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Research Article

Expanding anticipatory governance to legislatures: The emergence and global diffusion of legislature-based future institutions

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Abstract

Global challenges from climate change to the COVID-19 pandemic have raised legitimate questions about the ability of democratic decision-makers to prepare for such crises. Gradually, countries throughout the world have established state-level foresight mechanisms. Most operate under the executive branch, but increasingly such institutions have started to emerge also in legislatures, expanding anticipatory governance towards democratic publics. Drawing on a global survey, official documents and expert interviews, this article presents the first comprehensive analysis of the emergence and diffusion of legislature-based future institutions. We show that, despite the early emergence of a pacesetting institution, such committees have spread slowly and only very recently, and they still exist in only a few countries. For diffusion, the findings highlight the importance of the pacesetter, semi-formal networks of like-minded individuals and personalized agency. Most especially, the role of Members of Parliament (MPs) seems crucial, suggesting that expanding anticipatory governance to legislatures is largely in the hand of legislators.

Keywords

Legislatures, foresight, future, committees, diffusion

Introduction

Climate change and globalization are prominent examples of large-scale societal changes affecting countries across the world. Besides their enormous spatial breadth that shows no respect for national boundaries, the temporal span of these challenges defies the traditional functioning of representative democracies that is based on short electoral terms. Governments are struggling with efficient

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responses, with critics often pointing out how unprepared they were and how the enacted policies are piecemeal and reactive. Certainly, no ruler can forecast all crises, but clearly there are legitimate demands for political institutions that can facilitate more forward-looking policymaking.

Many countries have established such institutions. Most of them reside in the executive branch and deal with technological change and sustainable development, they are pronouncedly expert-driven and have a non-political ethos. For decades, legislatures around the world had utilized research units for scientific technology assessment (TA), but it was only in the 1990s that units resembling typical legislative institutions (committees, etc.) that engage legislators more concretely with future issues started to materialize. However, despite the growing interest in designing institutions for long-term policymaking (e.g., Boston, 2017, 2021; González-Ricoy and Gosseries, 2016; Jacobs, 2016; MacKenzie, 2021; Smith, 2020), empirical research on legislature-based future institutions has been limited to a few case studies, particularly on the Committee for the Future in the Finnish Eduskunta (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017; Koskimaa and Raunio, 2020) and a recent comparative assessment of mainly Commonwealth countries (Boston et al., 2019).

This article presents the first global comparative analysis on legislature-based future institutions. Organized foresight activities have also occurred in sub-national legislatures,[1] but for the sake of research economy and validity we focus exclusively on national legislatures. The predominantly exploratory effort has two main research questions, one descriptive and one with more explanatory ambition:

1. Which countries have adopted legislature-based future institutions?
2. What explains their establishment (i.e. the diffusion of the model)?

We utilize a novel global survey of legislatures, official documents and focused expert interviews to answer these questions.

The following section presents our analytical framework by discussing the sources of political myopia, its institutional correctives and the general conditions for their diffusion. Due to the lack of previous evidence and the exploratory nature of our study, the section focuses on the main mechanisms and agents of diffusion without formulating explicit hypotheses about the relative weights of the potential drivers of diffusion (including the basic distinction between agency and structure). The third section introduces our data and provides an overview of the past and existing legislature-based future institutions. The first part of the fourth section traces the birth and activities of the first 'pacesetting' future committee; the second examines the dynamics of institutional diffusion; and the third draws together the diffusion patterns. The concluding section reflects on the challenges involved in turning legislatures into more forward-thinking institutions.

Analytical framework

Democratic myopia and corrective institutions

Due to the short-term motivations of electoral candidates, voters and interest groups, democratic political practice is commonly conceived as myopic (Boston, 2017, 2021; Jacobs, 2016; MacKenzie, 2021). Although actual policymaking that primarily focuses on developing general societal capacities in the long term has likely always been a more future-regarding endeavour (Pierson, 2004; Pollitt, 2008), the growing awareness of global societal 'megatrends' has recently introduced a surge of institutional designs that seek to relieve the myopic thrust of electoral democracy. Some innovations suggest re-allocation of state power to non-elected bodies (e.g. expert organizations) or legal instruments (fixed budgetary items or constitutional clauses, etc.) while others aim to

enhance existing democratic institutions with, for example, special representatives, research centres and designated future committees (Boston, 2017, 2021; Caney, 2016; MacKenzie, 2021).

Regarding existing institutions, executives have invested many more resources into long-term planning, and established foresight mechanisms can now be found on most continents. In 1946, France set up the General Planning Commission (re-named in 2006 as the Centre for Strategic Analysis and in 2013 as France Strategy), an expert advisory body that produces long-term plans on various societally significant themes (e.g. trade, economy, environment) (France Stratégie, 2016). Today, countries utilizing such institutions include Canada (Policy Horizons Canada), Germany (Strategic Foresight and Policy Planning Division in the Federal Chancellery), Japan (National Institute for Science and Technology Policy), Singapore (Centre for Strategic Futures and Strategic Foresight Unit), Spain (National Office for Prospective and Long-Term Country Strategy), the United Arab Emirates (Future Foresight Strategy) and the United States (Center for Strategic Foresight in the Government Accountability Office) (School of International Futures (SOIF), 2021; Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020). The European Union (EU) has also started to invest more in strategic foresight: in the Commission appointed in 2019, one portfolio is Inter-institutional Relations and Foresight, leading to the Commission's first annual Strategic Foresight Report in 2020 (European Commission, 2022). Governments drive policy planning and are thus 'natural' locations for foresight units. Another rationale for placing such units in the executive branch is perhaps to shield them from short electoral cycles. The downside can be marginal ownership among politicians, especially if the foresight unit is a quasi-independent research organization consisting of bureaucrats and/or scientists.

For these reasons, fostering ownership also among legislators is important. Claims for intergenerational justice can be legitimately (and realistically) instituted only through the participation of existing publics, which in representative democracy are represented by legislatures. Inside legislatures, institutions that enable legislators to develop sufficient expertise on foresight work matter. The logic is the same as with parliamentary committees: through their committee work, legislators develop expertise which facilitates more informed scrutiny of the government (Siefken and Rommetvedt, 2022). Without a profound understanding of governments' future plans, legislatures cannot monitor them. And, even if only a small share of legislators is at any given time involved in such work, their influence can nonetheless extend to the whole parliament – that is, legislators engaged in future-oriented business will bring their insights into debates in party groups, committees and the plenary, making legislators more alert to the long-term effects of policies (Caney, 2016).

However, the emergence of a parliamentary future unit is likely to meet resistance. Legislators may feel that forward-looking planning is achievable without new mechanisms. 'Future' could be made part of standard legislative scrutiny more explicitly, with each government draft bill also including an assessment of its potential long-term effects. Thereby, a more forward-oriented thinking would form a routine part of the legislative process (Boston et al., 2019: 147). The danger is that both the government proposal and legislators might nonetheless focus on the short-term effects of laws. A more demanding alternative would be to oblige the government to produce a regular report on future challenges and, for creating ownership among legislators, mandate the legislature to produce a response and debate it in the committees and the plenary, giving it more publicity and connecting foresight more explicitly to the accountability of legislators (Caney, 2016).

Legislators may also feel that a foresight body would somehow be an odd, novelty element, detached from the usual, more serious parliamentary business and thus not worth the commitment. Sectoral legislative committees normally do not need to worry about their position: they are the backbone of parliamentary work. For a future organ the situation is considerably more challenging as it must prove its worth inside the legislature and more broadly in the political system.

Here, the existence of a broader 'foresight ecosystem' is important (SOIF, 2021). When there is a sufficiently large set of actors engaged in foresight work, the ecosystem will sustain itself through regular interaction and standardized outputs that disperse the processes' institutionalizing capacity wider than a single institution could. Without such backing, even a well-argued project of highly motivated actors can easily be stopped by the institutional 'conservatism' of more established actors.

Mechanisms and agents of organizational diffusion. The first parliamentary future institution was established in the 1990s, with the others created since the turn of the millennium, suggesting the possibility of organizational diffusion. The diffusion of policies and organizations has attracted broad attention, with scholars studying, for example, the diffusion of democratic institutions (Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; Gleditsch, 2002), diffusion of ideas among parliaments (Malang and Leifeld, 2021), diffusion among international organizations (Sommerer and Tallberg, 2019) or in policy documents like party manifestos (Böhmelt et al., 2016).[2] We also recognize policy transfer literature, which puts more emphasis on agency (Marsh and Sharman, 2009).

Reflecting the dominant view in the diffusion literature, we conceive organizational diffusion as a process where the choice of an institution in one country impacts on choices in other countries, via emulation, learning, competition or coercion (Dobbin et al., 2007; Gilardi, 2010, 2012; Gilardi and Wasserfallen, 2019). As countries cannot coerce other countries to adopt future institutions and sufficiently strong competitive dynamics likely do not yet exist in this field, we mostly draw on learning and emulation approaches that are closely related. In learning, the underlying rationale is the adoption of effective policies or organizational models. Through observing developments in other countries, actors change their own beliefs about how to achieve better outcomes. Emulation, in turn, stresses ideas that prevail in the society, both at home and abroad, with various experts and organizations promoting reforms. Compared to learning, emulation has therefore less to do with deliberate enhancement of specific outcomes.

Learning can occur between neighbouring countries, between countries at the same level of economic development or facing similar challenges, or when developing countries take cues from more established democracies. Geographical proximity has been observed to matter: 'countries that see themselves as members of sub-global groupings based on history, culture, language, level of development, or geography may copy one another's policies because they infer that what works for a peer will work for them' (Dobbin et al., 2007: 462). Learning and emulation logics can be difficult to distinguish, and they may co-exist: actors identify successful practices from other countries, practices that are gaining recognition both closer to home and in the broader international community. Regarding agency, learning and emulation processes can emphasize the role of sender or receiver. In the former case, diffusion is more related to the activities of the actor that already possesses the institution. In the former case the adapter plays a more active role.

Without formulating specific expectations on their independent impact or relative ordering, we identify three different actors that can facilitate diffusion: pacesetters, interparliamentary networks and international organizations. A pacesetter serves as a model to be imitated. Reflecting the sender-driven model of diffusion, it can actively promote its innovation, because it believes in its effectiveness or its positive impact on reputation, but a pacesetter may also inspire without deliberate effort, shifting agency towards the receiver. Walker (1969: 897), in his analysis of innovations among the American states, had already noted the importance of peer comparison: the likelihood of adopting an innovation is higher 'if the innovation has been adopted by a state viewed by key decision makers as a point of legitimate comparison'. Legislators or parliamentary officials have incomplete information about alternative solutions to problems affecting their countries, and thus look for evidence from other political systems (Meseguer and Gilardi, 2009).

Interparliamentary networks can facilitate organizational diffusion, albeit in a less agency-driven fashion, by providing an institutionalized medium where national actors exchange experiences. Such mediums can facilitate the spread of new ideas – compared to bilateral meetings, which of course may also facilitate diffusion, especially between neighbouring countries – and can thus become important facilitators of institutional diffusion. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the global umbrella organization of national legislatures, while parliaments have networks and coordination structures in different regions of the world (Giesen and Malang, 2022). Interparliamentary cooperation is most advanced in the EU, where national legislatures and the European Parliament pursue cooperation through several avenues (Raube et al., 2019; Schimmelfennig et al., 2021; Stavridis and Jančić, 2017). Hence, it is not surprising that the domestic legislatures of EU member states have been learning from one another, especially regarding oversight mechanisms in EU affairs (Bormann and Winzen, 2016; Senninger, 2020).

International organizations may act as sender-type active inspirers and/or institutional facilitators of organizational diffusion, often mixing these roles. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has operated 'as an important site for the construction and dissemination of transnational research and policy ideas embracing a wide range of contemporary issues' (Mahon and McBride, 2009: 84), exerting significant influence on policy diffusion, particularly regarding education (Sorensen et al., 2021). The OECD has also invested a lot of effort into strategic foresight and offers general and country-specific guidance and training. The INTERFUTURES Project, launched in 1976, was the OECD's first larger exercise involving a more global approach to the longer-term future.[3] In 1990, OECD established the International Futures Programme (IFP) to conduct foresight activities and in 2013 the Strategic Foresight Unit took over its tasks. Today, the unit hosts the Government Foresight Community (GFC) which 'brings together strategic foresight practitioners in the public sector from around the world' to 'exchange information and content on the latest foresight developments in government policy making'. GFC holds an annual meeting in Paris, where foresight practitioners from around the world get together and discuss foresight methods (OECD 2022b).[4] The United Nations (UN), too, with its Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has engaged in futures work via its Futures Literacy network (Unesco 2022), and the UN Development Programme (UNPD) focuses on Sustainable Development Goals and the UN 2030 Agenda. Since the turn of the 1970s, organizations like World Future Society and World Futures Studies Federation have also fostered a global community of scholars, research institutes and think-tanks with special interest in the future (Andersson, 2018).

Policy transfer literature has stressed that agency matters for how transnational networks facilitate the transfer of ideas. Some actors need to raise the importance of foresight work and suggest the necessary changes to parliamentary standing orders. Legislators and administrative personnel taking part in the above-mentioned networks are ideally positioned to be inspired and transmit ideas to their own legislatures, but legislators may also have a special interest in long-term planning through their educational or professional background. While established organizations are important, individual agency can become decisive (Marsh and Evans, 2012; Stone et al., 2020). At the same time, we must acknowledge that actors also have capacity to prevent the establishment of new organizational innovations. State organs are typically strongly institutionalized and institutional 'conservatives' tend to be in the majority, giving them the advantage in competitive situations.

Data, methods and charting legislature-based future institutions

Our data collection proceeded in four stages. First, we consulted literature and official documents to detect all notable past experiments to institutionalize future organs in legislatures. We recognize

Table 1. Legislature-based future institutions (2022).

Country/chamber	Foresight institution and year of establishment	Main features
Finland/Eduskunta	Committee for the Future (1993)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Chile/Senate	Comision de Desafíos del Futuro, Ciencia, Tecnologiá e Innovación (2012)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Brazil/Senate	Comissão Senado do Futuro (2013)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Austria/Bundesrat	Ausschuss für Innovation, Technologie und Zukunft (2015)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Estonia/Riigikogu	Foresight Centre (2017)	Research institute under the Riigikogu, consists of scientific experts
South Korea/ National Assembly	National Assembly Futures Institute (2018)	Research institute under the National Assembly, consists of scientific experts
Iceland/Althingi	Prime Minister's Committee for the Future (2018)/Future Committee (2021)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Philippines/Senate	Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking (2019)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Lithuania/Seimas	Committee for the Future (2020)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators
Uruguay	Comisión de Futuro (2021)	Parliamentary committee consisting of legislators

the possibility of missing some more minor attempts that have not been recorded in these sources (short-lived or temporary ad hoc bodies). We believe it is not possible to examine all such cases with a sufficient degree of reliability for this study. In the second phase, we carried out an email survey in spring 2020 addressed to all national legislatures ($n = 192$) to locate existing institutions from both chambers. The purpose of the survey was simply to find out whether the legislature had established any specific future-oriented institutions. Despite several reminders (the initial contact information was drawn from the IPU webpage and later supplemented with different email addresses from the legislature's webpages), the response rate was only 16%. In the end this was not surprising given the specific topic of our inquiry and the timing of the survey (the initial phases of COVID-19).

In the third stage we examined the websites of legislatures, paying particular attention to committees and other organs and utilizing search engines available at the websites. After these 3 stages, we identified 10 existing institutions that were specifically established to debate or assess long-term challenges (broadly defined, in non-exclusive fashion; that is, not focusing on any specific policy field like sustainable development), with significant functional role for legislators (i.e. excluding expert-operated TA units). Table 1 lists the institutions and their main features, ordered according to their year of establishment.

Of the ten institutions, eight are legislative committees, and two are research institutes operating under the legislature. Five are in Europe (Austria, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania), three in South America (Brazil, Chile, Uruguay) and two in Asia (Philippines, South Korea). The Finnish Committee for the Future was established in 1993, while all the others have been founded since 2012.

Due to the future's inherent uncertainty, which reflects the scenario methods of futures studies, a relatively open agenda seems essential for genuine future organs. Thus, the key criterion for identifying the institutions was that they should have the specific yet broad remit of assessing long-term societal and technological challenges. We have excluded legislative organs with a narrower focus like the various special committees and other units that deal with sustainable development (for a recent comprehensive assessment, see Cordonier Segger et al. (2021)) and the UN 2030 Agenda (see Breuer and Leininger, 2021), and/or technological development, science and innovations. We included the Ausschuss für Innovation, Technologie und Zukunft from the Austrian Bundesrat and the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking from the Philippines, because both have the broader mandate of looking into future societal challenges.

Despite their founding role in parliamentary foresight, we also excluded advisory TA units. Although some long-standing institutions like the French Parliamentary Office for Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Options (OPECST, formed in 1983) directly engage legislators in its operations, they focus exclusively on scientific-technological matters with limited autonomy to choose topics (Nentwich, 2016). The research institutes in Estonia and South Korea are admittedly borderline cases, as many countries have research centres that are accountable to the legislatures and deal with extra-legal questions. However, these two institutes operate directly under the parliament and were specifically established to study future challenges.

Having identified the relevant organs, we used official documents[5] and expert interviews for examining their establishment and operating modes. The semi-structured interviews were carried out between summer 2021 and late spring 2022. Altogether, we interviewed nine parliamentary civil servants and legislators from Argentina, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Lithuania and South Korea that have extensive knowledge of the relevant foresight organs and the processes leading to their establishment.

The emergence and diffusion of legislature-based future institutions

The emergence and activities of the pacesetter

After the horrors of World War II, as the first signs of the Cold War and the global environmental crisis were emerging, an international scientific interest in predicting, imagining and managing the future emerged (Andersson, 2018). Motivated by these developments and the adjoining efforts to develop TA capacity to parliaments, Finland started developing a comprehensive 'foresight ecosystem' that drew inspiration from the more eclectic, visionary and long-term emphasis of 'futures studies' (Miettinen et al., 1999; Tapio and Heinonen, 2018). The most advanced state foresight system, it is a strongly interconnected multi-level structure connecting the government, ministries and the parliament, as well as non-governmental organizations and regional authorities, into a coordinated process for producing foresight information (Boston, 2017).

The system's centrepiece is the Committee for the Future, a permanent parliamentary standing committee comprising solely of Members of Parliament (MPs) with the exclusive task of studying the future. After its establishment in 1993, it gradually came to be considered a global pacesetter attracting international attention (Groombridge, 2006; Tapio and Heinonen, 2018). Boston (2017: 407–408) has noted that the long and difficult process leading to its establishment might explain why there are so few such institutions elsewhere in the world. We now briefly describe the process to illustrate the hurdles that initiatives for building a future institution into a legislature are likely to face, hurdles that also impact the dynamics of diffusion analysed in the second empirical section.

Reflecting the importance of agency, Pentti Malaska, a professor of electrical engineering at the Helsinki University of Technology and the 'father' of Finnish futures studies, played a foundational role in building support for the state foresight system. He established the Finnish Society for Futures Studies (FSFS) in 1980 and became its first chair (Miettinen et al., 1999; Tapio and Heinonen, 2018). Another important network was the Association of Researchers and Members of Parliament (Tutkas), founded in 1970 in the Eduskunta, which sought to educate MPs on scientific developments, especially on technological change and sustainability (Miettinen et al., 1999). In the 1980s, Tutkas had already discussed the creation of a foresight institution in the Eduskunta (Arter, 2000: 150). Further highlighting the importance of individual agency, two MPs played crucial roles in the process. Elected to the Eduskunta in 1983 and 1987 respectively, both Martti Tiuri (professor of radio engineering at the Helsinki University of Technology) and Eero Paloheimo (PhD from and later a professor of wood construction at Helsinki University of Technology) were concerned about the short-termism of parliamentary politics (Arter, 2000).

Tiuri and especially Paloheimo were instrumental in building cross-party support for the parliamentary future committee among MPs. The initiative met considerable opposition among leading public officials and in the Eduskunta, with critics claiming that such an institution was unnecessary, as ordinary committees could also do foresight, and the institution would not contribute to Eduskunta's basic legislative work, but the broader societal context facilitated the project. Mainly due to the downfall of the Soviet Union, the strongly export-driven Finnish economy had slumped into its worst recession, which provided a further rationale for Finland joining the EU in 1995. The turmoil of the early 1990s has been generally considered as a central driver of the foresight system (Tiihonen, 2011). However, without the active agency of Malaska, Tiuri and Paloheimo, such institutions would not have emerged. The context only provided a 'window of opportunity'.

Over time, the Committee for the Future has developed a set of distinct tasks and operating practices, which have inspired other legislature-based future units (Tiihonen, 2011). The key document of the Finnish state foresight system is the government report on the future delivered once per electoral term. The first such report was issued in 1993 and, to provide Eduskunta's formal reply, the Committee for the Future was established, and the resulting 'future dialogue' became its formal-institutional 'backbone' (Tiihonen, 2011, see also Boston, 2017; Caney, 2016). In the late 1990s, TA became another official task of the Committee. In time, the task evolved into the Committee's 'own projects', thematically more varied future-oriented research projects that MPs initiate and direct. The Committee may also issue formal statements on issues that other committees are scrutinizing and since 2018 it has served as the correspondent committee for the government's Agenda 2030 report. In addition to becoming a formally recognized permanent committee in 2000, the Committee for the Future has institutionalized through its consolidated tasks and incentives that it offers to its members, which together foster internal cohesion and continuity. Due to its international fame, the Committee brings positive publicity to Eduskunta and it is now also valued by other MPs, making it a strongly institutionalized parliamentary committee (Koskimaa and Raunio, 2020.)

We interpret that the gradual broadening and consolidation of the Finnish 'foresight ecosystem' is relevant for the subsequent diffusion and (non-)survival of parliamentary future institutions. First, only as an institutionalized unit, with prolonged existence, could the Committee for the Future develop into a global pacesetter. Secondly, the broader foresight community is clearly relevant for both the emergence and survival of the Committee. Thirdly, however, the Finnish case with its historical-contextual and person-dependent factors underlines the significance of highly contingent conditions.

Since its emergence, the pacesetter has been actively networking around the world, contributing to the gradual diffusion of the model. Contrary to rational-functional models of institutional diffusion, however, our findings suggest a more random process and highlight the importance of creative agency at national level. According to one interviewee, the diffusion process has reminded the establishment of the Finnish Committee for the Future in the sense that international organizations have had no role in directing it. Instead, ideas spread more or less spontaneously among like-minded individuals via events and meetings that inter-parliamentary networks and other professional travelling have facilitated. The Committee for the Future, both its MPs and clerks, undertook 'learning trips' that all Eduskunta committees were expected and encouraged to take. The Committee's first leading clerk, Dr Paula Tiihonen, significantly contributed to the Committee's development and institutionalization during her tenure that lasted over two decades. Tiihonen had already established vast international networks before her appointment and she continued to maintain and expand them actively. For example, in the latter half of the 1990s the Committee became interested in the 'Four Asian Tigers' (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) that had performed exceptionally well – because of future-oriented thinking, the Committee interpreted. There was no 'Great Commission' to spread 'the gospel' of the Committee, the ideas spread rather spontaneously – also through visits by other Eduskunta committees or the networking activities of other Finnish foresight actors.[6]

Eventually, as the Committee's reputation grew and strategic policy planning and foresight gained more prominence in the 2000s, with its only institutionalized national foresight system Finland became a kind of a celebrity, a 'place to go', and travellers more often found their way to Eduskunta or invited the Committee for a visit. Finland transformed from an active sender into a passive example that others (receivers) actively sought to emulate. Again, the interviewees noted a semi-random diffusion pattern: sometimes the guests had only heard rumours and random stories about the Committee, so they decided to come and see what the fuss was about. Sometimes, there was 'a future revelation', an individual's powerful realization of the potential benefits of organized future-regarding activities made in legislatures. In time, certain contacts stabilized and turned into clearer networks whose organization nonetheless remained highly dependent on active individuals.

As the next section demonstrates, strong bilateral bonds characterized the process, and many of the countries that have adopted the model are also geographically closely situated (a group of Nordic, South American and Far Eastern countries are clearly detectable). However, our findings indicate that personal contacts over a mutual interest created the links, not the other way round; that is, diffusion was not caused by existing bilateral links. As one interviewee noted, Finland's neighbour and by far the closest historical ally, Sweden, has not developed anything comparable to the Finnish national foresight system despite centuries of close cooperation. To a lesser extent, the same applies to other Scandinavian countries (Norway and Denmark). Thus, proximate bilateral ties alone do not lead to diffusion. However, bilateral links might be more important for institutional diffusion in other contexts; for example, between less developed countries that seek ways to develop. South American cases, for example, may have been more influenced by close countries than by Finland directly. Nevertheless, the frequent interaction with it demonstrates that South American cases were also inspired by the Finnish example (see below).

In turning ideas to action, individual agency has been crucially important. Simultaneously, the dependence on individuals, either legislators or even parliamentary clerks, has constituted a weakness: strongly personalized ad hoc projects without a broader backing mechanism, especially on the politicians' side, are subject to the wills of changing governing majorities, as the failed cases below demonstrate. To demonstrate the dynamics of diffusion and resistance, the following section examines the emergence of other parliamentary future institutions in chronological order.

The diffusion of legislature-based future institutions

Israel was the first country after Finland to experiment with a designated legislature-based future institution, the more limited future commissioner model, where a single person was appointed to protect the interests of future generations. As such, the case reflects the importance of creative agency under local conditions: the 'transferred' idea might take varying forms due to these forces. The Knesset Commission for Future Generations was established in 2001 and lasted until 2006. It was headed by a commissioner, Justice Shlomo Shoham, who was appointed for a five-year term. After that, no new commissioner was appointed and in 2010 the Knesset officially abolished the Commission. Importantly, the commissioner lacked support among the Israeli political-administrative elite and civil society. The Commission was largely initiated by a single politician, Joseph (Tommy) Lapid, the chair of the Shinui party, whose retirement from politics in 2006 coincided with the termination of the Commission's work (Boston, 2017: 324–331; Shoham, 2010).

In Hungary a non-governmental organization, 'Protect the Future', had been campaigning since the 1990s for an institution looking after the interests of the future generations. According to an interviewee, a Hungarian UN official initiated a foresight unit under the UN with a broad societal scope and capacity to facilitate meetings of European parliamentary futures activists, where the Finnish representatives also participated. Inspired by this interaction, Marcel Szabó, a clerk in the Hungarian parliament, developed the national initiative further. In 2008 an Ombudsman for Future Generations (officially the Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations) was established, but only a few years later in 2012 the post was subsumed into the office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, with more limited powers. The ombudsman failed to generate needed legitimacy among the decision-makers, and the party-political environment turned less supportive following the landslide victory of Fidesz in the 2010 elections (Anderson, 2018; Tóth Ambrusné, 2010) According to an interviewee, the ombudsman's significant veto-like powers contributed to the diminution of the institution.

The long and difficult process in Finland, and the Israeli and the Hungarian cases reflect the significant barriers that a novel organ within an established institution faces. Indeed, although the Finnish future committee is globally well known and passionate foresight agents exist in many countries, only few legislatures have actually managed to establish such organs. Success – and the lack of it – seems predominantly connected to the broadness of the coalition that drives the initiative, especially among legislators. Although the exact motives of legislators opposing these initiatives are largely unknown, the Finnish case suggests that besides mere 'organizational conservatism', legislators likely seek tangible benefits from new organs that may be difficult to foresee in the rather high-minded work of future committees (see Koskimaa and Raunio, 2020).

Chile is clearly among those countries that have consistently invested resources in long-term decision-making (e.g. Aceituno Olivares, 2021; OECD/UN, 2018). The Committee on Challenges of Future, Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Chilean Senate was established in April 2012. On that occasion, the chair of the Finnish Committee for the Future, Päivi Lipponen, was invited to give a presentation in the Senate, and the Chilean committee was strongly inspired by the equivalent committee in Finland. Our interviewees also confirm representatives of the 'pacesetter' having several meetings with Chilean officials throughout the years. While an interviewee noted that the institution stands on a relatively narrow base, compared to Finland's comprehensive foresight system, the sustained development suggests that it has created ownership among a broader group of actors. In nearby Brazil, the Committee for the Future in the Senate was established a year later in 2013. As in Chile, the main source of inspiration was the Finnish pacesetter committee, but there was also broader interest in

foresight work. For example, from 2011 to 2013 the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars organized annual trips of Brazilian MPs to the United States and Europe to study policies and practices related to innovations (Wilson Center, 2013).

In Austria more encompassing foresight work has been carried out since at least the 1980s, involving the executive branch, academia and various stakeholders, and with active links to international organizations. Of the two chambers of the federal parliament, the Bundesrat established the Committee for Innovation, Technology and Future in 2015 while a fairly similar committee (without the 'future') is in the Nationalrat. In Estonia Lennart Meri, the country's president in 1992–2001, was influenced by the Finnish experience, not least the Finnish Innovation Fund that has played a central role in the development of the Finnish foresight system. A Strategic Initiative Centre was established in the Bank of Estonia in 2000, and in 2006 another future-looking institution, the Estonian Development Fund, was founded and remained active for a decade. The Riigikogu created the Foresight Centre in 2016, and it became operational in 2017. Roughly one-third of MPs are involved in the Centre's work through the lead committees, but otherwise the Centre is essentially a scientific think-tank attached to the legislature. Contacts with international foresight actors are important for the small Estonian foresight community.

According to our interviews, since at least the late 1990s South Korea has been one of the most active developers of state foresight capacity and engaged in frequent interaction with the Finnish Committee for the Future. Despite the enthusiasm, the resulting projects were short-lived and typically centred around people from business or public administration, making them highly vulnerable to changing political majorities. Reports by the OECD and other international networks have clearly influenced public policies and organizations, with high investment in research and development. The Korean government had a Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning (2013–2017), but long-term planning posed serious challenges. In this context, in the 2010s two consecutive Speakers of the Assembly had argued in favour of establishing a parliamentary future committee. They both visited Finland during their terms as the speaker, and also the examples of Israel and Scotland were examined in the legislative process leading to the establishment of the National Assembly Futures Institute (NAFI) in 2018. A research institute instead of a parliamentary committee was introduced due to opposition from MPs and the Ministry of Finance.

Before 2018, foresight work in Iceland had been sporadic and 'under the radar', but since then there has clearly been a more concerted effort to raise the profile of strategic foresight. However, resources are limited and the circle of people small, and hence links with international foresight actors are important.[7] In June 2018 the prime minister appointed, in line with the government programme, a Committee for the Future located in the prime minister's office. Icelandic proponents of foresight work had studied the Finnish foresight system and the Eduskunta committee very closely. Initially, the idea was to establish a parliamentary committee like in Finland, but as that would have required changes to legislation it was decided to locate the committee in the prime minister's office. However, the MPs appreciated the work of the committee, and thus it was moved to the Althingi after the September 2021 elections.

According to an interviewee, in Argentina there was already an interest in developing foresight capacity in the 1970s. Nevertheless, it took until mid-2019, following the example of Chile, for the Argentine Senate to create a Future Commission. Here, the general diffusion process reveals an important new feature: the original idea may have to traverse a more proximate and similar national setting before it creates an impact. However, the Commission lasted only a few months, as upon the change of government in December it was discontinued. In 2012 the Philippine Center for Foresight Education and Innovation Research (PhilForesight) was established to advance futures studies and strategic foresight in the country. The idea was conceived at a UNESCO Laoag futures

literacy knowledge lab forum-workshop. Building on this evolving foresight work, the Philippines' Senate established in 2019 a Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking. Interaction, particularly with researchers and international organizations, has the goal of broadening the 'futures' community in the Philippines and of making it a more permanent part of the political system. Much of this activity is driven by the committee chair, Senator Pilar Juliana 'Pia' S Cayetano and her 'Futures Thinking' initiative.

The Committee for the Future in the Lithuanian Seimas was established in late 2020 with the aim of instilling a more strategic foresight culture into Lithuanian decision-making and to coordinate the process of preparing Lithuania's long-term vision. Active collaboration with the government is envisioned, as well as wide-ranging consultation with the public and external stakeholders. The formation of the committee was influenced primarily by good practices in the legislatures of other countries, Finland included. Following the above-mentioned logic of 'localized' institutional diffusion, the Estonian case might have been significant for the Lithuanian initiative.

According to an interviewee, Uruguay is among countries that have exhibited a prolonged effort to create a future institution within its legislature. Unlike in many other South American countries, in Uruguay MPs eventually took ownership of the project, making it a serious effort. Despite problems with low resources that hindered exchanges with Finnish officials, the General Assembly, inspired by the Finnish model, finally established a Special Committee for the Future in 2021. As in the Brazilian case, the initiators of the committee were also likely impacted by the prior experiences in the continent.

Agents and networks of diffusion

Our analysis has uncovered interconnected diffusion patterns operating at three levels: country level, parliamentary level and individual level. In line with the learning and emulation models of diffusion, our findings underline both the role of a pacesetter that serves as a model to be imitated, and the broader salience of international contact networks in facilitating the spread of ideas. However, we must emphasize that the sheer complexity of the networks and the often informal nature of interaction between formative individuals made it very hard to locate exact causal mechanisms and the sequence of events. Notwithstanding the case of Finland, in many country cases even the interviewees themselves found it difficult to exactly locate the origin of future-regarding legislature-based institutions, as obviously the national-level actors also develop their ideas about foresight work through learning from abroad and they need to fit the ideas into their local context to make them successful.

On a more general, country level, international organizations, not least the OECD, have aimed to facilitate the global diffusion of state foresight mechanisms – by actively spreading relevant information and providing a forum for interaction. Foresight communities such as GFC offer a forum where like-minded politicians and public sector officials form networks and exchange ideas about best practices. The interviews and national documents refer to contacts with and guidance from the OECD, while reports from the international foresight community in turn champion those countries with existing foresight mechanisms, not least Finland. These reports clearly have their own 'foresight discourse', reflecting the role of active sender, which is then often repeated in the documents of national executives and legislatures. However, while the OECD and other international organizations now offer hands-on guidance and training, they have not aggressively promoted foresight work, and therefore more important has been the presence on the ground of actors with specific interest in long-term planning, emphasizing the facilitator role of the international organizations. However, our comparison also indicates that support from the OECD and other

international networks has been more important for legislatures with fewer resources (such as Estonia, the Philippines or Iceland) or when the country is taking first steps in strategic foresight.

At the level of legislatures, bilateral contacts become more prominent. Here the activity of the pacesetter, the Finnish Eduskunta, has been crucial. Essentially all other legislature-based future institutions have been inspired by the Committee for the Future – also in their tasks and activities. The actors in the Finnish foresight ecosystem, including government officials, lobbies and researchers, have promoted the Finnish model, while MPs and clerks of the Committee for the Future have spread the word through interparliamentary networks and bilateral avenues. Instead of systematically 'selling their product', the MPs and clerks initially travelled abroad rather spontaneously, exchanging ideas with foreign colleagues, also for learning purposes as the case of 'Asian Tigers' shows. As the Finnish state foresight system became more widely known, visits to Finland became more numerous. Finland transformed from an active sender into an institutionalized example that active emulators sought to learn from in the vein of receiver-driven diffusion.

Formal interparliamentary networks like the IPU were less important for diffusion. Bilateral contacts mattered more, although they were largely formed during the diffusion process and not driven by them. However, the existence of regional networks in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay), northern Europe (Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania) and in the Far East (South Korea, Philippines) reflects the possibility of an intermediary impact of the local context. While the Finnish example has become well known and most countries have maintained active interaction with Finnish officials, in the final initiation phase existing examples from nearby countries may have been significant. In the larger picture, however, it is interesting to note how broadly the model has diffused: legislature-based future institutions now exist in countries that bear little resemblance in terms of geographical proximity and level of development. These countries may share some latent cultural-epistemic perception (on the importance of future-regarding action) that has pushed them to seek similar institutional solutions, but it cannot be confirmed with this analysis.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding, which the highly varied composition of countries also emphasizes, is the centrality of individual agency. This applies to the pacesetter as well as to all the other countries. Besides legislators or ministers, public officials, lobbies and even academics can play significant facilitating roles. Individuals' interest in foresight and other future-regarding activities can stem from professional background, specialization in sustainable development or technological change, but, even without personal motivators, relevant networks can convince individuals of the added value of foresight work. However, while many types of individuals may propose initiatives, our cases clearly suggest that involvement of elected politicians is crucial for success. At least in democratic countries, the involvement of MPs is mandatory for creating new institutions inside legislatures and the lack of motivation among them appears to be the main reason why still so few countries have such organs.

Concluding reflections

This study examined the emergence and diffusion of legislature-based foresight institutions to reveal factors that enhance and hinder the extending of anticipatory governance ideals to parliaments. Normatively speaking, it is a crucial next step in the process of making long-term governance a sustainable, genuinely legitimate endeavour.

Contrary to simple rational-functional top-down models of diffusion, which one might expect to find during the era of deep internationalization, our analysis revealed a complex, semi-random and agency-driven interplay between the pacesetting institution, international networks and

bilateral exchange. From each country we could identify key personalities that were crucial in importing future-institutions to their legislatures, highlighting the role of individual agency in the complex diffusion processes. Advocates of foresight work were learning particularly from the pacesetter, but, simultaneously, collective ideas about the value of strategic foresight and other future-regarding activities were spreading around the world at increasing pace, mixing the emulation and learning logics of diffusion. In time, the agency of the pacesetter changed from active sender to passive example, and the idea 'localized' through regional experiences and contexts.

Of the various agent groups, legislators seem crucially important. In most successful cases they played a central role while the failed experiments (Israel, Hungary, Argentina) did not enjoy sufficient support from elected officials. As the founding and the only truly institutionalized case (Finland) demonstrates, an active agency of legislators produces much-needed legitimacy for novel initiatives. Positively, legislators' prominent role in the successful projects also indicates that if legislatures want to increase their role in anticipatory governance, they are in a good position to make such claims. No one expected the personal motion of an MP to lead anywhere in Finland, whose political practice is strongly dominated by cohesive party groups and a strict government–opposition divide, but only a year later, with a massive cross-party support, the institution was in place (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017; Koskimaa and Raunio, 2020).

Besides paying more attention to the detailed process (scope conditions, timing, etc.) and agency in facilitating and institutionalizing legislature-based future institutions, subsequent research should examine more thoroughly the practical functioning of existing institutions. This would increase our understanding of the institutionalization of these organs, which may be even more important than their emergence, and also show how, exactly, legislatures can contribute to the lengthening of political time perspectives in representative democracies.

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Notes

1. For example, the Scottish Parliament has the Scotland's Futures Forum. Established in 2005, it brings together legislators and external experts and was very much inspired by the Finnish Committee for the Future (Boston et al., 2019: 121–125; Groombridge, 2006).
2. For overviews of the literature, see Graham et al. (2013) and Gilardi and Wasserfallen (2019).
3. The agendas of IFP and INTERFUTURES focused much more on policies instead of governance issues (OECD 2022a).
4. In addition, OECD hosts the Observatory for Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) that works with governments in encouraging new approaches to policymaking (OECD (2022b).
5. The documents consisted primarily of parliamentary standing orders, governmental and parliamentary reports, press releases and background memos, and agendas and outputs of parliamentary foresight units.
6. We consulted all travel documents of the Committee for the Future from the early 1990s onwards.

7. For example, OECD organized a workshop with the Committee for the Future, educating MPs about foresight work and methods: *Ready for the Future: Strengthening Foresight Capacity in the Government of Iceland.* Report on Foresight Workshops held in Reykjavik, Iceland, 15–16 November 2018 by the Strategic Foresight Unit of the OECD.

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