Finland's ability to renew and maintain its position as a producer and applier of high technology.' (p. 19). In this fantasy, emphasized skills and innovation capabilities depend predominantly on 'science and math' (MEC 2017a, 12), STEM-based knowledge, while humanities and social sciences do not appear in vision memorandum.[3] This emphasis is indirectly justified by stressing the scarcity of the nation's resources and the importance of choosing sectors where it can succeed:

> [I]t is indispensable to Finland and other small countries to gather their resources in sectors where they achieve the international top. Courageous risk-taking and endeavor to reach the frontline of science and innovation will ensure access to the international networks of knowledge production and utilization. (MEC 2017a, 19)

While in the 2017 memorandum the general ethos stressed predominantly aspects under threat, the 2019 roadmap proclaims a more positive and encouraging spirit, toward the beatific side. The earlier, harsh rhetoric of weak universities (MEC 2017a, 14–16) is on many dimensions overturned: while previously the HEIs' resources were poorly used, they are now considered 'autonomous' and 'strong agents' and the whole 'HEI system is one of the most efficient in the world' (MEC 2019, 5). Defects are briefly identified as a lack of 'international attractiveness and competitiveness to some extent' (MEC 2019, 5–8) due to future knowledge creation and 'problem-solving' will take place in global networks and research groups (MEC 2019, 5).

Humanities and social sciences are also given slightly more space than in the 2017 memorandum; they are now seen as occupying a 'significant role in anticipating and solving future global trends and problems caused by societal changes' (MEC 2019, 5). The narrative persists that universities are framed as problem-solving and responsive to changing societal needs. Accordingly, scientific knowledge becomes predominantly instrumentalized and the role of applied sciences is foregrounded. When basic research is mentioned, it is reduced to commodified form, a vehicle in the capital accumulation process: 'investments in basic research will create bases for RDIs, thereby helping to expand capitalization to new areas' (MEC 2019, 32).

For universities, the roadmap envisages a 'new role' (MEC 2019, 17) of expanding relationships between universities, business, and working life. One example of this new role is implied in the idea of 'innovation ecosystems', where funders, business actors, and higher education institutions would co-operate in innovation production by reason of a common goal (MEC 2019, 26–27). Such ecosystems are believed to attract corporate funding and RDI investments in Finnish higher education. A plainer demand-supply objective is the idea that HEIs are encouraged to provide more short-term education such as in-service training, top-up training and re-education according to the needs of changing working life (MEC 2019, 10).

The logic of fantasy in the strategy of knowledge-based growth is summarized in Table 1. Vision Development documents articulate the main narrative structure around crisis and salvation: a *horrific fantasy* of falling behind in global competition causing an existential threat and a compensating *beatific fantasy* of technological solutions that will also provide the foundation of guarantee.

Strategy of wellbeing: fantasy of a prosperous university community

The second competitiveness strategy concerns the wellbeing of university communities and the congeniality of higher education institutions as workplaces. In this question, the narrative structure of beatific fantasy is altered between the two documents. Let us start with the 2017 memorandum identifying problems in the working conditions and abilities for democratic participation in university governance and management.

Table 1. The logic of fantasy in the strategy of knowledge-based growth.

Vision document	2017 Memorandum	2019 Roadmap
Narrative structure	*Horrific fantasy of falling behind* & *Beatific fantasy of technological solutions* Emphasis on horrific side: Highlighting defects of HEIs (weak, inefficient agencies) and Finnish society, articulation of crisis & need for a major competitiveness shift (*lost enjoyment*)	*Horrific fantasy of falling behind* & *Beatific fantasy of technological solutions* Emphasis on beatific side: Accentuation of strengths, solutions, opportunities and partly overturning 2017 noted defects, spirit of 'we can do this' (*retrieving enjoyment*)
Foundation of guarantee	Ontological threat: Fear of dropping into pariah state in fierce global KBE competition Ontological security: Found in nostalgic revival of successful technological past & STEM-based knowledge accumulation (*retrieving enjoyment*)	Ontological threat: Fear of falling behind in KBE competition, but the risk is mitigated since HEIs are rearticulated as strong agencies with only minor flaws Ontological security: Top-class HE system: Technological solutions – innovations, societal problem-solving, enhanced cooperation between HEIs & business

Students and university personnel experience uncertainty and stress. The personnel feels their work well-being has deteriorated due to increase in administrative tasks, precarious employment security and lack of opportunities to participate and exert influence on [university practices]. [...] Some personnel report depreciation of their own work and skills. Management systems are criticized by the personnel. (MEC 2017a, 17)

These concerns represent widely observed flaws already noted by ministry reports (e.g. MEC 2016). After recognizing the problems, the memorandum depicts a future objective, the beatific dimensions of the Finnish higher education sector in 2030: 'Vigorous HE communities are an asset for Finland and foundation of its competitiveness. Higher education institutions are the best workplaces in Finland' (MEC 2017a, 22). This quote can be interpreted as promising decisive measures to resolve troublesome issues of stressful, precarious employment and lack of democratic participation, even though no actions are specified. Yet, to materialize the beatific fantasy of flourishing communities such nuisances should be solved somehow. This promise therefore contains indirect references to more democratic government. For some academics, this narrative may have recalled the past democratic self-governance operative before the Universities Act of 2009 and their related 'lost enjoyment' (see Tiina and Tuomas 2022 on Finnish academics longing for previous, democratic governance practices). Accordingly, I suggest that acknowledging problems in policy rhetoric and promises of the 'best, flourishing workplaces' in 2030 refers to profession-based logics (Glynos 2014; Kallio, Kallio, and Blomberg 2020), such as Mertonian norms in public good knowledge/learning regime (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Profession-based logics project academics' aspirations of academic profession and interdependent community, shared responsibility, professional autonomy, and recognition of one's work. I call the memorandum's organizational ideal the *beatific fantasy of democratic academia*.

The 2019 Roadmap retains the objective 'universities to become the best workplaces' in 2030 and names this as one of the five development objectives. Yet while the explicit goal remains unchanged, the content and referential logic of beatific fantasy rotates: in the roadmap rhetoric, previous shortcomings of precarious employment and lack of participation for

academics are hidden or refused because 'the Universities Act [. . .] allows the personnel and students to widely participate in HEIs' decision-making' (MEC 2019, 23). Instead

> [t]here is a demand for skills in change management to support the wellbeing and knowl-
> edge of personnel at higher education institutions. In addition, to build a human- and skill-
> based working culture, multifaceted data on the situation and data analysis are required.
> (MEC 2019, 23)

Moreover, employees' participation and belonging seem to be reduced to 'continuous com-munication with university management' (MEC 2019, 23). The roadmap continues, establish-ing concrete actions: a program of change management for university leaders and expansion of knowledge base for leadership by exploring personnel time allocation (MEC 2019, 23). Thus, demands for participatory and democratic decision-making and a just workplace (*fantasy of democratic academia*) become a question of informed leadership and organiza-tional performance management (MEC 2019, 23). These ideas suggest the harmonious employment relationship and social engineering common in work and organizational psy-chology (Bal and Dóci 2018). The former refers to the assumption that employees and organization may be consonant in their needs, interests, and goals. The latter suggests that organizational performance and personnel well-being can be enhanced through 'positivistic, "objective" research' and 'evidence-based solutions' (p. 545); however, these views disregard dissent, pluralism, and power relations (Bal and Dóci 2018).

To recapitulate these features, I call the roadmap's organizational ideal: *beatific fantasy of wise leadership*. Its narrative content consists of perceiving management as aiming at harmo-nious employment relationship through social engineering: demanding knowledge-based evaluation, leadership training, and exercises in change-management skills. This fantasy employs the logic of authoritarian managerialism projecting hopes and aspirations of control, mastery, and self-sufficiency, i.e. fantasies of independence (Glynos 2014).

In sum, the strategy of wellbeing and the fantasy of a flourishing university commu-nity consist of an inner transformation in its beatific fantasy 2017–2019. This change is outlined in Table 2. During the process, structuring discourses are rotated from pro-democratic professional governance to leadership-centered managerialism.

Table 2. The logic of fantasy in strategy of prosperous university community.

Vision document	2017 Memorandum	2019 Roadmap
Narrative structure	*Beatific fantasy of democratic academia* - Acknowledgement of democratic deficit and precarious working life - Better working conditions and management systems via appreciation of profession, participatory, bottom-up governing practices	*Beatific fantasy of wise leadership* - Insufficient audit culture leads to poorly informed leadership - Better working conditions and management systems via enhanced audit culture, informed and strong leadership, change management skills, performance management, top-down governing
Foundation of guarantee	Ontological threat: Prolongation of problematic, undemocratic order Ontological security: *Logic of professional community* projects aspirations of academic profession, autonomy and shared responsibility, recognition of work, fantasies of dependence	Ontological threat: Weak leaders, poorly informed management Ontological security: *Logic of authoritarian managerialism* projects hopes and aspirations of control, mastery, self-sufficiency, fantasies of independence

What could explain this apparent *volte-face*? Here the role of the OECD policy evaluation of the Finnish innovation system (OECD 2017) and its recommendations provide compelling evidence. The OECD (p. 26) initially recommended generating 'a new national vision for research and innovation policy' concerning future development. Secondly, the OECD's standpoint on universities' internal governance strongly favored strengthening strategic leadership and top-down management:

> Other measures rather concern the operational level of universities. For example, assessing the need to further professionalise university management and increase its internal power relative to the staff as a whole. A key measure would be to increase the proportion of external and international members on university boards to more than half, and putting the rector's authority beyond the reach of the collegiate. (OECD 2017, 42)

MEC (2017b) referred to the OECD policy evaluation and called for reform in higher education 5 months before the first vision memorandum appeared. Furthermore, the outcome of 'wise leadership' in 2019 also accommodated OECD recommendations. Legitimization of national reform interests by an external authority such as the OECD or EU has been utilized in higher education policy-making, especially in contentious matters (Kallo 2009; Moisio 2014). Additionally, Poutanen et al. (2022; Kuusela et al. 2021) argue that establishing anti-democratic order in universities was among the main drivers behind the new Universities Act of 2009. Thus, promoting academic self-governance would have countermanded this doctrine. In sum, it seems unlikely that the *fantasy of democratic academia* was a 'genuine' goal at any phase, but just a rhetorical instrument to gain legitimacy from the academic community and bring their desires in align with the reform.

Trangressive manoeuvers beyond policy documents

We have shown how transgressive elements of fantasy are missing in Vision Development policy documents. However, this does not mean that such elements were absent from the government's politics or higher education policy-making. Instead, discursive transgressions emerge if we extend the scope of analysis to the public higher education discourse. For example, two ministers of the Sipilä Cabinet paved the way toward Vision Development at the beginning of the term in office. In May 2015, Minister of Finance (to be) Alexander Stubb introduced a new summer term to universities saying 'If before a professor had three reasons for being a professor – June, July, and August – henceforth those three reasons are off the table' (Karjalainen and Varpela 2015). This proposal indicated that professors had much longer vacations than people in general but also questioned the purpose of doing research and academic work in general. These insinuations of undeserved privilege and laziness provoked annoyance and critical commentaries among professors and other academics. (Ironically enough, the former minister Stubb is currently a professor.)

The second case followed 5 months later. In late October 2015, Minister of Education and Culture Sanni Grahn-Laasonen sent an open letter (MEC 2015) to higher education institutions portraying a view similar to the *horrific fantasy of falling behind* in Vision Development and argued that 'the lack of resources is not our problem, but inefficient use of them', calling the situation 'sleeping complacency'. Therefore, budget cuts in HEIs would not be a problem. She concluded by asking HEIs to define in which scientific

disciplines they would become top-class by 2025 (MEC 2015). Similarly to Stubb's public talk, the letter was considered to imply complacency and laziness among university employees, and its ethos culminated in the renaming of the letter in academia and press alike as a sort of 'papal bull'. Public indignation soared and academics described the Sipilä government as having a 'hostile attitude' toward *Bildung*, education, science, and knowledge (Sirén 2016).

These two cases exemplify transgressive elements violating the appropriate way of speaking of universities in public discourse. While infuriating many academics, public transgressions might have aroused desire and enjoyment among like-minded politicians and voters, those in favor of austerity and efficient use of public funds, or those identifying with an 'anti-academic/-elitist' stance. This way Sipilä government's austerity measures concurred with populist tendencies, which is reminiscent of the rhetoric of the populist, right-wing Finns Party forming part of the coalition government. All in all, transgressive articulations set up fantasy frames justifying education budget cuts and paving the way for Vision Development with its horrific and beatific narrative structures.

Conclusion: anticipation of ideological closure

This research scrutinized how anticipatory policy-making played out in Finnish higher education reform. Vision Development 2030 articulated capitalist, growth-based, and technological future fantasies, depicting universities as top-down led corporations centering on STEM-based knowledge accumulation, applied science and societal problem-solving via technological innovations. The research also made visible how politicians use fantasies to garner emotional support for their agenda. Scrutinizing a range of ideological fantasies, like articulating gloomy forecasts and reactivating cognitive and affective memories of past successes, Vision Development sought to evoke subjects' latent emotions and desires, mobilizing them toward a reproduction of the 'techno-managerialist' (Remling 2023) order.

The Sipilä government's strategic vision predicts the future development relying heavily on a knowledge-based economy. The policy disdained basic research, ideals of *Bildung* and liberal education, and norms of traditional academic professions – as such it reflects the overall ethos of the government's narrow education policy (Tervasmäki and Tomperi 2018). The ideological fantasies and their uncompromising nature imply a strong investment in and mode of attachment to the ideals of KBE. Policy rhetoric argues for a clear-cut choice between vision narrative or doom, which appear as 'the only rational and logical course of action' (Nokkala 2016). Such a black and white simplification remarks about 'overinvestment' to a fantasy (Glynos 2011) and ideological determinism, which can be seen as the policy's fantasy of control (Clarke 2020) aiming to dispose of contingency and/or aim to elude the contestability of policy and reflection of alternatives.

While some policy-makers and officials may hope for straightforward and decisive policies, more critical readers require discussion of alternatives and reasoning for their rejection. It would also make policy more open to public deliberation. Accordingly, there are several reasons why deterministic closures in policy-making should be avoided. Excessive yearning for ontological security may lead to dogmatism and exclusion (Eberle 2019; Glynos 2011). The marginalization

of alternatives in Vision Development is also ill-suited to uncertainties of the future: anticipation should rather map out a range of (im)probable possible futures (Beckert and Bronk 2018) and still maintain 'constant readiness to identify another possible way in which future may play out' (Anderson 2010, 782). These procedures would leave space for open and pluralistic fantasies of higher education futures that appear ever more urgent amidst ecological and social crises (e.g. Amsler and Facer 2017). Nevertheless, these would have necessitated abandoning the KBE fantasies and contested underlying the assumptions of 'apolitical' and 'efficient problem-solving' that characterized Sipilä government policy-making (Tervasmäki and Tomperi 2018). Accounts of this research offer additional explanations why predeterminism prevailed in their anticipatory governance.

Notes

1. However, Sellar and Zipin (2019) criticize the tools of 'ideology-critique' as being insufficient to 'register [...] affective qualities' (p.573). While this seems to be relevant for Wallerstein's & Harvey's theories the authors discuss, it does not apply to the ideology critique paradigm at large. Many theorists of ideology critique (e.g. Theodor Adorno; Antonio Gramsci; Stuart Hall; Žižek,[1989] 2008) and the Essex school of discourse theory (present in this article) have emphasized the role of emotions and affects in the scrutiny of ideology and politics.
2. Quotes translated from Finnish by the author.
3. Memorandum (MEC 2017b, 10) contains a figure representing 'the scientific publication profile of Finland 2011–2014'. There is a small note that this figure 'is based on Wos-database, it does not include humanities'. Instead, the figure illustrates STEM-based science outputs.

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Tuomas Tervasmäki is a doctoral researcher in the Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University, Finland. He is currently finalizing his Doctoral dissertation analyzing the politics of

education and the ideological foundations of Finnish education policy from the perspective of poststructuralist discourse theory.

ORCID

Tuomas Tervasmäki 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2300-6451

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