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Stories of Decision-making in a Complex Society

Narratives of change in the context of funding societal action towards futures

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This master's thesis explores how funding decisions as a form of societal decision-making are expected to shape change towards preferable futures. The contemporary operating environment is ever more complex, and wicked problems challenge traditional ways of making societal decisions. Both transition and futures researchers have paid increasing attention to language and how narratives can shape our interpretations of futures. In this study, *narratives of change* are analysed to gain insight into how change is expected to be shaped in contemporary society from the societal decision-making perspective.

Ten Finnish funding experts were interviewed for this study. The results of the narrative analysis show that societal decision-makers hold varying interpretations of how to shape change towards preferable futures. Three different narratives of change were constructed in the narrative analysis: the Nurturing narrative, which relies on enabling sharing and the long-term positive development of knowledge and values in society; the Reinforcing narrative, which seeks to future-proof local actors amid the digital and green transitions; and the Participatory narrative, which emphasises cross-sectoral and grassroots participation and learning, to achieve even systemic and transformative impact. The preferable futures sought in the narratives of change can be typified by four different visions: societal well-being, socio-economic prosperity, international openness, and ecological sustainability.

The systemic Multi-level Perspective (MLP) framework serves as the analytical lens for interpreting societal change. The narratives of change challenge the MLP's emphasis on niche innovation as the primary tool or seed for change. A significant finding is the shared emphasis across all narratives of change on the importance of diverse ways to arrange information flows for shaping change. The study therefore suggests incorporating more socio-cultural structures and cultural elements like values and worldviews of actors for a more comprehensive analysis regarding societal change.

In conclusion, the research suggests that narratives of change can crystallise the perceptions of actors, such as decision-makers, about how change is shaped, thus enriching the application of the MLP. In this study, the narratives of change unravel in detail, for example, the systemic intermediary roles of decision-makers. In this way, narratives of change can be used to generate a more nuanced understanding and a holistic depiction of how decision-makers view futures in society and provide tools to develop practices in an increasingly complex society.

Key words: narrative of change, societal decision-making, preferable futures

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Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii, miten rahoituksen asiantuntijat tulkitsevat rahoituspäätösten edistävän muutosta kohti toivottuja tulevaisuuksia. Toimintaympäristö on yhä kompleksisempi ja viheliäiset ongelmat haastavat perinteiset tavat tehdä yhteiskuntaan vaikuttavia päätöksiä. Sekä transitiotutkijat että tulevaisuudentutkijat ovat kiinnittäneet enenevässä määrin huomiota kieleen ja siihen, miten narratiivit muokkaavat tulkintojamme tulevaisuuksista. *Muutosnarratiivien* analyysillä on mahdollista valottaa sitä, miten muutokseen voi vaikuttaa päätöksen tekijän näkökulmasta ja millaisia tulevaisuuksia päätöksillä tavoitellaan.

Tässä tutkimuksessa haastateltiin kymmentä suomalaista rahoitusasiantuntijaa. Narratiivianalyysin tulokset osoittavat, että rahoittajilla yhteiskunnallisina päätöksentekijöinä on erilaisia tulkintoja siitä, miten muutokseen voi pyrkiä vaikuttamaan kohti toivottavaa tulevaisuutta. Narratiivianalyysin tuloksena rakentui kolme erilaista muutosnarratiivia: Ravitsemisen narratiivi, jossa luotetaan tiedon ja arvojen jakamiseen sekä pitkän aikavälin myönteiseen kehitykseen yhteiskunnassa, Vahvistamisen narratiivi, jossa tavoitellaan paikallisten toimijoiden tulevaisuuskestävyyttä digitaalisen ja vihreän siirtymän keskellä, sekä Osallisuuden narratiivi, jossa korostetaan sektorirajat ylittävää ja ruohonjuuritason osallisuutta ja oppimista jopa systemisten ja transformatiivisten vaikutusten aikaansaamiseksi. Muutosnarratiiveissa tavoitellut toivotut tulevaisuudet voidaan tyypitellä neljään eri visioon: yhteiskunnallinen hyvinvointi, sosiaalis-taloudellinen kukoistus, kansainvälinen avoimuus sekä ekologinen kestävyys.

Systeeminen monitasomalli (MLP) (Geels 2002) toimii tutkimuksessa teoreettisena kehyksenä yhteiskunnallisen muutoksen tulkinnassa. Muutosnarratiivit haastoivat MLP:n korostamaa niche-innovaation merkitystä muutoksen ensisijaisena välineenä tai siemenenä. Tärkeä havainto oli, että huolimatta erilaisuudestaan kaikki muutosnarratiivit toivat esiin informaatiovirtojen merkitystä päätöksissä ja muutoksessa. Tutkimus ehdottaakin, että sosiokulttuuristen rakenteiden ja kulttuuristen elementtien, kuten toimijoiden arvojen ja maailmankatsomuksen, roolia on syytä syventää lisää yhteiskunnallista muutosta tutkittaessa.

Tutkimustyön perusteella on mahdollista ehdottaa, että muutosnarratiivien avulla voi hahmottaa toimijoiden, kuten päätöksentekijöiden, näkemystä muutoksen synnyttämisestä ja näin rikastaa MLP:n soveltamista. Muutosnarratiivit avaavat tässä tutkimuksessa yksityiskohtaisesti esimerkiksi päätöksentekijöiden systeemiä välittäjärooleja. Näin muutosnarratiivien avulla voidaan synnyttää syvempää ymmärrystä ja kokonaiskuvaa siitä, miten päätösten tekijä katsoo yhteiskunnan tulevaisuuksia ja antaa välineitä kehittää toimintatapoja yhä kompleksisemmassa ympäristössä.

Avainsanat: muutosnarratiivi, yhteiskunnallinen päätöksenteko, toivottavat tulevaisuudet

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Research Approach and the Research Questions

The narrative approach has gained increasing attention in the field of futures studies. Many scholars have emphasised the great potential of the narrative approach for futures thinking and studying change in society. Voices in the academic field have even called for a narrative turn or general shift to a narrative paradigm. (Paschen & Ison 2014; Milojević & Inayatullah 2015; Schwartz 2015; Wittmayer et al. 2019.) Milojević and Inayatullah (2015) suggest that narrative foresight can be utilised to discover and create new stories that better meet needs and desires – and thus facilitate preferable futures. However, despite the increasing emphasis on narratives, academic futures research on narratives focusing on societal change and decision-making is scarce, if not minute.

Current grand challenges impose societal decision-makers on choices amid an unprecedented context. The fabric of contemporary society is undergoing acceleration of change, and complexity is increasing in societies, when changes are not incremental and isolated, but they occur simultaneously and are interconnected (see, e.g., Masini 1993; Sardar & Sweeney 2016; Poli 2019). The growth of complexity has brought with it not only disruption, such as the pandemic but also the possibility that new ways of doing things will be rapidly and widely adopted (Wilenius 2022, 47). Additionally, “current societal challenges are interlinked and systemic in terms of their reach and impacts, and are characterised by the features of wickedness and persistence” (Avelino et al. 2019, 196). These wicked problems are related to e.g. environment and climate, rapid technological change, natural resources, security, or demographics. They are difficult to address because they are multifaceted and have no clear-cut solutions, despite having significant implications far into the future (Turner & Baker 2019; Rittel & Webber 1973).

There is a growing consensus that traditional ways of making societal decisions are not sufficient. Policymaking continues to be criticised for its short-term arguments and present-day issues (Steen & Twist 2012, 476–477; Airos et al. 2022), or more extensively, governance, strategic planning, and decision-making are characterised as processes, which have not sufficiently recognised complexity, dynamics and rapid change of the operating environment (see, e.g., Auvinen et al. 2015, 97). For instance, classical top-

down governance, or a liberal free market approach with the belief to bring about social change by market forces can be found outmoded (Loorbach 2010, 162).

Amid societal decisions, our relationship towards the future is dialectic. Our thoughts, images and assumptions about the future guide our decisions and actions in the present. In turn, the decisions we make in the present have a major impact on shaping futures. This two-way relationship between the future and the present has long been recognised in the field of futures studies. (Rubin 2004; Ahvenharju & Pouru-Mikkola 2022.)

In the context of futures studies, it is thus vital to shed more holistic light on decision-making processes in the present, and the reasoning behind them. Our societies could change radically in the next 10 to 15 years, as Wilenius (2022, 47) writes, and enter an era of hyperchange due to accelerating technological development and the changing needs of societies. Instead of seeking mere insight into paradigm leaps of certain developing trajectories, futures studies methods increasingly seek to interpret the holistic, systemic development of societies (ibid., 46).

For this holistic interpretation, it is narrative methods and frameworks that can be deployed. What is essential regarding futures, in their core, narrative and time are intrinsically linked: narrative is movement through time (Milojević & Inayatullah 2015, 152). Narrative imposes a specific structure on past, present, and future events, a structure that these events do not inherently possess, allowing us to make sense of these events across all three time dimensions, and enabling us to make choices, take actions, and devise strategies (ibid., 153).

Given the use of narratives has been important for futures studies from the beginning, for instance, regarding scenarios, it was only after the postmodern turn that narrative as a term has entered broader academic use (Milojević & Inayatullah 2019, 152). Likewise, transition researchers have started to look more into language and how, for example, narratives are shaping socio-political interpretations of problems, actors, innovations, and transition pathways (Geels 2019, 193). Narratives are widely understood to both impact and reflect societal change, and they can be accordingly referred to as *narratives of change* (Wittmayer et al. 2019; Dobroć et al. 2023). Miller et al. (2015) state that if the potential of narrative is fully realised, futures research based on narrative strategies may encourage individual and collective storytelling and meaning construction and enhance societal capacity to meet governance challenges.

This master's thesis takes up the challenge of raising insight into the significance of narratives in terms of societal decision-making. The study delves into the interplay between changing society, decision-making regarding expectations towards change and paths to futures. The decision-makers chosen for this study are funding experts who make concrete daily decisions and funding choices to promote activity in society. Funding organisation experts are perceived as societal decision-makers, who have a significant part in the process of catalysing societal action due to their professional location in a societal system. Funding organisations function simultaneously on several interfaces, often comprising governance, regulations, organisational strategies, and financial systems, but also the awarded activities and actors such as development projects, researchers, artists, businesses, non-profit organisations, and diverse communities, teams, and individuals. Funding is thus a certain kind of vantage point to society. Hence, there is a reason to believe the interpretations of their choices to promote societal action towards futures contribute to futures studies.

The focus of the study is societal change, and the research is viewed and interpreted through systemic theoretical framing, specifically the Multi-level Perspective (MLP) model (Geels 2002). Socio-technical transitions research has studied societal change since the early 2000s (Geels 2019, 188), and today there is a comprehensive body of systemic research literature to build on. The MLP, rooted in transitions research, has been a powerful tool in hypothesising trajectories of change in social systems. The MLP is deployed as the theoretical framing since it elucidates the dynamics of change across multiple levels, from micro to meso to macro, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of societal change. As for the narrative approach, the study utilises narrative analysis to interpret the research data and to pursue a holistic grip on the decision-makers' interpretations towards futures.

The study consists of two layers of research objectives. First, the study examines what kinds of preferable futures are shaped in the narratives constructed in the interviews of funding experts. Second, the study explores which kinds of elements and ways of action can constitute the expected change towards the preferable futures. Through these objectives, the study aims to answer the main research question: How are funding decisions expected to shape futures as a form of societal decision-making?

1.2 The Research Context

The context of the research focuses on grant-based funding. Hence, such private funding instruments that are related to venture capitalists or loan providers were excluded from the research context.

The field of funding in Finland is diverse (Figure 1). In the public sector, several organisations grant funding. Under the administration of the State of Finland, ministries, or their organisations award funding. For example, The Ministry of Education and Culture grants state aid and subsidies for projects relating to education, research, culture, sport, and youth work, or The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health provides grants e.g. the development of social and health care, health promotion, and other such projects. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, on their behalf, focuses on funding e.g. enterprises, RD&I, and regional development. There are public-sector organisations such as ELY-Centres (regional state administrative authorities), Finnvera (financing for enterprises), Business Finland (funds for innovation, trade, travel, and investment promotion), and the Academy of Finland (funding for scientific research). Further in the public sector, Regional Councils are associations of Finnish municipalities. They aim to serve the interests of the regions and municipalities. Both Regional Councils and ELY-Centres, for example, distribute EU funding in Finland. (See, for example, Academy of Finland 2022; Business Finland 2022; ELY-keskus 2022; EU Funding Advisory Service 2022; Finnvera 2022; Kansalaisyhteiskunta 2022; Kuntaliitto 2022; Local Finland 2022; OKM 2022; STM 2022; TEM 2022.)

In addition to public grant-based funding organisations, there is a wide range of private-sector funding operators. There are around 800 grant-making private foundations (charitable trusts / non-profit foundations) that support science, art, and other non-profit activities in Finland (Säätiöt ja rahastot 2024). For instance, members of the Association of Finnish Foundations shared nearly 516 million euros in 2022 (ibid.).

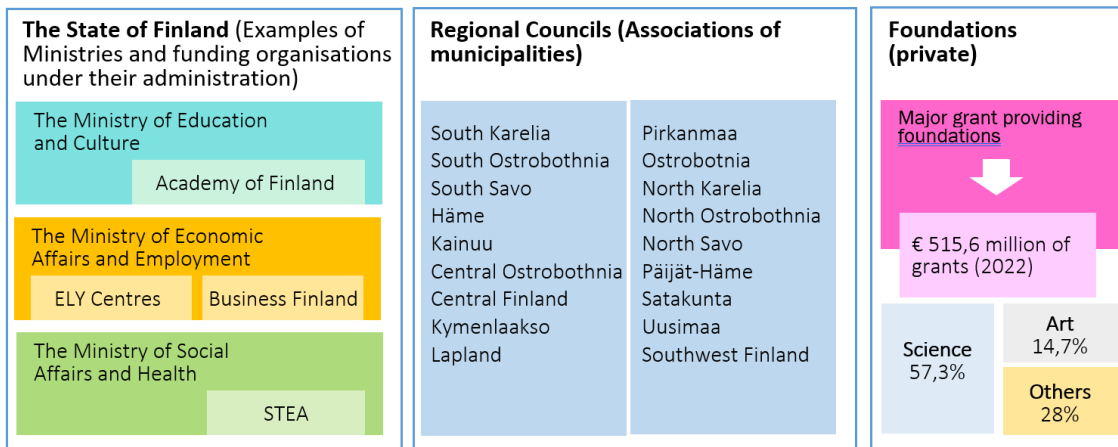


Figure 1 The relevant sectors of grant-based funding in the research context. The operators are examples of the major funding organisations; some grant-providing organisations are not included in the figure.

The following part, Chapter 2, moves on to review the theoretical framing and the relevant concepts. After that, in Chapter 3, I will describe how the process of collecting research data was conducted and how the narrative analysis was applied. The results from the empirical investigation are presented in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, I will discuss the main research findings. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes and outlines implications for the field of futures studies and recommendations for further research work.

2 The Theoretical Framework

As Milojević and Inayatullah (2015) suggest, narratives can be utilised to facilitate preferable futures. According to the general principle of futures studies, there is not one future but many alternative futures (Masini 1993, 8). The future can be looked at in terms of possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures. Possible futures are the futures that we can imagine. They can be generated by intuitive and personal processes. These futures might happen, based on some futures knowledge. Plausible futures refer to ‘possibles’ that could happen, but they are the futures that we can imagine based on the currently available knowledge (e.g. physical laws or social processes). Probable futures are the futures we think are likely to happen based on the known development trajectories. When examined, we need to look for connectedness and relationships and the likelihood of their occurring. Preferable futures, in turn, are those in which we would like to live. They should happen. When they are on the focus, it is about expressing preferences for alternative paths. Preferable futures are related to personal and social values, and they are normative by nature. (Masini 1993, 8–9; Poli 2015, 91; Voros 2017.)

One way to look at preferable futures is the concept of a vision. “A vision is a statement or image of the future we are committed to creating” (Bezold et al. 2009, 4). Compared to an idea, a vision is more since it has the power to motivate and align efforts. A vision refers to having a direction and setting goals. A vision raises one’s aspirations, it is the preferable future, and it depicts values translated into the future and made real. When one embraces a vision, it can turn into an inspirational force that pulls the present towards the envisioned future. (Ibid., 4–5.) Bezold et al. (2009, 4) summarise: “if scenarios, which deal with the plausible future, represent futures for the head, vision represents futures for the heart”. Likewise, Inayatullah (2013, 58) states that visions are foundational to the futures field and refers to Polak (1973, 17), who has underlined the significance of images of the future for cultures and nations to flourish or decline.

Nevertheless, the present, with all its occurring changes, is a breeding ground for all these potential futures and visions. Mannermaa (1986, 658–659) elucidates that “the object of future-oriented research is the present reality and historical knowledge available”, and instead of studying the future, “we study the present reality in front of the future”. Bell (2003, 236) writes that futures studies need to be concerned with much that is part of the past and the present, as they have a bearing on the future. For a reason, Bell (2003, 88–

90) outlines “Interpreting the Past and Orientating the Present” as one of the nine main tasks of futures studies. Futures thinking is indispensable for “deciding and acting in the present and balancing the use of present and future resources”.

Each theoretical framework contains underlying assumptions and goals (Sovacool & Hess 2017, 735) and they provide various interpretations of the research issue. Against this backdrop, the study analyses narratives in the present, and the narratives are understood to inform the present about the preferable futures, which, in turn, are normative interpretations of the societal decision-makers. In addition to the narrative approach, the theoretical framework of this study builds on systems thinking. In a system, all the elements, interconnections, and purposes have their essential, interacting roles (Meadows 2009, 17). The underlying comprehension is that whenever there is societal activity, there are implications on the interconnected societal system and some kind of change emerges.

In the next subsections, both theoretical approaches are more closely introduced, and the systemic framework of the Multilevel Perspective is described in more detail.

2.1 The Narrative Approach

We are homo narrans (Czarniawska 2004). We need narratives to understand our lives in the first place, or the lives of others. In recent years, there has been a significant shift in the social sciences towards narrative knowledge (Johansson 2014). The general narrative turn began to take shape in the 1960s, and today the study of narrative can be found largely in cross-disciplinary usage (Riessman 2008, 14–15).

Riessman (2008) recognises the challenge of defining narrative, and that a range of definitions are often linked to discipline. In general, the speaker in a narrative couples events into a sequence that is consequential for later action. It also contributes to the meanings that the speaker wants others to hold. The events are selected, organised, connected, and assessed as meaningful for someone. Narratives can be of many types, written or visual, but whatever the content is, there must be the consequential linking of events or ideas. “Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected.” (Ibid., 3, 5.) de Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) summarise that for a text to be considered a narrative, it must move through time, including the sequences of events that shape its plot.

The history of narratology sheds light on the interpretations of narrative. Classical narratologists considered the story as the object of study. Story was seen as a series of temporally and causally ordered events. This dominant role of action over other story elements can be traced back to Aristotle. Russian formalists brought into the discussion the distinction between story (events) and the way it is told, and later many narratologists introduced the differentiation between narration as the act of narrating, discourse as the narrative text, and story as the basic sequence of events. The fairytale of Snow White has a basic set of elements, constituting a plot that makes it look like the same story no matter which way or how many times it is told. (Fina, de & Georgakopoulou 2012, 2–3.)

In social sciences, the focus is on how narrative is both a mode of knowing and a mode of communication. The narrative mode of knowing “consists in organising experience with the help of a scheme assuming the intentionality of human action” (Czarniawska 2004, 7). Czarniawska (2004) stresses that despite the causality of narrative, “it is crucial to see that narrative, unlike science, leaves open the nature of the connection”. There is space for remaking and negotiation of meaning, such as the question: “Are you sure?”. Narrative as communication, in turn, is about narrative being the main form of social life. Narrative is the primary tool in making sense of social action. (Ibid., 13–26.) Constructing and sharing of stories can be understood as an essential element in social organisation. Narrative is a medium of cultural expression, organisation and learning, and a creator of cultural contexts. Narrative hence acts as a meaning-making device, and it constructs and negotiates reality. (Wittmayer et al. 2009; Paschen & Ison 2014, 1086.)

Narratives serve different purposes for individuals and groups. Riessman (2008, 8–9) writes that remembering the past is the most familiar one. Narrative constitutes past experience, and it supports individuals to make sense of the past. On the other hand, narratives can also argue with stories, or they are used to persuade or mislead others. Also, narratives engage an audience in the experience of the narrator, or they are used to entertain. According to Riessman (ibid.), narrative can also mobilise others into action for progressive social change as has happened in the civil rights movements when commonalities in the stories, or oral testimonies created group belonging.

Hyvärinen (2008, 48) underlines that especially in terms of social aspects of narratives, it is important to recognise that narratives neither exist in a timeless world nor come out of nothing. There have been interpretations of narratives as “subjective meaning-making”,

but Hyvärinen (*ibid.*, 51) argues that narrative should not be comprehended as a mere site of self-expression and private, subjective meaning. Rather, Hyvärinen understands narration and narratives as social and cultural practices so that in social research, cultural and social conventions should be embedded in narratives.

The social reality related to narrative is important to recognise in the research context. In the narrative approach, a research interview is not a window into social reality but “it is a part, a sample of that reality” (Czarniawska 2004, 52). Narrative theory does not view narratives as stories that transmit facts or truths about the world, but instead, they are about how people interpret the world from their specific social, historical, and cultural locations (Paschen & Ison 2014). According to Czarniawska (2004, 52–53), an interviewee may retell certain existing narratives, or the interview itself may become a site for narrative production. An interviewee may fabricate a narrative and thus reveal the narrative devices in practical use to the researcher. “The researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation so that there are two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning” (Riessman 2008, 21–23). Narratives should hence not be addressed as research objects lying around waiting to be picked. Riessman (*ibid.*, 50) underlines that scholars have a major role in the formation of narrative data: they are present, they listen and question and thus shape the narration. Also transcribing the interviews is an interpretive practice since the displays of the text are constructed and decisions about cropping narrative segments are made by the researcher.

Many kinds of texts can be studied narratively, be it written, spoken, or visual. A narrative may be present, for instance, in tales, drama, history, cinema, conversation, pieces of news, artwork, or scientific theories. In a research interview, narratives may come in many forms - as an answer to a single question or as a long narrative building over several interviews. (Riessman 2008, 4, 23.) However, Riessman (*ibid.*, 5) criticises the increasingly generalised use of the term narrative and how its specificity has been lost with popularisation. All talk and text are not narrative, and the term has also been wrongly used in policing language.

In futures studies, according to Milojević and Inayatullah (2015, 153), research benefits from understanding the role of narrative in future-related work. Narrative foresight shifts the focus of future-oriented thinking from primarily concentrating on new technologies or the general question of what lies ahead, to examining the underlying worldviews and

myths that shape our understanding of alternative futures. Narrative may maintain the status quo among dominant frameworks of meaning, but narrative can also be used to create transformations on individual and social levels. (Ibid., 153.) By narrative transformations, it is possible to shape alternative futures, which contribute to strategy deployment. This differs from planning which rather “seeks to control and close the future” (ibid., 154).

Although narratives linked to a timeline have been used for decades in scenario building, Jarva (2014) problematises the efficiency of scenarios, which are often “buried in the archives of history” once they are drafted and never incarnate in real-world action. Jarva suggests there is potential specifically in the narrative approach for filling the gap between futures images and action. Also, Paschen and Ison (2014, 1085) argue that by “taking the theoretical implications of narrative research seriously, the narrative orientation provides a complementary paradigm for adaptation research and practice because it draws attention to questions fundamental to the production of knowledge including actors and actions”.

In futures research, the narrative approach has been proposed as a potential way to support public participation and deliberation in energy futures (Miller et al. 2015), or to analyse decision-making with a novel typology, which combines futures thinking, climate knowledge, and narrative communication (Coulter et al. 2019). Riedy (2020) has studied scholarly articles and identified alternative discourses that have emerged to challenge the dominant neoliberal capitalism discourse regarding sustainable futures and transformation (ibid., 107–108). Wittmayer et al. (2019) link futures studies and narrative research in their study of social innovation and narratives of change.

2.2 Systemic View on Society

2.2.1 Systems in a Complex Society

From the human perspective, diverse social structures can be seen to function in a way they are societal systems, which meet societal needs (Haan, de & Rotmans 2011, 92). A broad range and variety of structures can be considered societal systems, be it energy supply, transport, or healthcare systems. Also, geographic regions, such as cities, regions, or nations, can be considered societal systems, and the same holds for ecological systems such as rivers, or forests. de Haan and Rotmans (ibid.) also bring about abstract systems, e.g. policy systems, financial systems, or education systems. Thus, the concept of society

can be interpreted as a manifold and dynamic systemic structure with numerous systems and their subsystems.

Meadows (2009, 2) defines a system as a set of things that produces a pattern of behaviour over time. “A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something” (ibid., 11). When exploring systems, one focuses more on interconnections than the elements they couple. Given a system is structurally a divisible whole, functionally it is indivisible (Ackoff 1970, 3). Any system is a set of interconnected, interdependent agents which generate behaviour that cannot be caused by any single element (Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015, 112–113). According to Meadows (2009, 11), “a system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose”. Elements may be either tangible or intangible. Interconnections with all their feedback loops are the relationships that hold the elements together. Some interconnections are physical flows, such as the water, but oftentimes they are flows of information, which Meadows (ibid., 14) calls “signals that go to decision points or action points within a system”. According to Meadows (ibid.), “information holds systems together and plays a great role in determining how they operate”. Purposes can be deduced from behaviour, instead of rhetoric or stated goals. All the elements, interconnections, and purposes in the system are essential – they interact and they have their roles. The elements are often the least important in defining the characteristics of a system, but interconnections are essential since altering relationships usually changes system behaviour. Finally, a shift in purpose transforms a system, despite each element or interconnection remaining the same. For instance, it can be asked if a university's purpose is for disseminating knowledge or making money. (Meadows 2009, 13–17.)

Systems exist in time, and over a period of time, all systems change (Leonard & Beer 2009, 6). Most social systems, according to complexity researchers, can be characterised as complex adaptive systems, resulting in unpredictable and emergent changes (Tjörnbo & McGowan 2022). A system is complex, such as the global economy, if it is interconnected with many other systems and if its cause-and-effect relations are not linear. Discontinuity is its noticeable feature. (Heinonen et al. 2017, 5.) As a result, multiple factors, multiple actors, and multiple perspectives on a situation interconnect and their relationships are not possible to compute (Leonard & Beer 2009, 7). In systemic transition and transformation theories, depicting change often stems from understanding the coupling and nexus in systems, as their resulting developments either slow down or

accelerate each other, creating volatility and unpredictability in systems (Soininen et al. 2022, 109).

Complex should be distinguished from *complicated*. Whereas complicated problems originate from causes that can be distinguished from each other, and there is an output for each input to the system, complex problems stem from the nexus of inextricable, interconnected causes. When a complex problem is discussed, the entire system needs to be addressed. (Poli 2015, 94.) In terms of futures, it is notable that most complex systems are subject to unequal chance variations that may significantly alter the conditions in a system (Leonard & Beer 2009, 7). Complexity feeds volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity in society (Heinonen et al. 2017, 5). Masini (1993, 19) highlights the importance of understanding complexity concerning futures: the more a problem is complex, and the more variables are needed to describe it, the greater the level of uncertainty.

As a result, complexity is, for example, the core feature of most policy problems today, notably due to increasing interdependencies, and thereby, governments are facing a volatile policy context. Measures that previously worked have become too inefficient or they are causing unforeseen effects (Tönurist et al. 2020). Decision-making is a process that converts information into instructions, which are expected to affect the behaviour of the system in order to improve its performance (Ackoff 1974, 9). It has been estimated that current decision-making systems do not regard effects enough, and sensitivity to changes is often lacking (Auvinen et al. 2015, 97). Tjörnbo and McGowan (2022) suggest that instead of top-down fashion, societies should take advantage of changes beyond our control and ability to predict. That is how we might manage to shift key system dynamics into preferable ones. Poli (2019) estimates that most decision-makers still want solutions that can fully solve problems, and by this, they treat complex problems as if they were complicated problems that can be managed by a control and command strategy. Poli underlines the importance of “learning to dance” with a complex system instead of trying to solve the problems.

Meadows (2009, 87) crystallises why looking further and broader is so important while we try to take those recommended systemic dance steps: “You can’t navigate well in an interconnected, feedback-dominated world unless you take your eyes off short-term events and look for long-term behavior and structure”. To avoid misreading the system, she writes (ibid., 75–85), we should be aware of nonlinearities, limits, and delays, and

respect the three properties that make systems work and make systems sustainable: resilience, self-organisation, and hierarchy. Resilience means a system can survive in a changing environment. “The opposite of resilience is brittleness or rigidity” (ibid., 76). Resilience differs from static stability so that resilience is hard to see and measure, and resilient systems may be very dynamic with various oscillations, outbreaks or cycles of succession and collapse. Self-organisation refers to learning, the capacity of a system to make its structure more complex, producing heterogeneity and unpredictability, which is likely to devise new structures and practices. But hierarchies, in the end, give the system stability and sustain the functionality of the system. If subsystems get too dominant, things get suboptimised. Again, if central control is rigid and too regulative, there is not enough autonomy to keep subsystems flourishing.

2.2.2 Perspectives on Change, Transition and Transformation

Transition studies have gained popularity as they provide a framework for understanding the interaction in society that causes change. Transition studies comprehend societal systems as complex adaptive systems, and the foci of research are non-linear and long-term processes of change. Interaction occurs between human and non-human elements, and it influences several sectors of society: social, cultural, institutional, political, economic, ecological, and technological. (Avelino & Rotmans 2009, 544.)

The unit of analysis at the core of transition studies is the socio-technical system, and the focus is fundamental structural change (Zolfagharian et al. 2019). Systemic transitions are often named as a key in responding to the grand challenges, for instance, related to the environment or demographics (Auvinen et al. 2015, 97). Frantzeskaki and de Haan (2009, 594) illustrate what new aspects the societal transition theories have brought into the discussion. For instance, traditionally, policy analysts have paid attention mostly to external forces that are highly unpredictable and uncertain. However, from mere external forces posing change in society, it is possible to draw only descriptive and plausible scenarios. Transition theories, in turn, show that transitional change occurs also from within, both inside and outside the system.

There has been a degree of uncertainty around the terminology referring to change in a societal system. In the lack of conceptual consensus, referring to literature consistently is a challenge. Hölscher, Wittmayer and Loorbach (2018, 1–3) state that the familiar concepts referring to change, ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’, have become even

buzzwords in political and scientific discourses. Both ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ usually refer to radical, non-linear, and structural change in complex adaptive systems. In general, these concepts signal the ambition to shift from the mere ability to understand problems to find solutions for preferable societal and environmental change. (Hölscher et al. 2018, 1–3.) To bring forth more conceptual clarity, Hölscher et al. (ibid.) suggest these two concepts are not mutually exclusive but they entail nuanced perspectives on how to describe societal change: they are often employed in different system foci. ‘Transition’ has been mainly used to analyse changes in societal sub-sub-systems such as energy or mobility, and it focuses on social, technological, and institutional interactions. Instead, ‘transformation’ is more commonly used in the context of large-scale changes - global, national, or local - in whole societies. For instance, the IPBES (2023) (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), defines ‘transformative change’ as “a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values”.

2.2.3 The Multi-level Perspective on Society

The Multilevel Perspective (MLP) (Geels 2002) revolves around understanding socio-technical ‘transitions’, which are shifts to new kinds of systems regarding, for instance, energy, mobility, housing, or food. Transitions do not involve just technological innovations but also changes in consumer practices, policies, cultural meanings, infrastructures, and business models (Geels 2020). The MLP framework combines ideas from STS (Socio-technical systems), sociology of innovation, evolutionary economics, and neo-institutional theory (Geels 2011, 34; 2019, 187), and, for instance, the earlier research of Rip and Kemp (1998) on multilevel perspective (see also Haan, de & Rotmans 2011, 91). The MLP addresses three levels of analytical concepts: niche innovations, sociotechnical regimes, and sociotechnical landscape (Geels 2002; 2004) (henceforth: regime and landscape). The MLP suggests that transitions occur through the interplay between processes at these three levels (Geels 2019, 190). (Figure 2.)

The macro-level of landscape is the wider external context, which influences niche and regime dynamics. Actors at niche and regime levels however cannot influence landscape in the short term. Landscape level encompasses slow-changing factors or deep structural developments. These heterogeneous factors are such as demographic trends, political ideologies, societal values, macroeconomic patterns, wars, emigration, broad political

coalitions, or environmental challenges. (Geels 2002, 1260; Geels 2011, 28.) Geels and Schot (2007, 403) illustrate landscape using analogies: some things do not change or change slowly such as climate, or there are long-term changes such as industrialisation in the 19th century, but also rapid external shocks may occur, such as the way wars break out.

The meso-level stands for socio-technological regime. According to Geels (2002, 1260; 2004, 904–905), regimes are the deep structure of socio-technological systems. Regimes are semi-coherent sets of rules, that are linked together, and different groups share different rules. It is possible to distinguish different kinds of regimes, such as technological, scientific, political, socio-cultural, and user-market regimes. Regimes are autonomous but linked and aligned to each other. Geels (2002, 1260) names regime as socio-technical since there is a multi-actor network affecting regime developments. For instance, technical trajectories are influenced not only by engineers but also by users, public authorities and policymakers, societal groups, suppliers, research networks, or financial networks.

Regimes refer to “intangible and underlying deep structures” such as beliefs, heuristics, rules of thumb, routines, standardised ways of doing things, policy paradigms, visions, promises, social expectations, and norms (Geels 2011, 31). “Regime’ is an interpretive analytical concept that invites the analyst to investigate what lies underneath the activities of actors who reproduce system elements” (ibid.). Notably, there is a reason for regimes to exist. Regime stabilises the existing system (Geels 2011, 26). A stable socio-technical regime provides benefits for actors, such as some certainty about future developments, reduced risks and savings in resources, for example, as the industry does not have to repeatedly redesign its operations (Witkamp et al. 2011, 670). From an economic standpoint, investments are less risky, designs can be scaled, and resources are saved (ibid.). The form of change that regime catalyses is likely incremental, and it also guides innovation activities towards an incremental trajectory (Geels 2002, 1260). “Prevailing regimes are very stable and resistant to change” (Witkamp et al. 2011, 670). There are many reasons for this kind of rigidity: regulations and standards, the adaptation of certain lifestyles, previous investments, built infrastructures, and existing competencies, but also blinding cognitive routines (Geels & Schot 2007, 400).

This kind of disposition can be explained with the term path-dependency. The concept implies, at its most basic, that the past influences the future (Derbyshire 2016, 48). The

future trajectory of a system depends both on its present state and the path it has taken to reach the present. Nevertheless, it does not mean things continue self-evidently, as they were, to the future, but instead, path-dependency is about the intertwining perspectives of past, present, and future. (Ibid., 48, 52.) Path-dependency is due to several lock-in mechanisms. Techno-economic lock-in is formed by investments e.g. in infrastructures and competencies, or by low costs thanks to scaling solutions and decades of development. Social and cognitive lock-ins are formed by human routines, alignments between social groups, and lifestyles. Institutional and political lock-ins stem from regulations, standards, and policy networks that favour incumbent factors, but also, from certain vested interests to hinder change. (Geels 2019, 189.) Unruh (2000, 824) estimates that once established, “institutions tend to become locked-in and undergo only incremental change for long periods”. Unruh (2000) explores in depth how lock-in emerges in society. It has been an essential notion in his work that carbon lock-in has risen from systemic interactions among technologies and institutions. Technological, institutional, and social forces interlock and cause locking-out alternative carbon-saving technologies through several systemic processes (ibid., 820–827).

The third level in the MLP is the micro-level of niches. Niche-level is crucial because niches provide the seeds for change (Geels 2011, 27). Niches refer to the generation and development of novelties as actors in precarious networks work on innovation. It also provides space to build social networks, such as user–producer relationships, which support innovation. However, novelties are initially unstable configurations with a low performance which makes niche-level to function as incubation rooms for innovation. (Geels 2002, 1261–1262; Geels & Schot 2007, 400.) Novelties are produced based on knowledge and capabilities and focused on the problems of regimes. There are three core processes in niche development: 1) the articulation of expectations or visions, which e.g. aim to attract attention and funding from external actors, 2) the building of social networks and the enrolment of more actors, and 3) learning and articulation, e.g. technical design, market demand, business models, policy instruments, symbolic meanings. (Geels 2002, 1261; Geels 2011, 28.) Although regimes and niches share similar kinds of organisational structures with their communities of interaction, the main difference lies in size and stability: niches are small and unstable whereas regime communities are large, stable, and coordinated by well-articulated rules (Geels & Schot 2007, 402). When social

networks grow larger and rules become more stable and constraining, niche innovations may end up becoming regimes (ibid., 403).

The MLP suggests that socio-technical transitions take several decades. Transitions evolve in alignments of trajectories and ongoing processes within and between the three levels. Niche-innovations build up internal momentum, and changes at landscape level create pressure on regime. Changes could be, for example, related to climate change, broad cultural changes in values and ideologies, or change in political coalitions. If there is no external landscape pressure, the regime remains dynamically stable and will reproduce itself, and radical niche innovations have little chance to break through while reinforcing landscape developments help stabilise regime. When regime is destabilised, windows of opportunity for niche-innovations emerge, and innovations end up competing with the existing regime. There are four phases with different core activities: experimentation (trial-and-error learning, building social networks of actors to develop the innovation, and articulation of positive visions), stabilisation (small market niches, design rules, standards etc.), diffusion and disruption (the struggle of competition, political conflicts), and institutionalisation and anchoring (a new system replaces the old one). (Geels 2002, 1291–1263; 2004, 914; 2020; Geels & Schot 2007, 406.)

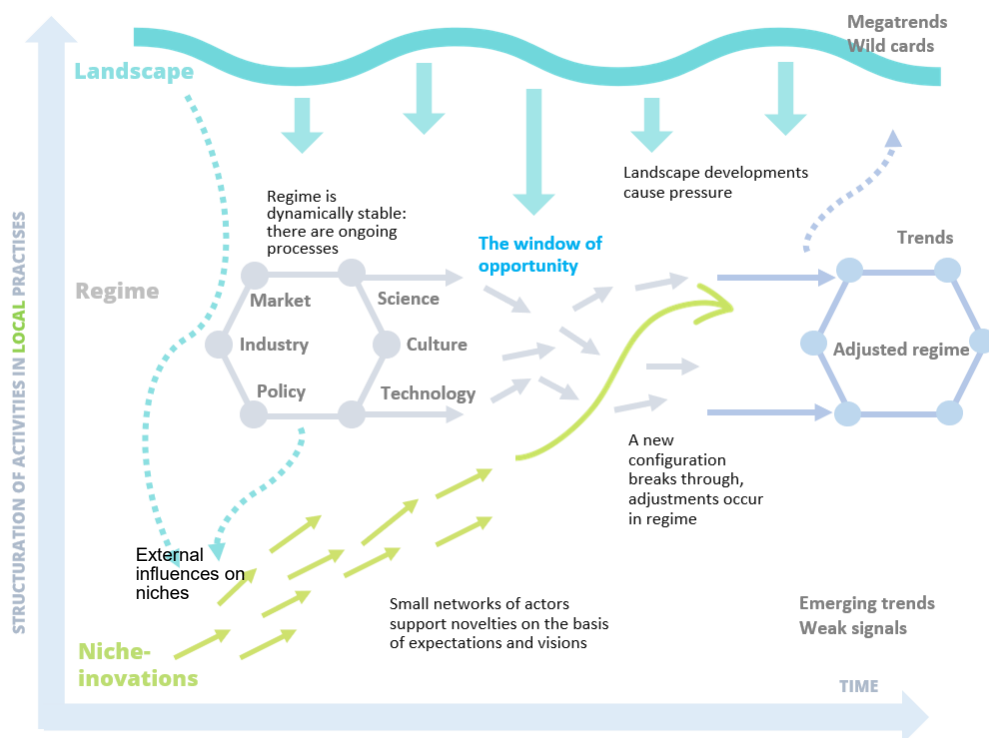


Figure 2 Multi-level perspective on transitions (Geels & Schot 2007, 400–401). The futures research concepts of megatrends, wild cards, trends and weak signals can be linked to the framework (Vähäkari et al. 2021).

Niche innovation is thus at the heart of MLP transition processes. From the outset, innovation has been defined largely according to the Schumpeterian theoretical framework, which outlines innovation as “a new product, process, or market structure” and it is readily associated with wealth generation, competitiveness, and market position (see, for example, Solis-Navarrete et al. 2021).

In the management field, a common definition of innovation has been ‘the profitable exploitation of a new idea’ (Cajaiba-Santana 2014, 43). Yet, broader and more inclusive approaches have enriched the theory of innovation to contemplate other types of innovation (Solis-Navarrete et al. 2021). For instance, the social element of innovation has gained attention and innovation research has increasingly accepted the process of innovation itself as social action (Cajaiba-Santana 2014, 42–43), and the need for social innovation is increasingly discussed. At its shortest, social innovation could be defined to be a tool to shape society (Wittmayer et al. 2019). The upsurge in discussing social innovation is, according to Ziegler (2017, 390), the result of discontent with mainstream innovation, as social innovation questions “the focus on economic development and technological innovation for markets”. A traditional example of social innovation is a social enterprise, but it can be also about, e.g., new governance arrangements, green nudges to stimulate behaviour change, civil-society-facilitated peer-to-peer learning on reducing emissions, alternative food networks, bike sharing, less-meat initiatives, or alternative credit provision (Avelino et al. 2019; Geels 2019).

All in all, de Haan and Rotmans (2011, 91) assess that the regime-niche language of socio-technical transition studies has been proven to be a useful conceptual tool. Again, Geels (2011, 34) reminds us of that frameworks such as the MLP are not “truth machines” but they need to be applied as interpretive, heuristic devices that guide the analyst’s attention to relevant questions and problems. To utilise frameworks fruitfully, an analyst needs theoretical sensitivity and interpretive creativity to see patterns and mechanisms.

2.2.4 Criticism of the Socio-technical Approach

Sociotechnical transition theories have faced criticism and various development needs. de Haan and Rotmans (2011, 91) bring forth two main problems. First, the body of literature on transitions has traditionally revolved around technology. Likewise, the MLP has taken technology and innovation as an analytical entrance point. The original perspective on transitions has gained critique due to bottom-up, niche-driven bias (Geels

& Schot 2007, 402). To counter the bias, the typology of multiple transition pathways (Geels & Schot 2007) considers transitions as outcomes of alignments between developments at multiple levels. The four transition pathways – transformation path, de-alignment and re-alignment path, technological substitution path, and reconfiguration path – differ from each other according to the various levels of landscape pressure, the priority of actors (regime or niche), and the type of (inter)actions (ibid., 414). Second, the transition literature has been criticised for addressing transitions and complex phenomena with conceptual simplicity. For instance, the MLP is claimed to provide “a quasi-static view of transitions” and a “one-dimensional snapshot of a transition” (Haan, de & Rotmans 2011, 91). Sovacool and Hess (2017, 709) also characterise the MLP presenting transitions as processes of societal levels triggering each other.

The debate on how actors relate to socio-technical transitions has been increasing in recent years. The image of actors in the transition literature has still been described as static, and the influence of culture on an individual's behavioural change has not been sufficiently explored (Koistinen et al. 2019; Huttunen et al. 2021). In this regard, Siivonen et al. (2022, 203) argue it is important to understand what culture is and how it is present in human actions and social interactions since the most impactful leverage points in transitions are related to values and worldviews. Values and worldviews often include tacit knowledge, which is recurring but hard to detect and imperceptibly changing in our everyday lives (ibid., 202).

Geels (2020) agrees that the MLP was “initially developed as a ‘global’ model to provide a big picture understanding of longitudinal socio-technical transition processes”, while the MLP's local model had remained underdeveloped. Nevertheless, Geels has along the way pointed out that although the MLP representations do not explicitly depict actors, the MLP is “shot through with agency, because the trajectories and multi-level alignments are always enacted by social groups” (Geels 2011, 29). Actors participate in maintaining and modifying the system. Rules and institutions shape their perceptions and actions. Social groups have distinct characteristics and follow different rules. Actors tend, for instance, to share a particular language, “jargon”: they read particular professional journals, or share certain values and problem agendas. As different groups share different rules, it is possible to distinguish different regimes such as science or financial regimes. (Geels 2004, 898, 900, 905). Also, Geels and Schot (2007) note that specific types of agency and interactions have been identified for different transition pathways in the MLP.

Now, researchers have taken further steps to develop the microfoundations of the MLP's local model. Geels (2020) has discussed the conceptualisation of agency, and the microfoundations, in the MLP's underlying theories. The agency can be defined as the capacity of an actor to act “which may instantiate itself in concrete actions in specific contexts” (Geels 2020). Geels (2019, 817) stresses that the MLP does interpret socio-technical transitions as enacted by multiple social groups who engage in multiple activities such as “exploration, learning, debate, negotiation, power struggle, conflict, investment, coalition building, goal setting in the context of rules and institutions, including belief systems and norms”. Geels (2020) also proffers theoretical insights into the agency in systemic transitions. Geels lines that individual but also collective actors such as firms, social movements, consumer organisations, or ministries are prominent entities in socio-technical transition. Geels also brings forth that agency can be shaped by cultural contexts such as symbols, discourses, or narratives, along with social-structural, economic, or regulatory contexts. However, Huttunen et al. (2021) call for openness to different approaches to the agency to proceed beyond the solutions offered by single scientific disciplines. They see that developing wider perspectives on agency can guide the analysis of transitions so that it is not only about, for instance, discrepancies between niches, regimes, and landscapes, as one may express in MLP terms.

In the context of futures studies, it is significant to explicate that the MLP mostly helps in looking back to understand historical transitions (Sovacool & Hess 2017, 711), and it does not explain how a certain trend or phenomenon develops further. Vähäkari et al. (2020, 8) underline that the actual change between “the different actors forming, reproducing and altering the regime requires more attention in further studies”. Given change accelerates in a complex society, it is also reasonable to ask if the MLP is agile enough to respond to analytical challenges regarding ever-increasing interconnections in society. Köhler et al. (2019, 21) aptly point out that transition studies, in general, “are beginning to widen their scope from focusing on single systems (energy, mobility, water, food, and health) to ‘multi-sector’ transitions, and the interactions of various systems”.

2.3 The Summary of the Theoretical Approach

This section has attempted to provide a summary of the literature relating to relative principles of futures studies, narrative theories, and the Multi-level Perspective on socio-technical transitions. Now that both transition and futures researchers have started

increasingly to pay attention to language and how narratives can shape socio-political interpretations, there is a reason to presume that a combination of the narrative and systemic approaches is applicable in analysing decision-making and its implications on societal action towards futures. There are examples of combining these two approaches: de Haan and Rotmans (2011) utilise a narrative method of analysing change in society and apply the conceptual language of MLP, and Geels and Verhees (2011) study cultural change on nuclear energy highlighting agency, collective sensemaking, and framing struggles.

The theoretical framework in this study is in part built on the MLP. Geels (2011, 34) notes that the MLP is a middle-range theory, and it should not be treated as a truth machine that produces the right answers after entering the data. Instead, the application of the MLP needs interpretive creativity. Based on the investigation of the methodology of transition studies by Zolfagharian et al. (2019), this thesis draws on interpretive transition research. In this context, transitions are socially constructed through culture and language. The focus is on complexity, multiple interpretations, and meaning making. Transition knowledge can be obtained by focusing on narratives, perceptions, and interpretations of the actors. Methods are typically inductive, encompassing small samples, in-depth investigations, and qualitative methods of analysis.

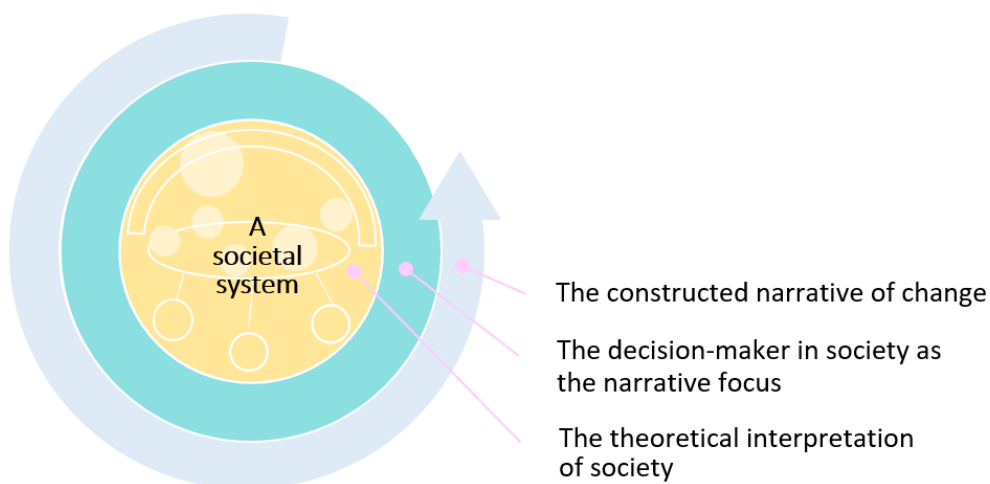


Figure 3 The theoretical framing of the study. At the core is a systemic interpretation of society. A decision-maker in society is the narrative focus of the study. Interpretations can be accessed through a constructed narrative of change.

Moreover, Zaidi (2022, 4, 15) finds hope in combining all three approaches – futures studies, narratives, and systems thinking. She writes about systems archetypes, which consist of patterns, symbols, models, and characters that appear again and again. They address diverse problems such as complex climate change. Instead of solving the problem or unfolding the desired future state of a system, archetypes clarify the problem and provide insights about the systemic paradigm and the recursive behaviours, and pinpoint leverage points and potential points of intervention. Systems archetypes, or alternative anti-archetypes, speak to transformation. Zaidi suggests it would be useful to think beyond current paradigms to what is possible and desirable, and underlines that aspirational patterns and stories are needed to take a futures approach to systems thinking and to create pathways to collective preferable futures. (Ibid., 2–4.) As with the Zaidi article, this study combines futures studies and systems thinking with the narrative approach (Figure 3).

The next chapter describes the procedures and methods used in this study to raise insight into narratives of decision-making in a complex society towards preferable futures.

3 Methods - Data Gathering and Analysis

The thesis takes a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach focuses usually on a small sample of data, but it is analysed thoroughly, and the validity arises from quality, not quantity (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 18). Qualitative research aims to describe events, understand activities, or interpret phenomena, rather than achieving statistical generalisations. The purpose of data is to help structure a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon being studied and develop theoretically sustainable perspectives. (Ibid., 61–62.)

This section explains the research strategy in detail. Firstly, I will describe the process of data collection by conducting research interviews. As the focus is on spoken language, I will provide a detailed and thorough account of the data collection process. Next, I will explain the principles of narrative analysis. Finally, I will demonstrate how the method of narrative analysis was used in this study along with the analytical framework.

3.1 Data Gathering

3.1.1 The Research Interview

To underpin the narrative analysis, data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. The interview is probably the most common way to collect qualitative data (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 85). The interview differs from a discussion due to its institutional nature, which is emphasised by recording and note-taking. The interview is distinct from a discussion due to its specific purpose: the interviewer is interested in the information, asks questions, takes initiative, encourages the interviewee to respond, leads the discussion, and brings themes into focus. (Ruusuvaori & Tiittula 2010, 23.)

An interview can be seen as a data-gathering technique, but it is more. It can be utilised as a research method especially when the researcher perceives an individual as a subject, i.e., as an active agent in creating meanings (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 35). Instead of merely “purveying data”, the interview, in general, is seen more and more as a site to produce meaning where the interviewer is not only collecting the data that is already there, nor the respondent is only a passive vessel of answers (Gubrium & Holstein 2001a, 12–13). Gubrium and Holstein (2001a) have criticised interview guidelines that highlight neutrality and controlled questions (see also Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2010, 200;

Hyvärinen 2017) when the interview is understood more as mining the facts with the right kinds of questions. In this model, “the vessel-of-answers”, the image of the subject is not of an agent engaged in the production of knowledge, but they can proffer information that subjects merely store within (Gubrium & Holstein 2001a, 13). In contrast to the vessel model, the interview can be reconceptualised “as an occasion for purposefully animated participants to construct versions of reality interactionally” (ibid., 14). In that case, an interview is a process of interpretation “from the time a researcher identifies a research topic, through respondent selection, questioning and answering, and, finally, the interpretation of responses” (ibid.).

Forms of research interviews range from well-controlled structured form interviews to fully unstructured open interviews. Somewhere in between is the semi-structured interview. There is no uniform definition for semi-structured interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47) but it is characteristic of this interview form that some aspects are locked but not all (Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2010, 11). The questions may be the same for everyone, but the interviewer can vary the order of the questions or the wording in the interview situation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47). One of the best-known semi-structured interview formats is a focused interview (Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2010, 11), but Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008, 47–48) rather talk about a thematic interview (fin. *teemahaastattelu*), which is quite similar to a focused interview. Still, instead of precise questions, the interview proceeds on certain key themes. From the researcher’s perspective, concentrating on themes instead of detailed questions, the interview situation frees up and enables hearing the interviewee’s voice better. The thematic interview puts individuals’ interpretations and meanings in the centre, as well as the fact that meanings are formed in interaction.

3.1.2 Interviewing Practices in the Study

In this thesis, the form of the semi-structured interview can be interpreted mostly as a thematic interview. These interviews were conducted between November 2021 and the beginning of May 2022, with ten experts from different organisations being interviewed. The objective was to ensure diversity in terms of both regional location and organisational type. All interviewees were experts in well-known organisations that provide grant-based funding in Finland. Many of them held managerial positions and had extensive experience in their respective fields. The organisations represented a mix of public and governmental funding organisations and private foundations that fund non-profit societal activities.

Altogether the organisations shared funding of around 550 million euros in 2020, each of them at least over 2 million euros. Geographically, many respondents were in Southern Finland due to the location of the headquarters. The organisations funded a variety of societal activities such as projects, non-commercial activities, science, cultural activities, and business. Six of the respondents were men and four of them were women. The anonymised interviewees were referred to in the analysis by ten different abbreviations (E1 to E10).

The funding experts were contacted for the first time mostly by email. The subject of the thesis was described in general terms. Some of the interviewees asked for the list of questions beforehand, and to prevent bias, the interviewees were provided with the thematic questions [except the first of the interviewees since the expert had already gone through the interviewing process]. (See the Appendix.) The professional position was important considering the systemic theoretical framing. It was mentioned in the first e-mail, and again in the written info, and occasionally I referred to it during the interviews. Holding the position of funding expert in the interview was important for constructing a narrative through professional experience.

There are research interview guides that say the interviewees can familiarise themselves with the questions in advance. Hyvärinen (2017, 38) opposes this kind of instruction and recites that one should never send research questions to an interviewee in advance. He states it may be even disastrous for the interview session since it hinders a reactive interview from taking place and the role of the interviewee is reduced to producing answers to questions prepared in advance, at worst, mostly reading out loud ready-made notes. Sending questions in advance, according to Hyvärinen (*ibid.*), thus implies the “vessel-of-answers” approach. However, Hyvärinen’s interpretation possibly overlooks diverse research settings. In this study, sending the thematic questions beforehand was mostly helping the interviews, since the questions were, according to some, challenging since many of the funding experts had not thought of all the issues before. Preparing for the questions thereby helped to ponder on the questions more thoroughly in a compact interview timeframe.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, mostly online, except for one face-to-face interview. The interviews were recorded. All responses were then transcribed in Finnish, analysed, and anonymised. Obtaining information in an interview requires a confidential

relationship which means truthful prior information and protecting the confidentiality of the information and the anonymity (if so agreed) (Ruusuvaori & Tiittula 2010, 41). In this case, the anonymisation was important because the interviewees were told that neither the organisation nor its projects or practices are depicted or analysed publicly.

As the thematic interview format pursues to leave space for the respondents and stresses the themes instead of mere questions, I aimed at taking the respondent's competence on the subject into account and thus the form of the interview and the number of questions varied in the interview. Some themes and subjects were inherently placed more emphasis than others as the interviews progressed, and not all questions were asked of each expert. Also, the interviewees were oftentimes asked something more specific about his or her answers, or follow-up questions were often raised. In addition, they were asked summarising questions whose role was to make sure the interviewer had understood the answer and to show that they were heard and understood. Each of the interview sessions and the set of thematic questions were unique.

3.1.3 Forming the Interview Questions

The themes and thematic questions were inspired by the analysis framework for narratives of change (Wittmayer et al. 2019) and the theoretical framing of the MLP (Geels 2002). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008, 66) refer to a theory-focused approach to defining themes in a thematic interview. This means that the basic concepts of the research topic are outlined while studying theories and earlier research data. When the interview framework is compiled, the objective is not to create a detailed list of questions but a list of thematic topics. Thematic topics represent specified sub-concepts or categories of theoretical main concepts. Hyvärinen (2017, 22) challenges this theory-focused interpretation and emphasises it should be noted that interviewees have an opportunity to choose themes or influence which themes are principally discussed, as certain pre-selected themes may not be familiar or important for an interviewee. In this study, utilising theoretical background and former research was the basis for the research design, but following Hyvärinen (*ibid.*), the approach in the interviews was to give space for the interviewees by asking mainly very open thematic questions without leading the discussion into specific topics. Instead, the interviewer aimed to follow the interests and pace of the interviewee.

The interview comprised three main themes and several sub-themes and questions that specified the main themes. The main themes were as follows: 1) Present funding actions

in society and change agents involved 2) Change in society and preferable futures, and 3) Innovation and social innovation as a tool for change. The selected themes were abstract in their initial setups, and by creating explicit sub-themes and thematic questions, the interviews were possible to attach to practical work and decisions of the funding experts. The first theme of the interview processed the background and current actions and the actors and influencing elements in decisions. The second theme discussed the generic change in society, the preferable futures, and opportunities to influence developments. The third theme discussed the possible pursuit of niche innovation in funding.

There is a lot of guidance on research interview questions. Some pay special attention to minimising the interviewer's impact on the answers by asking similar questions in each case, and others avoid too strict guidance since a question depends on the situation (Ruusuvuori & Tiittala 2010, 51). The latter is the way the questions are defined in this thesis. When the interview is conducted by applying the viewpoint of the interview as a process of interaction, the form of the question can be understood in many ways: it can also be a gesture, repetition of the answer, expression of ignorance, expression of interest, or even silence (*ibid.*, 51). Also, an assertion can function as a question in which case the following answer of the interviewee either confirms or denies the assertion (*ibid.*, 53). Simply put, despite the form, a qualitative interview is focused on the “qualities” of respondents’ experiences (Gubrium & Holstein 2001b, 55–58). Gubrium and Holstein (2001b, 55–58) point out that if we take postmodern thinking as an example, even the need for such distinctions is questioned in the first place. Answers raise new questions, and they bring out new answers. E.g., the line between interviewers and interviewees can be seen blurred and roles even reversed, or “roles are combined into what some call autoethnography”.

The thematic interview format was implemented so that the thematic questions were applied to the interviewee’s position and experiences from the start, to avoid a generic or abstract discussion about society and the world in general. To gain that, as the interviewer, I first pursued to understand the professional status of the interviewee, how the organisation makes funding decisions in practice, and how it is linked to the societal system. I wanted to support the occupational mindset of the interviewee and the positioning in daily professional actions. This helped to maintain the systemic position in the interview as if the interviewee were to proceed from concrete everyday practices to broader societal implications and further to the future. Second, the everyday practices

could be addressed by the interviewer later in the interview, for example when asking about more abstract subjects such as timelines, visions, preferable futures, or innovation. Third, during the interview, the interviewer could help the interviewee in recalling something discussed earlier. The objective was to link related thematic issues.

All this required making notes during the interview. Following the notes helped the interviewer pick aptly up something said earlier. Getting back to something that was previously said, also helped in constructing the narrative in the analysis phase, as it was about keeping the main thematic dots in mind during the entire process. From time to time, the interviewee might spontaneously address something which was said earlier to refine the theme in more depth. The process could be equated with a crochet technique: the interviewer and the interviewee together combine threads and layers of the emerging work. As it is, constructing a narrative of change in the research interview and analysis.

3.2 Analysing Data: Narrative Analysis

The interview data were analysed by utilising the narrative analysis method. Narrative analysis usually refers to methods that interpret texts that have in common a storied form. The researcher focuses on how a speaker or writer “assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning, that is, make particular points to an audience” (Riessman 2008, 11). Research interviews are widely utilised in narrative research (*ibid.*, 23), and as a method, narrative research often takes the form of semi-structured interviews that encourage storytelling (Paschen & Ison 2014).

Riessman (2008, 11–13) explains that narrative analyst examines intention and language, meaning how and why incidents are storied. Also, gaps or inconsistencies are worth exploring. Narrative analysis relies on “extended accounts that are preserved and treated analytically as units, rather than fragmented into thematic categories”. Category-centred models of analysis, such as thematic coding, tend to distil texts into snippets out of their original context. Instead, sequential and structural features are hallmarks of narrative, and both context and particularities come to the fore.

There are several different types of narrative research whose approach represents, for example, linguistics, sociology, psychology, or organisational research (Johansson 2014). The research method used in this study represents the sociological approach. Riessman (2008) introduces four diverse approaches to narrative analysis: thematic, structural,

dialogic, and visual. Thematic analysis is the most common method in narrative analysis. The content is the exclusive focus, asking “what” is said, rather than “how”, “to whom” or “for what purposes”. It is noteworthy that prior theory guides inquiry, which distinguishes the method from grounded theory. The analyst searches more sequences than segments that would be coded thematically. The analysis aims at preserving stories and this contributes to the case-centredness of the narrative analysis. (Riessman 2008, 73–74.) In the structural narrative, in turn, the analysis focuses on the narrative itself and how the story is told - it shifts from the ‘told’ to the ‘telling’. Attention to narrative form adds insights to the mere examination of the content by asking how content is organised by a speaker. (Ibid., 77–81.) In comparison, dialogic analysis focuses on interaction and how talk is produced and performed as a narrative. The visual analysis explores aesthetic representations made with images or art. (Ibid., 105, 141–142.) This study utilises narrative thematic analysis and thereby asks ‘what’ the interviews tell and what is the way they interpret the research subject.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 23) argue that the need for a theory, or framework, in qualitative research is essential. Especially in interview research, mere answers cannot be considered as the results of the research, but theoretical argumentation is needed to show that the research results obtained in the analysis are legitimate and that the empirical observations are made more understandable. The theoretical framing was the basis for the research design in this study. Despite the deductive approach, the research aimed to be open to data and build the analysis on the content emerging from data and thus utilise the theoretical framework without forcing the data into certain presuppositions. Following Hyvärinen’s (2017, 22) concern about giving space for the interpretations of interviewees, the analysis phase aimed to focus on the topics emerging from the data as precisely as possible. The basic assumption was that there was room for the emergence of topics from data within the theoretical framework. Hence, the analysis highlighted the importance of data but interpreted it in terms of the framework.

In this study, identifying themes began during the interview process. While listening and interpreting what was being said in the interviews the interviewer could form follow-up questions. While conducting the interviews, the researcher could write down insights and note emerging themes in telling. The analysis continued with transcribing the interviews. The interviews formed the audio material of approximately 590 minutes and 107 pages of transcriptions (Calibri 10; Spacing 1,15). While and after transcribing, the interviews

were read multiple times back and forth to get an idea of the themes and contents. From the first readings onwards, various elements of narratives emerged from data.

The transcriptions were examined with the analysis framework (Table 1), which was modified from the framework of Wittmayer et al. (2019). The framework consisted of three main sections. *Rationale* argued the existence and objectives of the funding decisions, *Change agents* referred to actors but also other agents, which promote or hinder the implementation of Rationale, and *Plot* explained how preferable futures were thought to be pursued.

Table 1 Framework for analysing the content of narratives. The structure of the framework is inspired by the framework of analysing narratives of change (Wittmayer et al. 2019). The structure differs from the framework of Wittmayer et al. (2019) and is adapted to societal decision-making and funding.

The sections	The contents	The implicit questions	Examples of the interview questions
Rationale	Society needs a certain kind of action (change) because...	What are the preferable futures? Current reasons to act?	What do you do? What do you want to gain by funding these instances? Is there a vision of the future society?
Change agents	Relevant actors and influencers are...	Who are the actors working towards the preferable futures? What and who are influencing the decisions? Who or what is opposing the decisions towards preferable futures?	Who makes decisions? What do you fund? Are there things that influence funding choices, broader in society? When does a funding process fail? What are the obstacles in funding or achieving the objectives?
Plot	Preferable futures are achieved if...	What activities lead to the preferable future? How are the actions arranged? Where and when do the activities take place?	How does the funding process proceed? How would you evaluate the outcomes and impact of the funding? How far in the future can you reach by funding? What should happen in society?

The thematic narrative elements were searched from the transcriptions by using colour coding. Data were then transferred into a more manageable format by utilising a spreadsheet format. The excerpts of the text, that is each textual entity, be it a sentence or

a paragraph, were positioned in their place as sections in the narrative framework. During the framing, the transcriptions formed a raw data broadsheet.

Notably, the interviews were not consistent. The interviewee could refer to something said earlier, or specify or rethink something discussed before, resulting in a partial spiral form of telling. Given the partial inconsistency of interviews, the excerpts for a certain sequence of narrative could be picked from several locations in the transcriptions. As narrative themes emerged from data, certain themes were conceptually close to each other and thus formed main theme types. As a result, narrative themes were organised as main themes built on sub-themes. After the narrative themes were identified, they were organised again following the analysis framework. The texts were translated from Finnish to English.

The next chapter moves on to present the main findings of the narrative analysis.

4 The Findings of the Narrative Analysis

This chapter presents the main findings of the narrative analysis of the funding expert interviews. The analysis and its results respond to the research question: How are funding decisions expected to shape futures as a form of societal decision-making? In addition, the results meet the research objectives, which examine what kinds of preferable futures are shaped in the narratives of change and which kinds of elements and ways of action seem to constitute the expected change towards the preferable futures. The first section (4.1.) introduces how narratives of change are constructed in a theoretical framing. The following sections in this chapter will depict the key characteristics of the three main sections of the narratives of change (Rationale, Change agents, and Plot).

4.1 Narrative Analysis in a Theoretical Framing

To respond to the research question ‘How are funding decisions expected to shape futures as a form of societal decision-making?’, the first objective of the study was to understand what kinds of preferable futures were shaped in the narratives of change. To explore that, the funding experts were asked whether their funding activities were based on a particular vision (Bezold et al. 2009) of society or futures in general. Although certain techniques, such as creative visualisation, were not used, questions in the context of the future-related interview helped to word a vision. First, if there is a vision, and second, what should happen in society to make the vision a reality.

Another objective was to explore, which kinds of elements and ways of action seemed to constitute the expected change towards the preferable futures. As mentioned in the literature review describing the theoretical framework of the study, social groups and individuals have been identified as critical in contributing to regime change and researchers are shedding more light on micro-foundations of transitions. The micro-foundations comprise multiple social groups who engage in multiple activities such as “exploration, learning, debate, negotiation, power struggle, conflict, investment, coalition building, goal setting in the context of rules and institutions, including belief systems and norms” (Geels 2020). With narrative analysis, it was possible to pinpoint the micro-foundation context and its interactions in the background of societal decision-making.

In addition, societal transitions and transformation are acknowledged as non-linear and long-term processes of change. Global long-term societal transition or transformation

processes, which typically take decades (Kivimaa et al. 2019, 113), occur to us as developments towards yet unknown futures. The focus of the empirical analysis is built on the assumption that constant interaction within and between the different levels in society is ongoing amid change (Geels 2020). The focus of the analysis is positioned in the early phases of transitions in the MLP: the pre-development phase, when the status quo does not visibly change but changes occur in the background, or the acceleration phase when niches start to build up and socio-cultural, economic, ecological, and institutional changes start to accumulate (Avelino & Rotmans 2009, 545; Kivimaa et al. 2019, 213).

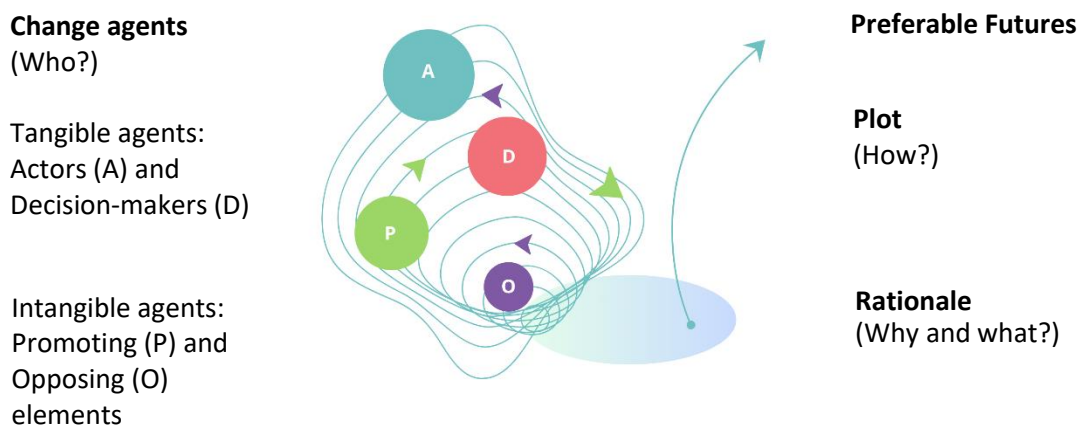


Figure 4 The sections in the narratives of change are Rationale, Change agents and Plot. Rationale represents the reasoning and envisioning, Change agents constitute and influence the action (decision-makers, actors, and promoting and opposing elements), and Plot arranges the agents and actions toward futures.

In this study, the narratives of change represent interpretations of a diverse field of funding and form a certain kind of snapshot of the contemporary reality of making decisions that influence societal action towards futures. The three sections of the narratives were Rationale, Change agents, and Plot. The framework of Wittamyer et al. (2019) was adapted so that Rationale represented the reasoning and envisioning by arguing the existence and objectives of the funding decisions, Change agents referred to instances who constituted and influenced the action (tangible decision-makers and actors, and intangible promoting and opposing elements). Plot arranged the agents and actions towards futures. (Figure 4.)

4.2 Rationale

The first section of the narratives, Rationale, is the starting point. Rationale is the reason for the story to exist in the first place. It is about the problem description and preferable futures (Wittmayer et al. 2019, 3). Rationale represents the reasoning of individual or collective actors, and answering why they want to act in a societal system and what kinds of futures they want to build with their actions. The interviewees started to construct Rationale when they were asked what they do in general. Rationale of the narratives could be organised under four main visionary preferable future states of society (Figure 5).

- 1) In the vision of the **Welfare of Society**, the preferred qualities were integrity, equality, democracy, and trust. Improved, Nordic welfare state -development was valued. The vision focused on people and their relationships, which would benefit the entire nation and its mindset. Environmental crisis could be important to solve but it was not the only relevant thing.

“—[the funding organisation (FO)] builds national integrity throughout the country and pursues getting the whole nation behind it. -- Broad national connection between science, art, economy, and political circles of social life was [also historically] a significant value. -- In other words, to bring people together and discuss.” (E7)

- 2) The second vision, the **Socio-Economic Prosperity**, referred mostly to local organisations and industries and their success in the future. Organisations were active, competent and innovative. Local industries were developing positively and coping with uncertainty. The vision focused on economic prosperity in the global competition, which would radiate positively to their region.

“Quite a lot of our funding is aimed at ensuring that we have a high employment rate, good taxpayers and thus a stable and economically prosperous society”. (E9)

- 3) The vision of **Ecological Sustainability** underlined mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss so that ecological crisis could be reversed. The vision focused on the welfare of the planet, and people were seen more as an integral part of the planetary system. The vision was seen to align with the goals of the scientific community.

“The vision would be of the world and us learning to live in harmony with the rest of nature. Because we are part of that nature. The ultimatum goal is not to spoil everything we're totally dependent on.” (E3)

4) In the vision of **International Openness**, organisations in Finland were increasingly part of the global networks. Operating in global networks and acquiring global funding proffered possibilities to higher quality research and innovation.

“This is a little tinkering after all. The actual big stuff is over there in the EU programs. [ERDF funding] can be used as leverage to support actors getting involved in European forums and obtain a much, much bigger entity from there.” (E5)

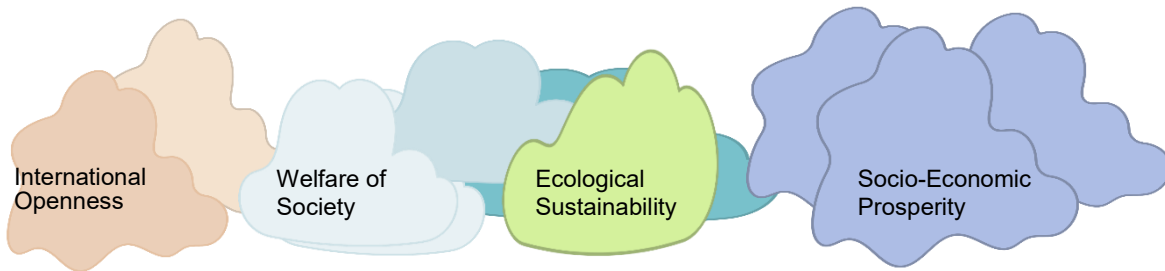


Figure 5 The visions of the preferable future states of society.

Each interview was connected at least to one of the visions. Several interviewees envisioned the preferable future society so that two visions overlapped or, as in one case, three of the visions merged. In the context of Rationale, descriptions of preferable futures and reasons to act can be interpreted as objectives. However, the concurrent, concise visions of these societal decision-makers were mostly large-scale, abstract, and mostly tenuous by their density, and they did not explicitly contradict one another. This raised questions about the relevance of density in the visions concerning societal decision-making. Are the visions abstract and indeterminate, or do they depict the preferable future state of society in a more precise mode so that practical decisions can be based more firmly on the vision? Notably, the Multilevel Perspective on transitions brings about external (regime or landscape) influences on niches via expectations and networks. The articulation and adjustments of expectations or visions are one of the core processes in niche innovation development, and visions are used to gain attention and funding from external actors (Geels 2011, 28). Thus, according to the MLP, the visions of decision-makers have the potential to act as substantial drivers in niche forming. The need for denser visions of the future society was also verbalised in an interview since society was “aiming for a world without a previous model” (E1). The interviewee referred to the abandonment of the colonial concept in Western societies and the question of how money and the environmental burden would circulate in the economy in a sustainable and

socially just way. Amid the vision of fossil-free Finland by 2035, most discussions were still about the ways to reduce emissions instead of envisioning the future of the very carbon-neutral society. As time was running, there should be more visions of Finland after 2035.

“-- this discussion, which only considers how we can reduce emissions, leaves too little attention to the innovations that are needed when you get there, how to live in that society --” (E1)

As there is framing power in language (Paschen & Ison 2014, 1084), narratives inherently include and exclude elements. Thereby it is also fruitful to ask, what kinds of elements were excluded from the narratives. What alternatives did the visions include and exclude? For instance, when the narratives were compared with the narratives of social innovation initiatives in the inquiry of Wittmayer et al. (2019), differences could be found. The narratives of social innovation initiatives provided visions about alternative futures by challenging the current capitalist system and the narrative of economic growth. The initiatives envisioned alternative economic arrangements, communal and relational values, and a more holistic view of the human being. (Ibid.) This converses well with the fact that social movements are often motivated by an alternative vision for society as a whole and they help to articulate new directions of societal change (Köhler et al. 2019). When compared to the visions in the narratives of the funding experts in this study, none envisioned, for instance, a post-capitalist society, albeit the vision of Ecological Sustainability had some similar elements, such as “doing less of everything” and slowing down the speed of the wheels of the economy and consuming less natural resources (E3).

Rationale asks, why the world must change (Wittmayer et al. 2019). Although Rationale is a composed description of the reasoning of one’s actions and decisions, it may unfold the underlying assumptions of the present society, problems, visions and potential trajectories. The analysis of Rationale alone in the narratives of change shows that both the justifications of decisions and the visions provide important insights into contemporary social decision-making.

4.3 Change Agents

According to Geels (2020), both individual and collective ‘actors’ can have the capacity to act as prominent entities in socio-technical transition. In parallel, Wittmayer et al. (2019) write about ‘actors’ in their inquiry and the narrative analysis framework. Yet, in

this study, instead of mere actors, a broader concept is used: Change Agents. In the second section of narratives, Change agents refer to instances, which constitute and influence the action. Change Agents make things happen in the story. Change Agents are needed to implement Rationale, as protagonists, but some agents rather get in the way and cause trouble as antagonists in stories do. Four kinds of Change Agents were identified: Decision-makers, Actors, Promoting elements and Opposing elements. Decision-makers and Actors were tangible agents and Promoting and Opposing elements the intangible ones.

4.3.1 Decision-makers

It is noteworthy to emphasise that a funding expert as a *Decision-maker* is perceived as the narrative focus, as the narrative analysis itself is case-centred in essence (Riessman 2008, 74). In this research context, the narrative was constructed from the viewpoint of the funding experts as decision-makers. As the funding experts were the narrators, awarded funds were at the centre and the starting point of the action. The narrator also interpreted the activities and their consequences in society towards futures.

The *decision-maker* in the narratives was both a mobiliser of other actors but also a mediator who filters, analyses, and constructs knowledge in society to apply it in their decision-making. Oftentimes, the interviewees described their role with mobilising words such as *implementing* (*toimeenpanotehtävä*), *enabling* (*mahdollistaja*), *catalysing* (*katalysoija*) but also with words related to mediating such as *evaluating* (*arviointi*), *gatekeeping* (*portinvartija*), *coordinating / compiling* (*kokoaminen*), *reconciling* (*yhteen sovittaminen*). The funding experts as decision-makers influenced societal action by awarding funding to beneficiaries but they were also influenced by other change agents.

"I see we are in a pretty influential role. This is a service mission of the enabler -- Actors receive even substantial amounts of monetary aid to be able to do those important things in the projects." (E6)

The descriptions of decision-makers showed similarities to the concept of intermediaries in the transition research literature. Intermediaries are actors or platforms that link multiple other actors and activities and thereby are involved in creating momentum for socio-technical systems change (Geels & Deuten 2006; Kivimaa et al. 2019). Intermediaries have been described to open spaces to a diversity of options and activities (Kivimaa et al. 2019, 114). According to Kivimaa et al. (2019, 111–114), intermediaries

may carry out certain functions in innovation and transition processes, such as articulation of expectations, demands and visions, or creating networks, exchanging knowledge and managing innovation processes such as procurement. Intermediaries play different roles in transitions and act on different levels in a system, such as niche (acting on the grassroots level, advancing a particular niche) or regime levels (creating space for niches, a player in the dominant system, pursuing incremental solutions), or system level (neutral position, simulating transitions, ambition towards disruptions). For example, governmental and institutional agencies such as innovation funders, city-level organisations or NGOs can act as intermediaries.

Interestingly, the role of the decision-makers was described as substantially larger than mere fund awarding (Table 2). All the decision-makers described their intermediating-oriented actions on some level in the narratives. The intermediary actions varied widely, and they could be summarised as interpreting the guidelines, identifying social needs, engaging and coordinating actors, identifying competence, guiding and coaching the actors, evaluating outcomes and impact, and having a dialogue with different instances.

“[the acceptance rate of applications is big] because of good guidance. People already hear in advance when something is not worth applying.” (E9)

First, many actions were related to interpreting boundary conditions and guidelines to underpin decisions. Decision-makers were responsible for understanding the internal values, missions, visions and strategies of their organisations, but also external regime objectives such as political programmes and strategies. They had to reflect on legislation and identify interfaces and restrictions related to funding instruments. In addition, many decision-makers needed to understand the strategies of regional organisations or other actors to conclude their decision-making. Some of the funders also expressed they applied foresight knowledge or other evidence-based information.

Second, identifying social needs meant mostly reacting to the needs of the operating environment, such as strategies of local organisations, demographic changes, and timely social needs. A few funding experts stressed that foresight was one way to make sense of the operating environment. A few experts also described reacting to surprises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and understanding the needs and everyday life of people. Some needed to produce regional development programmes.

Table 2 The intermediary actions of the decision-makers.

The intermediary actions of the decision-makers
<p>Interpreting boundary conditions and guidelines to underpin decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal values, mission, vision, and strategy of the funding organisation • external regime objectives such as political programmes, strategies • legislation and rules addressing the funding instruments, identifying interfaces and restrictions • strategies of local regional organisations and objectives of the actors • applying foresight knowledge in decision-making • applying evidence-based information in decision-making
<p>Identifying social needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reacting to the needs of the operating environment, such as strategies of local organisations, demographic changes and timely social needs • reacting to wild cards, such as the COVID-19 pandemic • utilising foresight knowledge • writing regional development programmes • understanding the needs and everyday lives of people
<p>Engaging and coordinating actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hearing local actors; negotiations, conversations, seminars • regional cooperation groups (organisation representatives) • engaging regional organisations in the foresight process • bringing actors together to dialogue and development; supporting encounters • encouraging the actors to keep in touch with the funder and ask questions • engaging new actors as applicants • hearing people of the region • shaping the operating environment culture together with actors • the neutral space and “gathering power” of foundations or funds
<p>Guiding and coaching the actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shaping project announcements to be published • informing and advising the applicants; guiding to apply for funding elsewhere • coaching and educating actors, challenging their current activities • facing expressions of feelings of actors (e.g. ignorance, tiredness, shock)
<p>Engaging external experts in the evaluation process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rotating experts underpinning pluralism • stressing the solidity; and purposive commitment of experts to the funder’s values
<p>Identifying competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expertise of local industries to be supported • competence of the actors; the quality of research and art
<p>Evaluating the actors, expected outcomes (such as reports of the actors) and impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluative position over actors • impact of funding; taking responsibility for funds • awarding a public prize for important activities in society
<p>Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with national governance, authorities, and policymakers; lobbying • employing multidisciplinary expert dialogue during decision-making • promoting public dialogue through funded activities • disseminating evidence-based information to society • international dialogue

A third significant intermediary action was to engage and coordinate actors: hearing local actors in negotiations, conversations, or seminars, participating in regional cooperation groups, bringing actors together for dialogue and development, supporting encounters, and encouraging the actors to keep in touch with the funder and ask questions, engaging new actors as applicants, or hearing people of the region in general and shaping the operating environment culture together with actors. For instance, foundations or funds were described as a potential neutral space and “gathering power” for actors. Also, engaging regional organisations in the foresight process was mentioned. A fourth significant action was guiding and coaching the actors, which could be publishing the funding announcements, informing and advising the applicants or guiding them to apply for funding elsewhere. Some funders described how they coach or educate actors or challenge them to evaluate their current activities. Some depicted situations where they had to face the feelings of actors such ignorance or tiredness.

Other intermediary actions were related to engaging expertise in evaluating the applicants and fund awarded actors, expected outcomes and impact of activities, identifying the competence, having a dialogue with various instances, or promoting dialogue in society. The agency is the capacity of an actor to act “which may instantiate itself in concrete actions in specific contexts” (Geels 2020). The analysis implies the agency of funding organisations as intermediaries can take multiple forms. The agency was not only about providing money and enabling the activities of actors, but the agency comprised a wide range of activities and the level of participation at different interfaces in society.

4.3.2 Actors

The MLP interprets that socio-technical transitions are enacted by multiple social groups who engage in multiple activities, and both individual and collective actors can have the capacity to act as prominent entities (Geels 2020). In this study, actors as Change agents were brought forth as explicit actors, who were needed to implement Rationale.

“It is about subsidies practically for public organisations such as municipalities, research and educational institutions, which is, in short, regional development, especially economic development. Another focus is perhaps Research, Development and Innovation activity”. (E4)

Intermediary decision-makers promoted action in society and the agency of actors by awarding funds. The actors were either primary or secondary beneficiaries. Primary

beneficiaries were mostly mentioned when the interviewees were asked what they do in general. The primary beneficiaries in the interviews comprised mostly actors from the scientific, political, civil society, and art sectors. In many cases, the primary beneficiaries could be interpreted as collective regime actors, which are stable and coordinated by well-articulated rules (Geels & Schot 2007, 402). However, the level of getting organised could vary. For instance, in the field of science, collective research actors such as research institutes, VTT [Technical Research Centre of Finland], universities, and universities of applied sciences, were well-organised science regime actors, but individual researchers could have a more decentralised connection to regime actor networks. Also, the field of art was strongly awarded by private foundations, but the actors could be organisations or individual artists. Policy regime actors, such as public authorities in municipalities, municipal development companies, and regional state organisations, were responsible for local decision-making. A fourth distinctive type of actors were civil society actors, including non-profit organisations. In this research context, non-profit organisations were typical civil society regime representatives, who are concerned with social objectives instead of profit (Witkamp et al. 2011, 676). The business was funded on a small scale. There were primary beneficiaries, who were not markedly identifiable as a part of stable, well-coordinated or rule-based networks, but rather individual citizens without a societally organised position or a commitment to an organisation or social movement.

In the narratives, fund-awarded primary actors were discussed as they were mediators or carriers of the visions or expectations. The secondary layer of actors comprised either implicit or explicit beneficiaries. Secondary beneficiaries were those who were expected to co-benefit from funds, and they were expected to embody the expectations and visions in society. Many of public funding organisations, who could not fund firms directly in legislative terms, found business, or industry regimes, as a significant beneficiary. Funding could aim at creating space for businesses to “get part of the cash flow in the operating environment if a company participates in a project at market price” (E1, E4, E5), and by that, create local prosperity. Other explicit secondary actors were citizens or individuals. Although a decision-maker could fund a science actor, it could be expected to steer the actions of secondary actors, the individuals, who would act in alignment with the expectations. For example, individuals could be expected to develop or change their mindsets. Individuals could also be expected to benefit from funding and increase welfare in society. (E3, E7, E8, E9, E10.)

“[Grants are funded] in principle for everyone who benefits from actions, but funding is not received by citizens directly -- but by organisations, which means the beneficiaries are one step further.” (E8)

4.3.3 Promoting and Opposing Elements

Decisions to award funds were not made *ad-lib*, but it was possible to identify intangible elements, which influenced decision-making and the expectations towards implications. The elements were either promoting or opposing in nature. The promoting elements were those, which decision-makers brought up when explaining why decisions were made and what kinds of actions were expected to shape change. Opposing elements were those agents, which hinder either decision-making or the expected progress towards preferable futures. The elements could be organised as follows: 1) Socio-Cultural elements, 2) Societal positions and relations, 3) The operating environment and the future, 4) Regulative power, 5) Worldview, 6) Competence (Table 3).

Table 3 Comparison of the influencing elements in the narratives to structural contexts and characteristics of actors presented by Geels (2020).

The structural contexts (Geels 2020)	The influencing elements in the narratives of change
Cultural: <i>symbols, discourses, narratives, categories</i>	1) Socio-cultural elements: Public space, Language, Built platforms for dialogue
Socio-structural: <i>social networks and relations</i>	2) Societal positions and relations: Managing position, Expertise, Familiarity
Economic: transactions, financial, flows, competitors	3) The operating environment: Social needs, Needs and strategies of organisations; The future developments
Regulatory-institutional: <i>laws, regulations</i>	4) Regulative power: Governmental policy, EU legislation, and regulation, Politically driven programmes
Characteristics and properties of actors (Geels 2020)	5) Worldview
	6) Competence of decision-makers, the assessed competence of actors

During the first stage of the analysis, the elements emerged initially from research data without comparing it to theory. Some of the elements were inherently brought up when describing the decision-making process, and some of the elements were rooted out after elaborating and specifying questions. That is, the interviewing process and the construction of the narrative along the interview brought insight to the interviewees.

As referred before, socio-technical transitions are enacted by multiple social groups, who engage in multiple activities such as “exploration, learning, debate, negotiation, power struggle, conflict, investment, coalition building, goal setting in the context of rules and institutions, including belief systems and norms” (Geels 2019, 187). However, in that kind of fast-forward description, concrete actions and characteristics of actors remain obscured. Geels often refers to Giddens’ theory of ‘duality of structure’ (see, for example, Geels 2004; 2011; 2020; Geels & Schot 2007) when actors are embedded in rule structures, but at the same time actors reproduce rules through their actions. Geels (2020, 14) states that analyses of transitions should not focus on agency as such, but always in relation to social networks, institutional contexts, and ongoing processes. That is, agency is towards something when actors enter relationships with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events. Geels (ibid.) argues that the actors’ capacity to act instantiates itself in concrete actions in specific contexts and there are three aspects to it: characteristics and properties of actors, scale (actors can be individual and collective), and structural contexts. Structural contexts comprise cultural (symbols, discourses, narratives, categories), social-structural (social networks and relations), economic (transactions, financial, flows, competitors), and regulatory-institutional (laws, regulations). Characteristics and properties of actors, in turn, could refer to, for instance, routines, capabilities, resources, positions, interpretations, goals, interests, and templates.

Based on the comprehension of Geels (ibid.), the analysis was interpreted in alignment with the theory. *The structural contexts* could be identified in the narratives of the intermediary decision-makers. The similarities with Geels’ listing underpinned the role of the structures. *Characteristics and properties of actors*, on the other hand, could be found in the narratives in the form of Worldview and Competence in reference to human mindset and capacity of decision-makers and awarded actors. To shed more light on the promoting and opposing elements (Table 4), they are described in more detail in the following sub-chapters.

4.3.3.1 *The Structural Contexts*

Socio-cultural elements, which could refer to both cultural and socio-structural structures in the Geels (2020) listing, appeared in the form of Public space, Language, and Built platforms for dialogue. Based on the narratives, *Public space* could be interpreted as a cultural systemic entity, which has shaping power. It referred to emerging, free-form dialogue in society such as *general discussion topics* and *media content*.

General discussion topics were recognised to influence funding so that socially significant discussion topics often attract projects and funding (E9). Media was seen as a channel for societal dialogue. Reading the daily newspaper was a good source for making strategies in a funding organisation, along with analysing various reports and future prospects (E7). Public discussion topics were also described to influence actors' applications, reflecting the fact that "everyone is connected to the social dialogue and atmosphere" (E3), which could affect, for instance, how researchers thought about what they should research, and thereby, what kind of research is available to fund in a public space atmosphere.

"It's actually pretty crazy how one year, when microplastics were often discussed [in public], we got twenty applications about microplastics, and this year we received two." (E3)

In addition, a shift to a more *systemic societal dialogue* was noted, especially due to the way the media had started to report environmental themes. Systemic social dialogue was assessed to increase researchers' comprehension of the interconnectedness, which further helped researchers to see how one's research was connected to the systemic whole (E3).

However, there were problems related to public space in the form of *Bounded dialogue*. *Siloed* societal public space opposed, for instance, the vision of Ecological sustainability, as political agendas, business dialogue or ideologies of civil activists did not meet: "There are incredibly big silos between people, and it prevents things from moving forward. -- The biggest problem is that we don't understand the realities of others" (E3). In addition, diversification of media content was seen as one relevant but unanswered question. For instance, the possibility of social media or media uproars influencing funding decisions was pondered on in terms of the *politicisation of science*.

"Of course, you would want our evaluators, who work with the applications received by the fund, to still stress scientific and artistic quality and interests primarily. But it has become interesting [to ask] in terms of the public image issues how media uproars affect evaluation." (E2)

Language was brought up as another socio-cultural element. Deploying a certain headline or a term in a funding programme, such as "social innovation" as a newcomer in the latest EU structural funding programmes, could steer thinking. When the term is mentioned in the EU programme, it might be considered better, and the term might improve the understanding of the need to develop something that relates to the term (E9). However, terminology and associations could be *Fuzzy language*, which might oppose the expected

actions. For instance, one of the funding organisations had decided to highlight the need for innovation among funded projects and differentiated funding criteria by naming some projects in demand as ‘innovative’. This turned out to impede application processes due to *associations*. The threshold to apply for funding, specifically for ‘innovative projects’, was suddenly very high. The funding organisation needed to stop using the word ‘innovative’ in their documents, and the experience made them more cautious about naming something innovative (E8). In addition, some (E9, E10) described how a professional discussion about a term, such as “social innovation”, may get challenging due to complicated and abstract language, which is *difficult* to comprehend, and terms are challenging to apply in real-life funding decisions or forming descriptions about projects and initiatives. It could also hinder participation in professional dialogue. That was a risk in terms of engaging potential new actors: "I consider it important that also common people understand what we are funding, common people dare to submit an application to us, talk to us, be understood" (E9).

Although Geels (2020) distinguishes cultural and socio-structural contexts, one of the identified promoting elements, *Built platforms for dialogue*, could be positioned in both cultural and socio-structural structures. The role of Built platforms for dialogue was significant since platforms were described in multiple ways in most of the interviews. Platforms refer to a built and acknowledged official space or an implemented section of a process to carry out meetings and concrete discussions, which were needed to implement funding decisions. Mostly they were about professional communication, local network communication, and political negotiation. *Professional communication* could take the form of internal dialogues in the funding organisation, consulting external authorities, or well-organised discussions among evaluators who assess the applications.

“-- we aim for a solid multidisciplinary group [mostly in professor positions] who can discuss and look at the whole –, bring the best projects around the same table and have multi-disciplinary dialogue. -- In the dialogue, it is possible for an expert to note that one did not understand something and it is always about a subjective view, and it might be wrong.” (E3)

Local network communication, in turn, was significant among those funding organisations, which focused on regional development. Usually, regional development involved large-scale dialogue engaging a broad network of people from local organisations. A regional cooperation group was even described as an entity, which comprised the entire social scale of the region, “all the big players on the map”, including both the authorities that grant

funding and actors who were central to the development of the region (E4). In a region, any normal project application went under the eyes of a hundred people during several meetings (E9). Another estimated that opinions from 300 to 400 people were heard while constructing a regional strategy, which, in turn, defined funding decisions (E6). Even the direction of change in the region was described to be set in dialogue (E1).

“-- we go through the strategies of each municipality, each major community, various organisations and so on. We sit with them and choose the goals for the direction of change in the regional programme work. -- [When forming a programme], there are hundreds of meetings and preparations and seminars, and discussions, and negotiations, and versions, etc.--.” (E1)

In addition, *political negotiation* was seen as a platform of dialogue in the context of EU-based funding. When defining its emphasis on funding on a large scale, it was seen, on the one hand as geographically distant and abstract “political twist and negotiation somewhere between Helsinki and Brussels” (E4), and on the other, it was lobbying, regarding a way for a funding organisation itself to meet the influential people in the EU: “If you want to change the world to a certain direction, you need to act now to influence what will be offered to governmental policymakers in the next five years” (E1).

However, an opposing socio-cultural structural element, *Lack of connectedness*, affected Public space and Built platforms of dialogue. Lack of connectedness could be identified as a structural problem regarding the organisation level, especially in the form of a *lack of continuity* in projects. An example of the traditional detached way to fund projects was called metaphorically “project humppa” (fin. *hankehumppa*), which refers to a Finnish, fast-paced social dance. The metaphor implies there are numerous temporary projects time and again, but they are isolated from each other without continuity. Projects may build “very expensive systems which can no longer be implemented after a project” because it costs too much (E9). A project may produce something concrete, but “there are a lot of small actors who don't necessarily have that kind of basic activity in which the results of the project would be rooted” (E8) and the outcome disappears with the project (E8, E9, E10): “--there are projects here and there and then the projects and reports are just closed and that's it. Their joint impact is not looked at” (E10). Lack of connectedness was exemplified by a story about a bioproduct factory planned in the region, which would be good news, but since the strategy was mainly R&D and technology-driven, important interconnections such as the needs of local people and the region were overlooked. During the interview, the expert constructed spontaneous systemic insight regarding regional

decisions being too sub-optimised and narrow, and how instead, one should see more connections between things.

“Now that I think about it, there should be a more sophisticated understanding of how things affect each other. If a bioproduct factory comes here, it should get raw material and you can't get it from [a municipality] if roads are not in a good condition. When people move away, it doesn't make sense [to build] roads -- And how do we get forest machines and workers, and educate the drivers to transport raw materials to the factory, which is a part of some international value chain? [Decisions should] not be so sub-optimised and thereby narrow. One should see the connections between things and the impact of decisions. A scenario where big cities and top universities lead the way into the global economy leaves out quite many other perspectives.” (E4)

The lack of common will in funding regarding climate issues was found problematic (E3). Also, *lack of cultural, and international interaction* was a concern (E1). The innovation environment was described with a metaphor of ‘impivaaralaisuus’ (E1), which is a reference to a historic Finnish novel describing parochialism and isolation from others. Instead, cultural interaction was needed for novelties to rise: “I am afraid that our society is not exposed in a positive sense to the platforms of international contacts and openness, and innovations are made within a closed system” (E1).

Another element in the socio-structural context (Geels 2020) could be **Societal positions and relations**. The cross-cutting theme in the element was a societally acknowledged position. First, those individuals and organisations, which were engaged in the funding process or were forming directions to it, were often in some kind of *Management* or *Professional top expert position* (E1, E3, E6, E7, E8, E10): “[FO] hears widely regional organisations, 300–400 people, most of whom represent management teams, directors, or RD&I managers or management of large organisations” (E6). Interestingly, another funding expert confirmed the existence of the element by opposing it, when describing how they recruit evaluators of applications: while some other funders may engage, according to an expert, “well-established and famous professor types”, the policy was rather to engage those who were competent and had merits but who did not yet have “power” (E2). Additionally, *Familiarity* could be understood as a possible form of an impactful position in relation to a funding organisation. The decision-making process inside the funding organisation might stress familiarity and solid relationships: “We often get evaluators suggested by previous evaluators. The circle enlarges all along” (E2). When comparing the applications, it can also be found important that an applicant can show previous “evidence

it has done things right and it is known” (E9). A funder could also express that there “is some turnover among those who get grants” (E8) referring to the fact there are long-established non-profit organisations as regular beneficiaries.

Social positions and relations also surfaced in an opposing role. *Managing culture*, such as top-down managing or matrix organisation, could hamper novelties and innovation, e.g. matrix organisation could cause challenges in a complex environment (E6). *Fuzziness in societal relations* could be a common term describing a certain blindness in a societal system. Fuzziness hampered especially the expectations regarding relevance and impact, which funders as decision-makers could have towards awarded actors and their actions. When several decision-makers and actors were functioning simultaneously in society but unaware of each other, the ignorance made the evaluation of the impact very difficult, since the impact is “not due to one project” (E2, E4). The further in the future the measuring point of a certain expected impact was, the more difficult it would be to separate the role of an individual funding organisation, “large impact is a far-reaching chain, and the impact is affected by the entire context” (E7).

“--when you fund scientific work, the dissemination of science, or artistic work, -- it's very difficult to assess the impact of a single funder because there are so many funders and actors. -- There is often long-term work in the background, which has been funded by many public parties, the state, universities, other private funders, and maybe companies. So, the impact talk that you hear from time to time is artificial and contrived.” (E2)

Likewise, fuzziness could also arise in situations where the beneficiary was in a well-established position in relation to the funding organisation. In an example, some contradiction was caused by the dual nature of non-profit organisations, balancing between the fund awarding administration and citizens (E8).

“[NGOs] apply for funding for things that sometimes conflict and sometimes don't with the public authority regulations or the government programme. --This shows the dual nature of NGOs. In Finland, we have many structures to fund NGOs with state grants or municipal grants, but at the same time it is assumed that they act as trustees, watchdogs, for certain groups.” (E8)

Second, the promoting element of the **Operating environment and future developments** comprised elements both in the *present* and in the *future*. In the present, some funding experts addressed specifically the needs of local organisations regarding e.g. EU-based structural ERDF funding.

Table 4 Promoting and opposing elements influencing decision-making and expected actions and implications in the narrative.

FO is an acronym for a funding organisation.

Promoting elements				Opposing elements				
1 Socio-Cultural elements				Socio-Cultural elements				
<i>a) Public space</i>	Societal discussion topics	Media	Systemic nature of dialogue	<i>a) Bounded dialogue</i>	Silos in public debate	Politicisation of science		
<i>b) Language</i>	Headlines in a programme	Definitions of terms		<i>b) Fuzzy language</i>	Difficultness of terms	Associations of terms		
<i>c) Built platforms for dialogue</i>	Professional communication, incl. multi-disciplinary discussion, and consulting	Local interaction	Political negotiation	<i>c) Lack of connectedness</i>	Inter-connections ignored	Lack of common will in funding	Lack of cultural, and international interaction	Lack of continuity in projects
2 Societal positions and relations				Societal positions and relations				
<i>b) Managing position</i>	Management of FO	Community leaders, managers of organisations	EU leaders	<i>a) Managing</i>	Matrix organisation	Top-down managing		
<i>c) Professional position</i>	Expertise position of evaluators	Professor position of evaluators	In-house expert position	<i>b) Fuzzy relations</i>	(Ignorance of) other actors acting simultaneously	Close position of a beneficiary to a funder		
<i>d) Familiarity</i>	Authorising recommended or previously funded actors as evaluators	An actor being known	An actor funded before			Professionalisation of non-profit organisations		
3 The operating environment and future developments				The operating environment and future developments				
<i>The present</i>	Social needs	Needs and strategies of actors	Societal change, shifts (e.g. Covid)					
<i>Futures</i>	Trends, megatrends	Foresight knowledge		Uncertainty of developments	Uncertainty of the impact; No impact	Trends and Megatrends		

Promoting elements						Opposing elements				
4 Regulative power						Regulative power				
Governmental policy	the EU		Legislation and regulation		Politically driven programmes	Bureaucracy of the funding instrument, energy spent on it	Regulation restrictions in legislation and programmes		Sparsness / marginality of funding	
5 Worldview						Worldview: bounded outlook (attitudes)				
Strategy of FO	Mission/mandate/tradition of FO	Expectations and the vision	Values of FO and actors	Negotiated regional values	Subjective views of evaluators	Professionalism	Sticking to traditions in funding	Attitudes (e.g. Fear of novelty or Engineering-budget-driven thinking)		
6 Competence						Competence gaps of actors				
Competence of FO	Competence of evaluators, appeal	Process of decision-making in FO	Evaluation of Competence of actors (applicants)	Quality of an application	Trustworthiness of actors	Not achieving initial goals	Lack of competence	Lack of project and procurement skills	Lack of commitment, giving up	Arguing actors

Constructing a regional strategy, which directs funding, was described as “piling topics from the strategies of the organisations” so that “the strong core of the funding” is based on the know-how of large local organisations and the needs of industry and business life. The strategy of funding was thus built on existing local economic strengths. It was also mentioned in the ERDF-funding context, that although funding may be awarded to public projects, the baseline is that local businesses should benefit somehow from funded projects and initiatives to make an application interesting (E4, E5, E6): “You could explore interesting things, for example, art and culture, but if it is not interesting from a business perspective, then it doesn't get money” (E4). Thus, the element was partly aligned with the economic structural context (Geels 2020).

“No strategy is created out of thin air. --It affects where we are far ahead, and where we have already been good at. --If our university is strong, or our industry is oriented in a certain way, then, of course, we must develop those sectors.” (E6)

Nevertheless, other elements were not related to mere economy. *Shifts* in the operating environment could change initial funding objectives but only slightly. Most of the funders described that if they reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was mostly about changing their process or sharing public supplementary funding for organisations to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Yet, two interviewees described how the pandemic crisis had promoted new kinds of project announcements even at short notice. One described how the agility of a funding organisation can help react to sudden shifts in the operating environment despite the heavy bureaucracy of the funding instrument; as an example, they managed to open rapidly a call for solutions to help young people keep involved in society amid COVID-19 (E9). Another funder launched a special call for a novel research project since they saw that the pandemic opened a window of opportunity to see if researchers would be more interested in studying connections between health and natural systems (E3).

The expected *Future developments* were a significant part of the influence of the operating environment. The future-driven promoting elements *comprised trends and megatrends*, and *foresight knowledge* including scenario processes. Trends and megatrends are gradual forces, factors and patterns that are pervasively causing change in society (Saritas & Smith 2011, 293). Megatrends as long-term processes have a profound impact on societies over decades or even centuries, and it is possible to equate them and Landscape-level changes in the MLP, as the similarity of the concepts is prominent: they both are difficult to

influence with the usual time horizon of decision-making (Vähäkari et al. 2020, 6–7). Megatrends, such as digitalisation or climate change, were described to guide decision-making when awarding funds to actors, whose actions could form long-term implications. (E4, E6, E7): “Megatrends or climate issues at least carry ten years ahead -- you know that if the circular economy centre is funded now, it's a right direction” (E4). Foresight knowledge was also seen as a baseline to form the societal and global big picture, on which the funding decisions were built (E10). Foresight knowledge in terms of trends, which can be more related to Regime level (Vähäkari et al. 2020, 7), was also seen important: one could underline that the strategy of the funding organisation was strongly built on foresight to look for emerging industries (E6), or foresight was needed to underpin decision-making when preparing a seven-year regional funding programme: “--it is really a long timeline in this kind of operating environment where fast changes occur” (E5).

The future also entailed elements that hampered decision-making, most of all the *uncertainty*. One could describe how they built a strategy for 2050 but, at the same time, were aware of “not seeing that far” but making only “sophisticated guesses beyond ten years” (E6). Although trends and megatrends were promoting agents in several interviews and seen as providers for a firmer base in decision-making, they were also seen as opposing elements due to their *overriding futures-shaping force*, as if they were untamed powers. For instance, the development of the giant global platform companies was seen as such a dominant trend that funding digital trading places locally was considered possibly irrelevant: “there may be phenomena, against which it is pointless to start fighting here with our means” (E6). Megatrends could be seen as untouchable by the means of funding. Therefore, the further the measuring point of impact was, the more difficult it was to set concrete goals due to “many other undercurrents in society” (E7).

"Big undercurrents flow their way, regardless of what individual funders do. Polarisation will not be significantly stopped or reduced with this money, nor will it solve the actions required for the ageing of the population or the transition to a carbon-neutral lifestyle. We can fund research to a significant extent, but our role in the big sustainability transition is limited." (E7)

As Kivimaa et al. (2019, 123) write, the causality in transition processes is difficult to assess because the processes are complex and multidimensional. In the interviews, evaluating the future *impact* was likewise often considered challenging. Many (E3, E4, E5, E7, E8) acknowledged that the further in the future the expected outcome or impact was, the more difficult it was to evaluate the relevance of decisions. Similarly, it was

considered difficult to verify the effects. Especially in the context of science and art, the question of impact was found complicated since they could have the long-term impact of decades when e.g. research knowledge is rather “gradually transferred” to teaching over years, and then gradually to people and society (E2).

“For us, [impact] is by no means a priority -- there are differences, of course, between environmental science and some theoretical, humanistic, or social science research. -- more theoretical research takes science forward, but it does not have a rapid social impact.” (E2)

The difficulty of pursuing social impact in practice was recognised: “We can only catalyse the fact that something can happen and see what happens in individual projects” (E3). The difference between short-term outcomes and the long-term impact was exemplified in a closed project, which promoted the attractiveness of reading literature and aimed to increase *Bildung* (fin. *sivistys*) regarding wisdom, open-mindedness and intellectual development acquired through education and upbringing (Tieteen termipankki 2024). When short-term outcomes were evaluated, numeric goals were well met. However, when evaluating the long-term impact years later, the leverage had run out and the impact on *Bildung* was only “very questionable” (E7). On the other hand, according to another view, the lack of a big impact was a major problem and an opposing element (E10) in funding since the impact should be pursued even in single projects: “A failed project or experiment is one that has no possibility to have a big impact, because the surrounding factors, phenomena or connections have not been identified” (E10).

Third, the promoting element of **Regulative power**, parallel with Regulatory-institutional structures by Geels (2020), comprised *governance* as well as *legislative* and *political* power. The element was brought up mostly by funding experts who were focused on regional development and had an authorised role in it. The selection criteria of applications could be based on legislation (E5), or funding was expressed to be politically “well-directed” with an “enormous” impact of the *EU*, where the boundary conditions for funding were set (E4). While actions of regime such as politically driven funding programmes were named as strongly promoting agents, they were also found as opposing agents and discussed in a critical light. Some funding instruments were depicted as *bureaucratic*. Beneficiaries could be “very tired” of running projects because it was administratively demanding, or applicants were not enthusiastic about certain funding instruments because “it had become very bureaucratic” (E4, E5, E9).

“New applicants are shocked at how carefully they have to think about everything and how precisely [the funding organisation] wants the applicant to describe things in the project plan.” (E4)

Another problem was the *regulation* and restrictiveness of politically steered funding programmes and national legislation. For instance, regional councils were not allowed to fund the business sector, while governmental Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment did not fund public actors. The regional funding programme document was described as the one thing that guided funding so that “even changes in the operating environment cannot change it”. (E1, E5.)

“Unfortunately, a large part of the funding is about thinking whether it is possible to do something. This is a highly regulated activity. The regulation stems from the EU and the national legislative frame. -- The difficulty is how to write [plan] and fund a project that would be cost-effective impactful and legal at the same time [laughs]. (E4)

Restrictions were illustrated in an example of a rural town, which needed to promote its tourism industry and therefore skilful labour was crucial. However, the funding organisation, which was authorised to develop the region as its prior Rationale, could not fund directly labour recruitment, tourism campaigns, housing construction or infrastructure for transportation, although each of those actions would be in line with the initial idea of the regional programme: “People would like to do a lot of good things but they just don't fit the [funding] programme” (E4). Uncertainty of legislation might also cause problems. In the case of foundations, the security of the operating environment guaranteed by the state was underlined, especially considering potential threats of new forms of taxation (E7). Also, *money* itself, or rather the amount of it, could be understood to have regulative power. Some considered the funding instruments as small, or “tinkering” (E1, E3, E5), and thereby expressed there were limited possibilities.

4.3.3.2 *The Characteristics of Decision-makers and Actors*

As discussed previously, the role of actors and their agency is often found inadequate in the socio-technical literature. In addition, if it is discussed, the way actors act and interact seems to be described abstractly. Analysing the narratives of change in this study introduces several promoting and opposing elements, which could resonate with the actor-oriented reality of societal change and transitions. It was possible to identify several characteristics of individuals or organisations, which were expressed to either promote or oppose decision-making and its expected implications in society.

First, **Worldview** as a promoting element comprised strategies, values, missions and mandates of the funding organisations as collective decision-making actors, but also personal views and comprehensions of the evaluators, who were authorised by the funding organisations to assess applications. Worldview could define prominently the direction of decision-making. Most funding experts (E1, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, E10) brought up that the *organisational strategy* gave guidelines in funding albeit the emphasis varied. For some, it was the most relevant element while another funding expert could stress the diversity of cultural activities and nourishing pluralistic values in funding keeping the organisational strategy in a minor role.

“-- [funding projects] is always strategy-oriented, impact-oriented and aimed at a common mission and common vision. (E10)

Expectations and *visions* were at the core of the narratives and were strongly connected to the *Rationale*, the reasoning, of narratives. The expectations, the expected outcomes and impact, were largely discussed as influencing elements but their significance to decisions ranged: while for one the awarding of funds was impact-oriented in essence, another could strongly question the prioritising of the impact in the first place.

“We make a precise analysis of the impact chain. – [We build] a story about change and impact analysis on how to build strategic goals, objectives, vision, and mission. It provides a big framework for what to do so that [actions are] focused from a [funding organisation] point of view.” (E10)

Visions emerged in some narratives as a perceivable promoting element, but some discussed it when asked. Vision, an image of the future one is committed to creating (Bezold et al. 2009, 5), was either expressing what the organisation was pursuing in society (E2, E3, E10), or the vision was described as a built-in element of phenomenon-based strategies (E4). One of the funding experts expressed their organisation had no real vision due to the uncertainty of future developments when scenarios were “very contradictory” while the funding organisation wanted to understand the possibilities of local industries to succeed in the future (E6). Vision was then treated more as a prediction, instead of a preferred future state to aspire to.

“We don't have a real vision; we can't go that far. Perhaps we rather have visions of the themes and topics that may be realised -- We try to see 10 to 15 years ahead and increase our understanding about issues there – e.g. in the future, we'll need more low-carbon or carbon-binding materials and technologies and such. We should underpin those since we have such expertise.” (E6)

The relevance of *values* was also emphasised. One could see that society's general political values affect funding decisions and thus dialogue and negotiating about mutual values was needed (E1), and some stressed the values of the funding organisation: they were expected to be adopted by the external authorised evaluators of applications (E2, E3).

“When [the evaluators] are recruited, we strongly highlight the [funder's] view and how we want to have an impact in the world. We attach the group [to the funder] -- so that the experts adhere (fin. “*leimautua*”) as a part of [us] -- so that they become familiar with the values and discuss before evaluating what we are looking for.” (E3)

Nevertheless, worldviews could also oppose the expected developments. Opposing elements related to Worldview were mostly about a **Bounded outlook** in society in general. *Professionalism* represented a conservative structure, which might hamper innovation in working life: “We have strong professions. Professional stuff in a certain way protects its industry so strongly that it is difficult to bring in outside perspectives or actors” (E6). Professionalism was also brought up when the role of NGOs was discussed. NGOs may function in a role similar to that of an authority and thus become more professional. For instance, an office may be open only during office hours instead of developing creative ways to contact people.

“-- people do not necessarily go to NGOs as active participants but rather expect services. One goes to an NGO saying "Please measure my blood pressure" instead of asking what one could do as a volunteer. – [Professionalisation] is, of course, not necessarily the most favourable development for free NGO activity.” (E8)

Also, funding organisations were described as *sticking to traditions* instead of renewing their funding policies, despite severe changes, such as climate change, in the operating environment: “Many old actors act as they have always done, and they do not think they should change because something is happening” (E3). Further, an atmosphere of *attitudes* was brought up. Resistance to novelty was described e.g. as fear. Engineer-budgeting thinking was seen to hamper creative innovativeness. Similarly, it was mentioned that there were parties that opposed certain scientific disciplines and found them political or unobjective, and “there may be [funders] who think that -- something cannot be supported since otherwise they could be attacked”. (E6, E2.)

Second, **Competence** was recognised as both a promoting and an opposing element. The *competence of funding organisations* was often interpreted to promote and enable funding

decisions. Competence could be about the skill to evaluate applications in a refined process, to write project announcements and choose projects, or to be on the pulse of society in general. (E1, E5, E7, E8.) *The competence of actors*, in turn, was understood as vocational skills or skills related to the funding process. Competence could be professional experience or appeal, knowledge of the operational environment, a high level of quality (in science and art), a skill to make a quality *application*, knowledge of funding instruments and procurement in general, or experience in project management (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E8, E9). *Trustworthiness* could also be considered competence since it was related to the ability to perform reliably. Trustworthiness could constitute e.g. previous performance in “fulfilling the administrative obligations” (E8), based on how an actor had reported on the use of grants in the past.

If the interviewees discussed failing in funding, failure was characterised as rare, but if it happened, most often it was related to actors’ *competence gaps* or deficiencies. The incompetence of project staff was described as a common reason for failures (E5). It could be about not finishing the funded action as planned, not achieving the initial goals, or getting tired and giving up. Competence gaps of actors also referred to problems that were caused by the inexperience of applicants related to the very funding processes and project management. As a result, it was stated that “it is easier to fund one project of a million euros than ten projects worth 100,000 euros” (E9). If an applicant needed a lot of support in applying for funding and details in the paperwork, the funding process became laborious for funders. For instance, it was described that non-profit organisations tend to have little experience in procurement and project management, and they don't know the basic procedures (how to acquire something, how to comply with procurement law, how to recruit people for work). Therefore, especially in the EU Structural Fund context, the work of non-profit organisations might not be considered meaningful and effective enough or to have continuity, and thus it was easier to leave them out. It was described as “a raw truth”. The same applies often to private companies, who do not know funding instruments and what they can be used for. (E1, E3, E5, E9.)

In the next chapter, the third section of the narratives, Plot, organises Rationale and Change Agents into sequenced entities completing the construction of the narratives of change.

4.4 Plot

Plot explains how the preferable future could be achieved. It is about the contextualised activities and developments leading to the desired future (Wittmayer et al 2019, 3). In this study, *Plot* arranges *Rationale* and *Change agents* (decision-makers, actors, promoting and opposing elements) and expected actions into sequenced entities towards futures. The plot starts forming when the questions “How does the process go?”, “How do you decide who and what you fund?”, or “What is expected to happen?” are asked.

Plot was formed based on the content of the interviews, instead of categorising funding experts according to their organisational status. A narrative plot might combine organisations, which would not cooperate in reality. Each of the ten interviews could form an individual plotting towards futures and therefore an individual narrative of change. However, as Riessman (2008, 74) states, the thematic narrative approach can follow the tradition of qualitative inquiry regarding theorising across several cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take, albeit preserving narrative features and the case centered essence of narrative analysis. In this case, common thematic elements were found in the narratives, and they formed a basis for the comparison of narratives.

The three main narratives of change were constructed according to their plot, that is the main course of action, i.e. whether the funded actions were expected to nurture society, reinforce a network of local actors, or participate cross-sectoral actors to shape change.

4.4.1 The Nurturing Narrative

The Nurturing Narrative revolved around the plot of promoting and safeguarding the space for sharing in society. The plot took society mostly towards the vision of the **Welfare of Society**, which embraces the nation’s integrity, trust and democracy. Fostering a Nordic welfare state and human health was desirable. Welfare also acted as a counterforce to elements that challenge e.g. democracy such as polarisation or hostile social media behaviour. The funding organisations were private funds but also public authority funders, but the similarity in the narrative themes stemmed from sharing intangible assets such as knowledge and communication, and negotiating values. The plot stressed trust in a system instead of control or rigid expectations.

“—encounters or empowerment are at the core of non-profit organisations’ activities. That’s what they [non-profits] are for. They act informally in informal relations. They do not have a role of authority but in a good case, they contribute to social capital and act as friends and buffers and promote communication. -- there is mutual trust among Finns, I think that is a core issue, which I would like to see promoted by NGOs.” (E8)

The narrative could also be connected to the vision of **International Openness**, when “obtaining change” (E1) was about heading together to negotiated directions towards a positive international future, where society was exposed to open platforms of international contacts. The principal tool was to secure space for free knowledge creation, pluralistic cultural actions, and connections for communication. The plot stressed funding activities related to science projects, artists, civil society organisations, or public projects, which could represent, for instance, science regime, civil society regime, and policy regime. Information flows were enabled through these connections. Information flows were expected to circulate and nourish society through interconnections in society without explicit steering. The role of the funders as the systemic intermediary decision-maker was *the bridge builder*. Their actions were focused mostly on enabling and securing information flows in society in general. Hence, the objectives of funded activities could sometimes be even contradictory.

“--we are probably funding projects with conflicting objectives, reflecting the fact that the experts have really got the power and can fund pluralistically. This is precisely the idea that we do not control the choice of content on behalf of the experts.” -- It would be impossible to imagine that we would want to steer science and art in a particular direction from a single funder's position. In a pluralistic society, this is the way to do good art and science and take them and society forward.” (E7)

In the context of the Multi-Level Perspective view on society, the funding decisions could be interpreted as aiming at shaping change primarily on the societal system at Landscape level, which is the wider external context and encompasses slow-changing factors or deep structural developments such as values or ideologies, and it cannot be influenced by actors at niche and regime levels in the short-term (Geels 2002; Geels 2011). If regime actors such as science regime representatives or civil society regime organisations such as non-profit organisations were funded, they were mostly expected to enrich intangible assets such as forming and developing knowledge, understanding, cultural assets and values in the long-term. Niche innovations were not necessarily expected. Fund-awarded projects might or might not have a rapid impact on society, and it was acknowledged that the timespan

could be tens or even hundreds of years since the effects of actions such as science projects would not suddenly stop but the understanding would increase in society.

“A typical impact in universities is that you research things now and they are gradually transmitted into teaching over a few years. From there, they are gradually transmitted to the people who are studying and then to society. It doesn't happen suddenly. Sometimes it can happen faster, sometimes slower.” (E2)

The need to promote change to a certain direction was not the priority albeit the need was more prominent in some interviews than others. More than the other two narratives, the Nurturing narrative expressed expectations to impede certain trends from developing further, such as the deterioration of the welfare state and democracy, or polarisation. Positive developments were expected to emerge and grow in the societal system as long as there was variety and ongoing action among diverse actors. From this perspective, decisions leaned on the self-organising property of systems (Meadows 2009, 81), which means that the societal system can learn and birth system-enhancing elements in the long-term.

In terms of promoting elements, the Decision-making and Actor oriented context, “the characteristics of actors” (Geels 2020), was prominently promoting decision-making and expectations in the form of *Worldview*, specifically *Values*. Oftentimes, the decision-making process was also about negotiating values. The values of decision-makers radiated and gave guidelines for action. Values and values-based dialogue were seen as intrinsically significant. Safeguarding a pluralistic value base in society could be even seen as a primary objective (E7). Additionally, the importance of negotiation of values was stressed to form common directions for change in the region despite the possible differences (E1). Values of the funding organisation such as diversity or eco-social Bildung were also seen as a concrete tool in decision-making when scientific and artistic quality was difficult to define (E2).

“Seeing directions is not about single solutions but about what is considered valuable next. Some may have the motive to get more labour force or healthy families, and another may pursue reducing morbidity or crimes -- While these are worked on, statements of direction are created -- This is what change management is when the funding and obtaining instruments are small. It is more about sitting together and agreeing.” (E1)

Another key element was *Competence* of both decision-makers and actors. The decision-making process was stressed. The quality of decisions was oftentimes argued by refined

evaluation processes of the funding organisation and how the phases of processes were built. The competence of evaluators of applications was in an important role. Expertise or meritorious background of authorised peer evaluators to evaluate applications and the needs in the operating environment, “being on the pulse of society” (E7), were brought to discussion. The competence of evaluators helped to identify the competence of actors. The competence of actors was conveyed through applications (E2, E8), such as the “high quality and level of science and art”. In addition, trustworthiness and previous performance were a factor in the selection process.

"If funded previously, the effectiveness is monitored. What kinds of results the actor has achieved previously, or supervisory information on how it has fulfilled its administrative obligations, i.e. how it has reported on the use of the grant in the past." (E8)

One area of actors’ competence was knowledge about the operating environment, the “capability of using ‘feelers’ amid the region and target groups the way the authorities cannot do” (E8). The knowledge about the operation environment, and the needs that wanted to be addressed by funding instruments, were thus channelled through the competence of actors and decision-makers themselves.

The structural context (Geels 2020) was embodied in the Nurturing Narrative mainly as *built platforms for dialogue* and *societal position*, which together enabled the very value negotiation and decision-making. Platforms for dialogue were set for professional communication in funding organisations, either for external authorised peer evaluators, or in-house experts. In addition, continuous dialogue – meetings and negotiations about solutions – between regional organisations and political leadership was underlined (E1). However, societal positions framed the possibilities to participate in the dialogue. Dialogue was either set between collective actors, organisations, and their expert or management representatives, or in case of peer-evaluating the applications, socially acknowledged expertise, or even “top expertise”, was required. Nevertheless, this excluding power-setting was noted by a foundation, that wanted to promote also those expert-peer-evaluators, who did not necessarily have a professor position. The link to future thinking and foresight was narrow compared to the other two narratives. One could refer to the need for knowledge about trends in different fields of science (E2), external future-oriented reports (E7), or the need for various futures images to which relate funding actions (E1).

The opposing elements, which would hamper the plot, emerged sporadically. In the structural context, opposing elements could be found in *Societal positions and relations* mostly regarding *Fuzzy relations*. Decision-makers and fund-awarded actors seemed unaware of each other's simultaneous actions in society, and as a result, the impact chains of actions were difficult to form. Also, the professionalisation trend of non-governmental organisations, referring to absorbing similar roles as of public authorities, could speak to the challenges in terms of the long-term relationship between an intermediary decision-maker and an awarded actor and the risk of a certain kind of blending of roles. On the other hand, Socio-cultural elements in terms of *lack of connectedness* were seen to oppose expected developments in the form of a lack of sufficient cultural interaction. When society was not exposed to platforms of international contact and openness, society would not see the world's needs. It could lead to parochialism in the innovation environment: "To create platforms for mutual change requires groundwork to birth platforms, in which new actors can meet and look at phenomena that are not yet on the table but needed in the future" (E1).

Similar elements were believed to hinder expected developments in the Decision-making and Actor-oriented context. The *bounded outlook* in society in general, such as opposing science, or possible ivory tower attitude of decision-makers, referring to the indifference to the practical needs of society (E2), were undesirable features. Furthermore, the *future developments* in the *Operating environment* were seen as somewhat uncontrollable as the power of megatrends could hamper making a certain impact, and it was recognised that the funding goals should be joined to the development of "big undercurrents and paradigms" to gain greater impact (E7). The further away the evaluation point of the implications was, the more difficult it was to separate the role of a single decision-making organisation in change-making (E2, E7, E8). As the narrative focused on long-term landscape-level changes, the narrative seemed to stress the obscurity of implications, as if the waves of actions dissolved as the timespan lengthened, not least because the nexus of actions would entail unknown decision-makers and actors over time.

4.4.2 The Reinforcing Narrative

The Reinforcing Narrative revolved around the plot of economic development by supporting the network of local actors to be well-prepared for future developments. The plot took society mostly towards the vision of Economic Prosperity, where organisations were competent and innovative, and local industries were developing positively and

coping with uncertainty, creating economic prosperity in global competition. Also, the vision of International Openness was connected to this narrative, where Finnish organisations were obtaining a share of European markets and funding.

“-- the development is still strongly business-oriented and technology-driven -- there is a desire to improve competitiveness and competence -- I think RDI will be increasingly on focus, and -- open innovation and partnerships and internationalisation are the buzzwords of the day-- I find it hard to imagine that the big picture will change [in the context ERDF funding].” (E4)

In the plot, the principal tool for change was innovation. Information flows were initially formed by science actors, and Research and development activities (RD&I) were expected to birth innovations. The role of the funder as the systemic intermediary decision-maker was *the assembler*. Their actions were focused mostly on combining different regime actors such as organisations in policy, science and industry (business) regime and enabling linkages and information flows between the actors. In practice, political objectives were interpreted and applied in alignment with the common regional strategy built on incumbent local strengths and individual strategies of local organisations, which were interpreted as relevant. Another major intermediary action was channelling information flows from science regime to the industry-business sector. As a result, niche innovation as a seed for change was expected to emerge and reinforce the network of local actors to help them compete more vigorously at the international level, and through them, the whole region and society could prosper. The funding actions could be interpreted as renewing society structures incrementally at regime level.

“We also want to transfer to companies the know-how that universities and others have. In practice, we fund mostly development processes. There, innovation is important. We've funded things like [making] insects into food and all sorts of even odd things, to see if they'll turn into something, -- some of them will turn into good stories.” (E6)

The need to promote change in a certain direction was strongly acknowledged even at the level of transitions. For instance, the concept of twin transition was used to express the need to promote both digital and green transition simultaneously in society.

In terms of promoting and opposing elements, the structural context (Geels 2020) was dominant, i.e. the information flows and the nods to disseminate information were primarily structural. *Regulative power* was conveyed through political and regional programmes, and funders as intermediates were to implement them. Another structural

key element was the *socio-cultural element of built platforms for dialogue* between the decision-makers and the actors to form the common ground, the strategy, for regional development. Participants took part in dialogue systematically and extensively according to their *societal position*; participants were representatives of most relevant regional organisations in expert or managing positions. The economic and social *operation environment* was primarily interpreted at regime level, through the *needs of regional organisations*. *Futures knowledge*, specifically strategic foresight activities, was utilised in strategy building. Foresight was harnessed to look for emerging industries and future trends and thereby reinforce the future-proofness of the network of local organisations.

The characteristics of decision-makers and actors underpinned the structural context. The fund-awarded collective actors operated mainly in the public sector, but they were expected to form economic welfare in society. Science regime, comprising universities, universities of applied sciences, and research institutes, was strongly represented. Policy regime was supported by funding municipalities, development companies, and regional state actors. Business actors as secondary beneficiaries were expected to co-benefit. Their *Worldview* was channelled through organisational strategies. *Competence* of both the decision-making organisations and the actors and their knowledge of the operating environment were essential to preferable future developments.

"It is the experts of beneficiaries and project professionals who know what to do in the operating environment. They are to offer projects and measures, and we evaluate as best as we can if they are reasonable and have novelty value and if they meet the costs. I cannot know the concrete level and I do not want to steer or hamper too much. There are experts and researchers in the field who know what development should be like." (E5)

However, the plot was hampered by the rigidity of both structures and actors. The strictness of funding instruments narrowed down the possibility of engaging a variety of actors. Heavy bureaucracy aggravated the formality burden on actors both in the application process and during the projects. Competence gaps of actors could pose challenges to the successful completion of projects. Bounded outlook, such as fear of innovation and professionalism, protected industries so that bringing in outside perspectives or actors, or welcoming innovations in one's industry or organisation might be difficult.

The Reinforcing Narrative was in line with the interpretation that the existing regimes are characterised by lock-in, which means that the future trajectory of a system depends both on its present state and the path it has taken (Derbyshire 2016). Innovation occurs

incrementally, with small adjustments accumulating into stable trajectories. The trajectories refer not only to technology, but also to cultural, political, scientific, market, and industrial dimensions. For instance, techno-economic lock-in is formed by investments in infrastructures and competencies. As it was expressed in the interview: “We have certain strengths. Our question is how to develop them. Then of course our question is always: what else should we understand? How can we be strong in the future? (E6)”. Institutional and political lock-ins stem from regulations, standards and policy networks (Unruh 2000; Geels 2011, 27; Geels 2019, 189), which was also strongly displayed in the narrative when the funding experts expressed the heavy burden of regulation and bureaucracy. The landscape-level pressure on regime was acknowledged in the form of megatrends (Geels & Schot 2007; Vähäkari et al. 2020) such as climate change and technological development leaps, which had already strongly shaped policies and regulations to promote green and digital transitions at local regions in Finland. However, sudden landscape changes, aka wild cards (Vähäkari et al. 2020) such as the COVID-19 pandemic, did not change funding programmes other than to provide additional funding to help organisations recover: “The program document is the one that guides us, -- even changes in the operating environment cannot change it” (E5).

4.4.3 The Participatory Narrative

The Participatory Narrative revolved around the plot of the pursuit of strategy- and vision-oriented societal impact. The impact was pursued through catalysing activities cross-sectorally, combining actors through projects, experiments, or disseminating knowledge. The plot could take society towards several visions, Welfare of Society, Ecological Sustainability, and Socio-Economic Prosperity. The principal tool for change was to create participatory interconnections between cross-sectoral actors and activities, which would enable learning and accumulating activities cross-sectorally in society. The role of the funder as the systemic intermediary decision-maker was *a catalyser*, who created and enabled interconnections and catalysed information flows and learning broadly in a societal system. A large variety of actors could be involved: science actors, public organisations, civil society organisations, business organisations, and citizens at the grassroots level without a recognised position in any organisation.

First, the connections were to form between multidisciplinary actors, or combinations of public and private organisations and people even at the level of ecosystems. Additionally,

the relevance of the secondary actors (beneficiaries), private individuals, in shaping change was highly stressed. Supporting individuals to change in their daily lives was underlined to make even “big social change” (E10) possible: “It's more about how a person's mind changes. The human mind should be inclined to the fact that we must truly change” (E3). Second, it was found important to promote interconnections of the funded projects. Interconnections between projects could catalyse large-scale impact. Projects could support each other to steer developments jointly in the preferable direction towards the vision instead of a single project hype: “individual projects will not be the solution, but how to bring different actors together and organise forums so that levers and opportunities for joint influence can be identified between projects, between actors” (E10).

If funding was awarded only to scientific research projects, cross-sectoral information flows were stressed in various phases of funding. In the case of a private foundation, the group of peer evaluators was formed on a multidisciplinary basis and funding was aimed at multidisciplinary research projects. The individual researchers were expected to give a communication plan to popularise science and disseminate research findings. Researchers were responsible for being active in public space and participating in societal dialogue, e.g. by writing blogs, but also meeting cross-sectoral actors. Actions were thus expected to promote the dissemination of research knowledge to influence opinions.

“We can follow how much an individual researcher does other than just scientific publications. We measure how much they've been, say, making appearances, giving public talks or writing on the subject in large forums, media visibility, or speaking to the parliament -- or collaborating with stakeholders -- What [are] the various interactions of a single researcher that radiate something forward -- our task is to support the researcher to do more than just write articles and do research. The role is to be active in society.” (E3)

As a catalyser, the intermediary decision-maker was more involved in the fund-awarded activity than in the other two narratives, specifically by providing support and coaching for the actors. Coaching ranged from advising in the application process, and training actors about the popularisation of science and networking, all the way to entire educational programmes for the actors and related networks. In addition to reports and surveys, concrete tools were created e.g. to develop the skills of change agents.

“--they are not top-down type solutions, but [about] how to obtain a systemically conceived whole. -- We need to support the activities of the actors in a more interdisciplinary way to increase our understanding. That's why we have a strong educational intervention. Just bringing in the money does not help, but we need

to support people's ability, desire and opportunity to make the change, to develop the ability, motivation, desire and know-how to do it in everyday life--. (E10)

The participation effort extended beyond structural boundaries and societally acknowledged positions to enable the participation of grassroots actors. That could be interpreted as an effort for an outbreak from regime level, making decisions which are incompatible with the regime norms, expectations and standardised ways of doing things (see, for example, Geels 2011). Enabling the participation had required even a powerful, proactive local reform of the EU-based ESF funding instrument: “[The ESF has been] very bureaucratic for a long time -- I've wanted to tear it apart to make it work” (E9).

“If people with good ideas but without an organisation, certain kind of free operators in a 4th sector, come from the street and talk about an idea, but they have neither money nor an organisation, [an actor] could acquire an event from them, e.g., and make together small videos or events around a topic. We have diversified the funding instrument [ESF] for such sectors and activities, which it would otherwise not adapt to. -- We have tried to find ways to the grass-roots level. (E9)

In the context of the MLP (Geels 2002), the Participatory narrative plot could be interpreted as shaping change through common learning in the nexus of the systemic whole, comprising also grassroots actors and niche development. For one, the initial seed for change was the knowledge created in science regime and “putting it into practice (*fin. jalkauttaa*)” (E3) cross-sectorally. Then again, the involvement of small, non-regime actors in the funded activity or even decision-making and planning of the very activity, could be found as an important source of learning. Small experiments could help in identifying the issues that influence the challenges at hand or which kinds of actors are suitable for shaping change in further funded projects and could help birthing, e.g. innovation (E10). In addition, making the community strongly involved in regional development was found crucial in terms of innovation in social issues, for instance through civil society actors and municipality cooperation in concrete decision-making on how to use EU-based ESF funding (E9).

“--that's where the best innovations come from, rather than us defining behind the program texts and not being ready to discuss what it could mean in practice in everyday life. -- so that things would be more concrete, allowing ordinary people to have an influence on everyday matters, which is where for example, the mental health and substance abuse problems stem from. Otherwise, we build castles in the air developing high-level stuff, where the actual target groups are not involved, and their voices are not heard.” (E9)

An expected outcome was discussed in various forms, from innovations, or shifts in mindset and values, to transformational long-term change in society. As one pointed out, nothing was excluded. "Anything is sped up depending on what kind of project is tackling certain things" (E10). The need to promote change in a certain direction and a certain vision was prominently displayed but the scale of expected change varied. Two out of three funding experts referred to the transformational level of change in society.

“Our call for applications stated there must be significant changes in the next 10 years. We want researchers to understand the urgency. Whatever they study [would] have an impact on decisions, business decisions and public opinion about that -- we simply must consume less--.” (E3)

Systems thinking was explicitly present in the plot. Identification of systemic leverages (Meadows 2009) was stressed (E3, E10). Leverages were sought by identifying the needs of systemic change at different levels of society. Promoting change was important in the structures and systems of society, but at the same time, it was about changing the capacity and behaviour of individuals, because “nothing goes forward without the other” (E10).

In terms of promoting and opposing elements, the characteristics of decision-makers and actors stood out. First, *Worldview* of the funding organisations or experts promoted strongly funding decisions: the mission, the mandate and the strategy were the core of decisions, and it was strongly connected to the vision of preferable futures. Funding decisions leaned on well-defined expectations and visions of future developments and could be significantly impact-driven. For instance, despite a regional funding organisation being influenced strongly by regime *Regulatory power*, the worldview had catalysed the transformation of a funding instrument to a more agile and participatory form. Second, *Competence* of the actors was highlighted, as the relevant part of the plot was to support the actors to learn and educate them to increase their competence and worldview.

The Structural context encompassed, in particular, *Socio-Cultural elements* regarding the dissemination of knowledge: *Built platforms for dialogue* and *Public space*. Despite the participatory approach, funding decisions were often built on professional discussions, whether it was inside the funding organisation, a solid group of authorised expert evaluators with their role as “gatekeepers” (E3), or a regional dialogue of organisation representatives. Nevertheless, the importance of public space and language was noted. It was expressed that “swarming, socially significant discussion topics often attract projects and funding” (E9), and the fact that “we are all connected to the social dialogue and atmosphere” (E3) also

affects how researchers think about what they should be researching and thus it helps to fund preferred systemic research projects. A generally favourable atmosphere was interpreted to form in the media, which addressed more environmental issues and expressed the interconnectedness of elements of the climate crisis. Second, *the operating environment and futures developments* were present in varying degrees. Social needs were strongly intertwined with strategies and visions. The significance of foresight was underlined by one of the interviewees, such as analysis of the operating environment, scenarios or megatrend analysis, which first formed the societal and global big picture and gave the starting point to strategies and so forth to funding decisions (E10).

The Participatory Narrative was the only narrative, where sudden landscape changes (Geels 2002) had partly changed the course of funding. The COVID-19 pandemic made some funding organisations adjust their processes. Some aimed at mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic. However, in the Participatory narrative, the funding processes seemed to be more agile. Funding organisations had ideated new kinds of funding objectives as a reaction to the pandemic. Landscape pressure could be seen as a window of opportunity (Geels 2002) since they could launch a preferred kind of call for research as the time was right: “--when Covid came, it took two weeks, and we had a call open for solving the problems -- to keep young people involved in society” (E9).

“The pandemic showed that we are totally connected to our living environment -- and we considered it attracts more researchers to the topic and to take the initiative and get interested in studying the connections between health and natural systems.” (E3)

The opposing elements, which would hamper the plot, were primarily structural. Socio-Cultural opposing elements were mostly related to *Lack of connectedness*, *Bounded dialogue*, and *Language*. Lack of connectedness could be interpreted as a lack of systems thinking or a lack of attempt at systemic action. The plot was hampered, for example, by the notion that actors did not see enough interconnections in society, or funded actions in general were too disconnected. The problem of bounded dialogue, silos in society, was stressed specifically in terms of climate issues, as “the environmental debate is so absurdly divided” (E3). All three interviewees brought up the difficulty of terms or the need to popularise knowledge, such as research language, foresight knowledge and terms. Similarly, discussions among experts could get difficult, while some may impose abstract

language on others; or plain planning of funding activities might get complicated when definitions are not clear to everyone.

4.5 The Summary of the Narrative Analysis

In summary, the results of the analysis show that funding decisions were expected to shape futures in three ways (Table 5). The three narratives of change were the Nurturing, the Reinforcing and the Participatory narrative. Funding experts as the narrative focus were on different roles of societal decision-making: The Bridge Builder (enabling and trust), The Assembler (compiling strategies and actors), and The Catalyser (creating connections between actors, guiding, coaching). Narratives aimed at preferable futures, aka future states of society, which were depicted through four primary visions: The Welfare of society, International openness, Socio-Economic prosperity, and Ecological sustainability. A narrative could plot to one or more visions.

The expected change towards preferable futures was constituted by various actions and influencing elements. *The Nurturing narrative* stressed safeguarding space for sharing such as free knowledge creation, value negotiation, pluralistic cultural actions and communication to promote understanding and trust in society. The narrative focus was long-term *Landscape* development regarding incremental diffusion of knowledge and value negotiation in society to develop the welfare of society. The direction of change was not necessarily steered. *The Reinforcing narrative* stressed the development of future-proofness of local organisations and the promotion of niche innovation. The narrative focus was to promote digital and green *Regime* transitions by combining and implementing the expectations of different regime organisations, and connecting actors. The narrative utilised scientific research channelled to different regimes, incumbent regime strengths, and trends to plot towards a socio-economic prosperous society. *The Participatory narrative* stressed the catalysis of cross-sectoral activities, combining actors through projects and experiments. The plot stressed cross-sectoral learning and disseminating knowledge. The decision-making intermediary role was most proactive and participative compared to other narratives of change. The narrative focus was a systemic whole including *grassroots-niche-level* to aim at systemic, even transformational, change to gain vision- and strategy-oriented societal impact.

Table 5 The summary of the narrative analysis.

The narrative		Nurturing	Reinforcing	Participatory
The intermediary role		The Bridge Builder (enabling and trust)	The Assembler (compiling strategies and strengths)	The Catalyser (creating connections; guiding, coaching)
Intangible change agents	Promoting	<i>1 Actor-related:</i> Worldview (Values), Competence (of evaluators and actors); <i>2 Structural:</i> Built platforms for dialogue, Societal positions	<i>1 Structural:</i> Regulative power; Built platforms for dialogue, Societal positions; Operating environment (Needs of organisations, Foresight)	<i>1 Actor-related:</i> Worldview (Mission, Vision, Strategy), Competence (of actors); <i>2 Structural:</i> Built platforms for dialogue, Public space, Operating environment (Social needs, Impact, Agility amid shifts)
	Opposing	<i>1 Structural:</i> Fuzzy relations; Power of megatrends; <i>2 Actor-related:</i> Bounded outlook	<i>1 Structural:</i> Rigidity of Regulatory power <i>2 Actor-related:</i> Competence gaps, Bounded outlook	<i>1 Structural:</i> Lack of connectedness, Bounded dialogue (silos), Language <i>2 Actor-related:</i> Competence gaps
Plot		Safeguarding space for sharing such as free knowledge creation, value negotiation, pluralistic cultural actions and communication, promoting understanding and trust, and hindering negative trends	Combining and implementing expectations, and connecting actors, utilising scientific research, incumbent strengths, and trends to develop future-proof local organisations and promote niche innovation to create a prosperous society	Catalysing activities cross-sectorally, combining actors through projects, experiments, or disseminating knowledge to enhance cross-sectoral learning and gain systemic strategy-oriented societal impact
Primary focus		Landscape	Regime	Systemic whole including grassroots, niche
Change		Long-term developments	Regime transitions	Transformational change; long-term developments
Rationale (Visions)		The welfare of society, International openness, Socio-Economic Prosperity, Ecological Sustainability		

The interconnections in the systemic entity could be identified as the most relevant defining factor of the plots and their variations. Interconnections are critically important for systems since interconnections are the relationships that hold the elements of systems together, and oftentimes they are about flows of information, “signals that go to decision points or action points within a system” (Meadows 2009, 14). As the funding experts as societal decision-makers were the narrative focus, their intermediary actions could be

seen as drivers of money flows, but most of all, drivers of information flows (Geels & Deuten 2006).

Taken together, the results suggest that with the narrative approach, it is possible to depict the expectations of societal decision-makers in society about change and the implications of decisions on shaping futures. The results also imply it is possible to challenge and enrich the Multi-level perspective interpretation of societal change, transitions and transformation. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the findings also in the light of the Multi-level perspective, but also to outline how the approach contributes to futures studies.

5 Discussion

This study aimed to explore, how funding decisions as a form of societal decision-making are expected to shape futures. To gain insight into the research question, research objectives were set to study, what kinds of preferable futures are shaped in the narratives of funding experts, and which kinds of elements and ways of action could constitute the expected change towards the preferable futures. In this qualitative research, ten Finnish funding experts were interviewed, and data were analysed utilising the narrative analysis method. Through thematic interviews, it was possible to construct narratives of change towards preferable futures.

The research pursued applying a holistic approach (Paschen & Ison 2014) to gain insight into how societal decisions are expected to shape change towards futures amid accelerating change, while the operating environment for making societal decisions is getting ever more complex. The Multi-level Perspective (Geels 2002) was deployed as the theoretical framing since it illustrates the dynamics of change across micro, meso and macro levels, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of societal change. In the context of the MLP, transitions come about through the interplay between processes at three analytical levels of society: landscape, regime and niche. The sociotechnical transition theories, including the MLP, have generally faced criticism, especially due to technology-centeredness and niche-driven bias, and the static or abstract depiction of actors' agency. This study suggests that a narrative approach can support the MLP analysis with a more detailed and future-oriented understanding of the interpretation of change in society.

The first central finding of this study shows that societal decision-makers may have diverging interpretations of how change towards preferable futures could be shaped in society. The findings suggest it is possible to construct and identify different narratives of change, which explicate different systemic focus and expectations towards the scope of societal change.

In this study, three narratives of change were identified. *The Nurturing narrative* revolved around long-term developments and focused on the macro-level of landscape concerning e.g. societal values and ideologies (Geels 2011, 28). Unlike in the other two narratives, the direction of change was not necessarily steered but the decision-maker showed trust

in the autonomy and adaptiveness of society as a complex entity of systems. *The Reinforcing narrative* was focused on digital and green transitions at Regime level concerning the sets of rules, which stabilise the existing system and provide continuity and security (Geels 2002), and the utilisation of foresight knowledge. *The Participatory narrative* focused on addressing the systemic whole including grassroots-niche-level with occasional pushing of regime boundaries to aim at long-term development or even transformational change towards vision- and strategy-oriented societal impact.

The second central finding is that with the narrative foresight method, it is possible to illustrate the preferable direction of change towards futures within the MLP framework. Societal decision-makers may aspire to different kinds of preferable futures and hence identify themselves as promoters of divergent developments in contemporary society. In these narratives of change, there were four primary visions: The Welfare of society, International openness, Socio-Economic prosperity, and Ecological sustainability. A narrative could plot to one or more visions. Narratives of change hence enable the depiction of concurrent divergent alternative futures which, in turn, inspire the implementation of different decisions and strategies in the present society (Milojević and Inayatullah 2015, 154). In the narratives of change of this study, decision-makers seemed not to be aware of the visions that the other decision-makers might hold or their resulting visionary efforts. With narratives of change, it could be possible to have a more systemic dialogue between societal decision-makers to comprehend change and transitions in the present, and foremost, how actors expect to influence and promote change.

The third central finding shows that tools for change, including the expected role of innovation, may vary. The MLP depicts how transitions evolve when niche-innovations build up an internal momentum, and changes at landscape level create pressure on regime (Geels & Schot 2007, 400). However, constructing the narratives of change showed that the MLP did not provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting tools for change in this context. In this study, the expectations towards niche innovation varied. Innovation was not necessarily aimed at. In the *Reinforcing* narrative, niche innovation was the primary tool for change. Niche was strongly driven by policy regime actors while landscape changes such as megatrends of climate change and digitalisation could be interpreted to put pressure on regime. The other two narratives did not prioritise niche innovation as a tool for change. Some interviewees constructing the *Nurturing* narrative expressed they did not pursue innovation (or niche) as such, while there was even an

example of being cautious about using the word innovation. Instead, slow landscape-focused incremental development of values, common knowledge ground and relationships was highly desirable. Unlike the other two narratives, the Nurturing narrative explicated the desire to hinder non-valued trends in the present (regime), while landscape megatrends could be difficult to address. In the *Participatory* narrative, in turn, the primary tools for change were learning and communication cross-sectorally in society notwithstanding the fact that niche experiments and secured spaces for niche innovation development and novelty would be welcomed.

The fourth central finding suggests that narratives of change can depict in more detail, which issues are expected to constitute the expected change towards preferable futures, but also, what opposes positive developments towards the vision. This study shows that societal decision-makers may take on different intermediary roles. The narrative intermediary decision-makers act differently according to the plot towards preferable futures. In this study, intermediary roles ranged from distant to strong involvement. In a more active role, decision-makers could contribute to learning and action by becoming proactive and prominent actors themselves. Second, change agents can have significantly varying roles in narratives of change. In particular, intangible change agents can be either in a promoting or opposing role in shaping societal change.

The findings imply that when decision-making is focused on *reinforcing* local regime actors to achieve economic prosperity in the context of Regime transitions, the structural element of Regulative power is prominently steering, but in parallel, also opposing actions towards change. As the MLP presents, innovation at regime level is mostly incremental and path-dependent (Geels 2019, 189). Likewise, the narrative at hand stressed the need to utilise incumbent local strengths. Institutional lock-in mechanisms in the form of regulations and policy framings strongly steered the desired developments to local technology and science-based innovation. In turn, when decision-making was focused on *nurturing* Landscape developments regarding long-term knowledge and value developments, the actor-related elements of Worldview and Competence of both decision-makers and awarded actors were prominent. The actor-related Bounded outlook regarding lack of open-mindedness or Bildung, was a prominent hampering factor. In this case, the structural opposing elements were not consistently articulated, but challenges could be summarised as an inability to see the structural big picture: ignorance of other funding intermediary actions or the future developments of the operating environment.

Here, the pursued societal change is difficult to fit within the framework of the MLP. The MLP presents Landscape as an exogenous, relatively static structure, which comprises, e.g. deep cultural patterns, and it is beyond the direct influence of niche and regime actors (Geels & Schot 2007, 403). It is illustrative that theorists have described the dynamics of Landscape with abstract and force-of-nature analogies, eradicating human presence. Yet, the narrative expresses that it is providing input for the long-term development of Landscape. In light of this study, the narrative challenges the MLP framing to shed more light on Landscape developments and how they are concretely formed and sped up. For instance, how do the values and norms of actors change and “become values and norms on the landscape level through discursive work, which functions to dissociate regime-level rules and practices from the moral foundations of actors” (Huttunen et al. 2021, 3)?

Again, when decision-making was focused on cross-sectoral *participation* to catalyse system-level interconnections, learning and powerful impact, the Worldview (strategy, vision, mission) of the intermediary decision-maker was a major promoting element, in line with the competence of awarded actors. In parallel with the learning focus, opposers in shaping change were mostly the competence gaps of actors. Structurally, dialogue and public discussion e.g. in media were strong promoters, and conversely, bounded dialogue, lack of connectedness and differentiating the use of language could oppose preferred developments. Although niche innovation was welcomed, the power of learning and sharing information overcame it. Here, the narrative aspiration for the development of collaboration and learning in niche-regime-interconnections again challenges the MLP framing and its static image of actors (Huttunen et al. 2021). The MLP depicts, how niche breaks through when landscape developments cause cracks and tensions in Regime and interpretive actors fight, negotiate, search, learn, and build coalitions as they navigate transitions (Köhler et al. 2019, 4). It is possible to ask that when decision-making prefers primarily learning and negotiating processes instead of niche formulation, is it niche innovation, which makes actors fight and interact or is it rather individual and collective actors, who negotiate and make sense of niche to grow and challenge regime level (Siivonen 2022).

However, with respect to the main research question about how funding decisions are expected to shape futures as a form of societal decision-making, this narrative analysis also provides a unifying element in all three narratives of change. Despite the differences regarding the plot, the system focus, or expectations towards change in the narratives, the

most permeating narrative constituent in shaping change was the significance of information flows. In all three narratives, the structural socio-cultural element of *Built platforms for dialogue*, was depicted even if its scope ranged. The Built platforms for dialogue could act as a part of a decision-making process in the funding organisation or the network of actors, or as an expected part of fund-awarded activities, to share information, negotiate, create knowledge, communicate, learn, and discuss values. Additionally, the influencing role of socio-cultural elements of *Public space* and *Language* was brought up in the Nurturing and Participatory narratives, or their opposing power in terms of preferable futures. The question of information flows is interesting in terms of one of the three basic systemic elements, interconnections, which are, according to Meadows (2009, 11), oftentimes flows of information within a system. Meadows (ibid., 157) also argues that information flows are one of the significant leverage points in a system. Missing information flows are a common cause of system malfunction and thus restoring or adding information in a system can be a powerful, cost-effective intervention to shape change (ibid.). Yet, the narrative depiction of utilising information flows in decision-making is difficult to detect and define in MLP terms. Rather, information flows take place behind the scenes of niche formulation and competition with the existing regime. This suggests that socio-cultural structures are important to highlight more when discussing societal change, transitions and transformation in the MLP framing. Moreover, as Worldview, including value negotiation in *Built platforms for dialogue*, was a significant influencing element in the two narratives of change, this study echoes the voices calling for cultural elements to be highlighted in transitions. The most powerful leverage points are related to our mindset regarding our deepest set of beliefs about how the world works (Meadows 2009, 163). These leverage points are connected to socio-cultural phenomena of values and worldviews, or in other words, how culture is present in all human activities and social interactions (Siivonen 2022; Siivonen et al. 2022, 203).

In sum, with the narrative method, it is possible to challenge and enrich the MLP interpretation and the role of change agents in change, transition and transformation in society.

Lastly, the findings of this study raise the question of the need for a more systemic understanding amid funding or other societal decision-making. As discussed previously, complexity and rapid change in society require a new approach to decision-making, considering the potential for radical changes even during the next ten years, therefore,

societies should rather take advantage of changes that are beyond our control and ability to predict (Auvinen et al. 2015; Tönurist et al. 2020; Tjörnbo and McGowan 2022). Poli (2019) underlines the importance of “learning to dance” with a complex system instead of trying to solve the problems in traditional ways. Yet, the implications of complexity on funding were raised by few albeit the acceleration of change was recognised by many. Nevertheless, the need for changing practices was often recognised. On the top of three narratives of change, it would have been possible to form an additional critical metanarrative since many interviewees analysed critically the current funding practices either in their funding environment or the general funding regime in Finland, and the need to develop the funding instruments. For instance, more dialogue and even strategic discussions between the public sector and private funds were suggested (E7), or common will and cooperation between private funds were called for (E3). In addition, politically regulated funding instruments were often described as rigid and bureaucratically burdening (E1, E4, E5, E9) and it was suggested that funding should not be as optimised and narrow as it currently is, but the interconnections in the local regions should be looked at (E4). One also explicated the need for systemic awareness in the funding regime in general (E10). This emerging need for a more systemic approach to funding and societal decision-making, on the other hand, supports the call for transition studies to move towards more 'cross-sectoral' transitions and cross-system relations, as Köhler et al. (2019, 21) argue.

5.1 Ethical Limitations

Some limitations to the thesis occur. First, the interview data focuses on grant-based funding but those funding actors, who provide grants primarily for companies, are not included in this study despite the efforts.

Second, the narrative approach stresses that a research interview is not a window into social reality but is a part, a sample of that reality (Czarniawska 2004, 52) and it is about how people interpret the world from their specific social, historical, and cultural locations (Paschen & Ison 2014). Also, these narratives of change are constructed jointly in dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee (Riessman 2008, 21–23), and the researcher’s interpretations are inevitably present in the analysis. Hence, it is notable that the narratives of change are not comprehensive or detailed analyses of each funding expert’s daily actions. Instead, they generalise actions and seek to identify relevant issues

that are interpreted to shape change in contemporary society. It should also be noted that the fund-awarded actors cannot be properly perceived in this research design, where the narrative focus was the intermediary, fund awarding change agent.

Third, the interview questions were initially formed to study primarily social innovation as a tool for change from the funding perspective. However, as the interviews progressed, a story behind the story started to emerge and take shape: innovation or social innovation was not in a leading role in the narratives, but shaping change seemed to be about the nexus of several interesting influencing elements and processes. Consequently, the eventual research design would have benefitted from more refined questioning, especially in terms of complexity and interpretations of change in general.

As it was discussed previously (see Chapter 3.1.2), the thematic interview format seeks to leave space for the interviewees and stresses more themes than single questions. Consequently, some themes and subjects were inherently placed more emphasis than others depending on the interview and the funding expert's interests. As a result, a full and balanced comparison of the narratives was not quite feasible. When comparing different constructed narratives of change, this study could have benefitted from conducting more interviews or having an interview session longer than one hour. The study could have also been improved by analysing additional qualitative material, such as texts from reports or websites of the funding organisations.

6 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis has discussed how funding experts as societal decision-makers interpret how change towards preferable futures could be shaped in a complex society. The findings show it is possible to construct diverse narratives of change in decision-making. In this study, three different narratives of change depicted what kinds of futures could be shaped by funding activities in the present. With narratives of change, it is possible to illustrate the preferable developments towards futures within the MLP framework. Narratives of change can also proffer interpretations of how change towards preferable futures could be shaped and depict in more detail what is expected to constitute the expected change. Interpretations about the tools for change may vary, including the expected role of niche innovation and novelty.

Despite the narratives in this study explicated different systemic foci (landscape, regime, and niche) and diverging expectations towards the scope of societal change, they demonstrated that it is also possible to identify a unifying factor for shaping social change, the information flows in a system. Given this notion, the study suggests it is possible to challenge and enrich the MLP interpretation and especially the role of cultural elements in change, transition and transformation with narratives of change. Socio-cultural structures and cultural elements should be more widely discussed and investigated when interpreting societal change in the MLP framing.

Milojević and Inyatullah (2015, 153) state that narratives may maintain the status quo in society supported by dominant frameworks of meaning. But narratives can also suggest particular ways in which the system should develop or transform and bring about particular outcomes (Hermwille 2016, 240). Zaidi (2022) suggests that with stories it is possible to pinpoint leverage points and points of intervention. The construction of narratives of change in this study implies it is possible to further utilise these kinds of narratives to scrutinise and challenge the relevance of present assumptions and expectations and bring more nuanced clarity to interpretations on how we understand uncertain and complex change and long-term developments in society.

Finally, the thesis contributed to the scarce literature on narrative futures research and created links between futures research, the narrative approach, and the Multi-level Perspective on transitions.

Considerably more work will need to be done to develop the narrative futures research and the combining of futures research and transition theories with narrative methods. It would be fruitful for further work to study how to utilise complexity theories or systemic change theories, other than the MLP, with a narrative approach. In addition, more research is needed to study narratives of change in terms of identifying and depicting systemic leverage points (Zaidi 2022), which need more attention in societal decision-making. As the most powerful leverage points in systems are related to our mindset (Meadows 2009, 163) regarding values and worldviews, narratives of change proffer an approach to explore and understand the cultural processes in change, transitions, and societal transformation. Constructed narratives of change can make change agents more prominent and thus they become more open and exposed to scrutiny.

The field of futures studies would benefit from a wider utilisation of the narrative approach. Researching narratives of change can provide a broad view of diverse comprehensions of societal change including visions and shaping change. Unlike scenario building, a narrative of change explicates the source of the used language. The constructor of the narrative becomes enmeshed in the story. It is about plotting one's way to futures: the expectations for the future are connected to actions in the present. The narrative approach can also embrace controversial and even opposing views. Unlike road mapping, which is a method to study trajectories towards a certain vision (see, for example, Auvinen et al. 2015), the narrative approach allows diverse visions of futures and the debate between them. Instead of acting as a normative signpost, the narrative approach provides a scenery of paths and can point out promoting and opposing agents broadly in society.

Overall, further studies are needed to refine the narrative foresight methods and fully understand the potential of narratives of change in the field of futures studies, and in particular, how they could help us to dance with our ever-complex society.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The Thematic Interview Questions

The Translations

The interview is a thematic interview with three main themes. The interview is based on the interviewee's experience and expertise and the views based on them. The number or format of specific questions may therefore vary, and some issues may inherently be more emphasised than others. The interview will particularly value your expertise in particular in the context of your work, but also about the wider financial landscape and the functioning of society. All responses will be anonymised.

1) Theme 1, background: funding is a vantage point and a place of influence, and as an actor, you can contribute at many interfaces simultaneously: how and how far into the future do you work on funding?

- How would you summarise what you usually procure or fund (in a few words)?
- How would you describe the funding process and who/what actors (stakeholders) may be involved? (brief description)
- What do you think usually influences the decisions of funders?
- Has the pandemic/other issue changed something in the way decisions are made now/recently?
- Time horizon: How many years ahead do you usually estimate the impact of a funding decision?
- Time horizon: What is the longest point in the future that you think you can estimate the impact of a decision?

2) Theme 2: Change in society and how to influence it (agency)

- How necessary is it to monitor the effectiveness or results of the project/objective after the decision has been taken? How much does impact influence the funding decision?
- How is the successful outcome of a funding decision usually interpreted? How is it interpreted if it has failed?
- When practical decisions are taken about what to fund, to what extent are they influenced by a broader vision of a particular direction of change in society?
- When talking about change in society over the next 20 years, what words or metaphors would you use to describe the nature of change?
- Has your perception of change changed?
- If the aim is to bring about the needed change in society, how would you summarise what should happen in society more broadly (the most practical ways that work)?
- In general, do you think it is possible (or necessary) to accelerate change - by changing something in your own/other actors' behaviour?

- Should you be able to prevent projects/innovations that risk harming society?
What are the means to do so?

3) Theme 3: Innovation as a tool for change. How to better generate social innovation?

- How would you summarise what innovation is (in a few words)?
- In addition to commercial innovation, there is a lot of talk today about innovation whose primary objective is to shape society for the better, (so-called social innovation) What should happen to generate more such innovation? Who should act?
- And what practical difficulties or obstacles are perceived to prevent social innovation?
- What do you think is the future direction of funding for innovation?
- And what is the future of innovation - where do you think we are heading?

Haastattelukysymykset (Alkuperäiset)

Haastattelu on teemahaastattelu, jossa on kolme pääteemaa. Haastattelussa edetään haastateltavan kokemuksen ja asiantuntijuuden sekä niihin perustuvan näkemysten pohjalta. Tarkempien kysymysten määrä tai muoto voi siis vaihdella, ja jotkin asiat voivat luontaisesti painottua enemmän kuin toiset. Haastattelussa arvostetaan erityisesti asiantuntemustasi, joka liittyy omaan työhön mutta myös yleensä rahoituskentän tilannekuvaan ja yhteiskunnan toimintaan. Kaikki vastaukset anonymisoidaan.

1) Teema 1, taustoitus: Rahoitustoiminta on näköalapaikka ja vaikuttajan paikka, ja toimijana saa vaikuttaa yhtä aikaa monella rajapinnalla: miten ja miten kauas tulevaisuuteen rahoitustyötä tehdään?

- Miten tiivistäisit sen, mitä yleensä hankitte tai tuette (muutamalla sanalla)?
- Miten kuvailisit rahoituksen prosessia ja sitä, ketä/mitä kaikkia toimijoita (osallisia) siinä voi olla mukana? (lyhyesti kuvattuna)
- Mitkä asiat mielestäsi vaikuttavat yleensä rahoittajien päätöksiin?
- Onko koronapandemia / muu asia selkeästi muuttanut jotain valintojen tekemisessä nyt/lähihistoriassa?
- Aikajänne: Miten monen vuoden päähän arvioitte yleensä rahoituspäätöksen vaikutuksia?
- Aikajänne: Mikä on pisin piste tulevaisuudessa, mihin voitte mielestäsi arvioida päätöksen vaikutuksia?

2) Teema 2: Muutos yhteiskunnassa ja mahdollisuudet vaikuttaa siihen (toimijuus)

- Miten tarpeelliseksi koetaan seurata päätöksen jälkeen hankinnan/tukikohteen vaikuttavuutta tai tuloksia? Miten paljon vaikuttavuus vaikuttaa itse rahoituspäätöksen tekemiseen?
- Miten tulkitaan yleensä rahoituspäätöksen onnistuneen? Entä epäonnistuneen?

- Kun käytännön päätöksiä rahoituksen kohteista tehdään, minkä verran taustalla vaikuttaa laajempi visio tietynlaisesta muutoksen suunnasta yhteiskunnassa?
- Kun puhutaan muutoksesta yhteiskunnassa seuraavan 20 vuoden aikana, millä sanoilla tai kielikuvilla kuvaisit muutoksen tapaa/vaikutusta?
- Onko käsityksesi muutoksesta muuttunut?
- Jos halutaan synnyttää tarpeellista muutosta yhteiskunnassa, miten tiivistäisit sen, mitä yhteiskunnassa pitäisi laajemmin tapahtua (toimivimmat käytännön keinot)?
- Onko mielestäsi yleensäkin mahdollista nopeuttaa muutosta (tai onko se tarpeen) - muuttamalla jotain omassa / muiden toimijoiden toiminnassa?
- Pitäisikö pystyä estämään sellaisia hankkeita/innovaatioita, joilla on riski vaikuttaa huonosti yhteiskuntaan? Millaisia keinoja siihen on?

3) Teema 3: Innovaatiot muutoksen työkaluna. Miten pystytään paremmin synnyttämään yhteiskunnallisia innovaatioita?

- Miten tiivistäisit sen, mikä innovaatio on (muutamalla sanalla)?
- Kaupallisten innovaatioiden lisäksi tänään puhutaan paljon innovaatioista, joiden ensisijainen tavoite on muokata yhteiskuntaa paremmaksi, (ns. yhteiskunnallinen/sosiaalinen innovaatio) Mitä pitäisi tapahtua, että saataisiin syntymään enemmän tällaisia innovaatioita? Kenen pitäisi toimia?
- Entä mitä käytännön vaikeuksia tai esteitä nähdään yhteiskunnallisten innovaatioiden syntymiselle?
- Mihin suuntaan innovaatioita hakeva rahoittaminen on mielestäsi kehittymässä tulevaisuudessa?
- Entä millainen on innovaatioiden tulevaisuus - mihin suuntaan mielestäsi ollaan menossa?

Appendix 2 The Translations of the Quotes

English	Finnish
4.2. Rationale	
<p>“--[FO] builds national integrity throughout the country and pursues getting the whole nation behind it. -- Broad national connection between science, art, economy, and political circles of social life was [also historically] a significant value. -- In other words, to bring people together and discuss.” (E7) p. 42</p>	<p>“--[Rahoittaja] rakentaa kansallista eheyttä koko maahan ja pyrkii saamaan koko kansan tän taakse --. -- laaja kansallinen yhteys tieteen, taiteen, talouden, yhteiskuntaelämän eri poliittisten piirien välillä oli merkittävä arvo. -- Eli pyritään saattamaan ihmisiä yhteen ja keskustelemaan.” (E7V4)</p>
<p>“Quite a lot of our funding is aimed at ensuring that we have a high employment rate, good taxpayers and thus a stable and economically prosperous society”. (E9) p. 42</p>	<p>”Aika monet meidän rahoituksesta kyllä tähtää siihen, että meillä olisi korkea työllisyysaste, hyvät veronmaksajat ja sitä kautta vakaa ja tämmöinen taloudellisestikin hyvinvoiva yhteiskunta.” (E9V43)</p>
<p>“The vision would be of the world and us learning to live in harmony with the rest of nature. Because we are part of that nature. The ultimatum goal is not to spoil everything we're totally dependent on.” (E3) p. 42</p>	<p>“Se on varmaan se visio maailmasta et ihminen oppis elämään sopusoinnussa tän muun ympäröivän luonnon kanssa. Koska mehän ollaan osa sitä luontoa. Se on varmaan se ultimatum tavoite, et me ei pilata kaikkea sitä, mistä me ollaan täysin riippuvaisia.” (E3V4)</p>
<p>“This [ERDF funding] is a little tinkering after all. The actual big stuff is over there in the EU programs. [ERDF funding] can be used as leverage to support actors getting involved in European forums and obtain a much, much bigger entity from there.” (E5) p. 42</p>	<p>“Täähän on pientä piperrystä kuitenkin loppujen lopuksi tää EAKR. Oikeasti ne isot jutut on tuolla EU-ohjelmissa. Tavallaan että me saadaan vipuvartta siihen, että esimerkiksi näillä varoilla pystytään tukemaan sitä, että toimijat pääsee eurooppalaisille foorumeille ja sieltä saavat paljon, paljon isompaa kokonaisuutta aikaiseksi.” (E5V23)</p>
<p>“-- this discussion, which only considers how we can reduce emissions, leaves too little attention to the innovations that are needed when you get there, how to live in that society --” (E1) p. 43</p>	<p>--tää keskustelu jossa vaan pohditaan, miten saamme päästöjä vähennetyksi, jättää liian vähälle huomiolle ne innovaatiot mitä tarvitaan, kun sinne on päästy, miten sitä yhteiskuntaa eletään (E1V37)</p>
4.3. Change agents	
<p>"I see we are in a pretty influential role. This is a service mission of the enabler -- Actors receive even substantial amounts of monetary aid to be able to do those important things in the projects." (E5) p. 45</p>	<p>”Kyllä mä koen, että tässä tässä on kuitenkin aika vaikuttavassa roolissa. Että täähän on semmoinen mahdollistajan palvelutehtävä kuitenkin mitä me tässä tehdään. Että kyllä sillä mun mielestä on isoa merkitystä, että toimijat saa huomattaviakin määriä rahallista tukea siihen, että he pystyvät tekemään niitä tärkeitä asioita mitä hankkeissa tehdään. (E5V46)</p>

<p>"[the acceptance rate of applications] is, of course, big. It's because of good guidance. People already hear in advance when something is not worth applying." (E9) p. 46</p>	<p>[Hakemusten hyväksymisprosentti] totta kai on iso luku. Se johtuu tämmöisestä hyvästä ohjauksesta, että ihmiset kuulee jo etukäteen ettei tämmöisiin kannata hakea. (E9V19)</p>
<p>"It is about subsidies practically for public organisations such as municipalities, research and educational institutions, which is, in short, regional development, especially economic development. Another focus is perhaps Research, Development and Innovation activity". (E4) p. 48</p>	<p>Se on tukea jollekin, käytännössä julkiselle organisaatiolle - kunnille tai tutkimus tai oppilaitoksille. Se on tiivistetysti alueen kehittämistä ja siinä tarkoituksessa erityisesti elinkeinojen kehittämistä ja sitte ehkä toinen painotus on Tutkimus-, kehitys- ja innovaatiotoiminta. (E4V3)</p>
<p>"[Grants are funded] in principle for everyone who benefits from actions - - but funding is not received by citizens or those in need directly but by organisations, which means the beneficiaries are one step further." (E8) p. 50</p>	<p>[Avustusta myönnetään] periaatteessa kaikille, joille on toiminnasta hyötyä -- mutta tietysti kun myönnetään rahoitusta suoraan, ei niille tavallaan kansalaisille tai toiminnan tarpeessa oleville, vaan järjestöille, et se hyötyjä on sitten tavallaan yhden portaatan takana oleva. (E8V5)</p>
<p>"It's actually pretty crazy how one year, when microplastics were often discussed [in public], we got twenty applications about microplastics, and this year we received two." (E3) p. 52</p>	<p>Se on aika itse asiassa hurjaakin, miten jonakin vuonna saattaa tulla, kun on puhuttu mikromuoveista, niin meillä on 20 mikromuovihakemusta, tänä vuonna meillä oli 2. (E3V27)</p>
<p>Of course, you would want our evaluators, who work with the applications received by the fund, to primarily still stress scientific and artistic quality and interests. But it has become interesting [to ask] in terms of the public image issues how media uproars affect evaluation." (E2) s. 52</p>	<p>Tietysti haluais että ne arvioijat joita me käytetään ja jotka tekee työtä säätiön hakemusten parissa niin, niillä on ensisijaisesti edelleen tieteellinen ja taiteellinen laatu ja kiinnostukset ja sellaiset. Mutta mainekuvioissa se on tullut kiinnostavaksi se, miten vaikka jotkut mediakohut vaikuttaa arviointeihin. (E2V50)</p>
<p>"-- we aim for a solid multidisciplinary group [mostly in professor positions] who can discuss and look at the whole – [and] bring the best projects around the same table and have multi-disciplinary dialogue. -- In the dialogue, it is possible for an expert to note that one did not understand something and it is always about a subjective view, and it might be wrong." (E3)</p>	<p>--et me saatas semmonen kiintee, monitieteinen ryhmä [suurin osa professori-positioissa] joka pystyy keskustelemaan, katsoo yhdessä sitä kokonaisuutta. -- oikeesti pystytään tuomaan parhaat hankkeet saman pöydän ympärille ja niistä voidaan käydä monitieteistä keskustelua. --Sit päästään keskusteleen, ja sit asiantuntija huomaakin, että hän ei ollut jotain ymmärtäny. Myös huomataan se et [kyseessä on] aina tavallaan subjektiivinen näkemys, ja joskus se voi olla vääräkin. (E3V6-V9)</p>
<p>"-- we go through the strategies of each municipality, each major community, various organisations and so on. We sit with them and choose the goals for the direction of change in the regional programme work. -- [When forming a programme], there are hundreds of meetings and preparations and seminars, and discussions, and negotiations, and versions, etc.--" (E1) p. 54</p>	<p>-- meillä käydään läpi jokaikisen kunnan jokaikisen merkittävemmän yhteisön, erilaisten järjestöjen sun muiden, strategioita. Heidän kanssaan istutaan, että valitaan maakuntaohjelmatyössä, mitkä on ne tavoitteet muutoksen suunnasta - [kun päätetään, mihin satsataan], siellä on satoja tapaamisia ja valmisteluita ja seminaareja, ja keskusteluita, ja neuvotteluita, ja versioita jne. (E1V23-V24)</p>

<p>“Now that I think about it, there should be a more sophisticated understanding of how things affect each other. If a bioproduct factory comes here, it should get raw material and you can't get it from [a municipality] if roads are not in a good condition. When people move away, it doesn't make sense [to build] roads -- And how do we get forest machines and workers, and educate the drivers to transport raw materials to the factory, which is a part of some international value chain? [Decisions should] not be so sub-optimised and thereby narrow. One should see the connections between things and the impact of decisions. A scenario where big cities and top universities lead the way into the global economy leaves out quite many other perspectives.” (E4) p. 55</p>	<p>Nyt kun ajattelen, niin se että olis pikkusen sofistikoituneempi käsitys siitä, miten asiat vaikuttaa tosiinsa. Esimerkiksi se että kun -- tulevalle isolle biotuotetehtaalle pitäis saada raaka-ainettakin. Sitä taas ei saa sieltä [kunnan] suunnalta jos tiet ei oo kunnossa. Ja jos sieltä muuttaa kaikki ihmiset pois, niin ei siellä enää oo oikein järkeä niitä teitäkään [rakentaa] --. Tai mistä me saadaan ne metsäkoneet, vaikka työvoimaa pitäis saada, mistä me saadaan ne metsäkoneen kuljettajat koulutettua niin että ne jäis töihin niin että me saatas raaka-aine isolle tehtaalle, joka on osa sitte jotakin kansainvälistä arvoketjua. -- Et tää ei ois niin osaoptimoitua ja semmosta kapeaa. Pitäs nähdä nää asioiden yhteydet. – että on vaikutusta näillä päätöksillä mitä tehdään. Et semmonen skenaario jossa mennään isojen kaupunkien ja kärkiyliopistojen johdolla globaaliin talouteen, siinä hukkuu aika monta muuta näkökulmaa. (E4V28-29)</p>
<p>“--when you fund scientific work, the dissemination of science, or artistic work, -- it's very difficult to assess the impact of a single funder, because there are so many funders and actors. -- There is often long-term work in the background, which has been funded by many public parties, the state, universities, other private funders, maybe companies. So the impact talk that you hear from time to time is really artificial and contrived.” (E2) p. 56</p>	<p>--kun rahoitetaan tieteellistä työtä tai tieteen yleistajuistamistyötä tai taiteellista työtä, on myös niin että yksittäisen rahoittajan vaikuttavuuden arvioiminen on hyvin vaikeeta, koska siellä on niin monta rahoittajaa yleensä ja monta toimijaa. -- Koska siellä on taustalla usein pitkäaikainen työ, jota on rahoittanut tosi moni julkinen puoli, valtio, yliopistot, toiset yksityiset rahottajat, ehkä yritykset. Et siis se -- vaikuttavuuspuhe mitä aina välillä kuulee, on tosi keinotekoista ja teennäistä. (E2V25)</p>
<p>“[NGOs] apply for funding for things that sometimes conflict and sometimes don't with the public authority regulations or the government programme. --This shows the dual nature of NGOs. In Finland, we have many structures to fund NGOs with state grants or municipal grants, but at the same time it is assumed that they act as trustees, watchdogs, for certain groups.” (E8) p. 56</p>	<p>[Järjestöt] hakee rahoitusta niistä lähtökohdista eri rahottajilta, jotka sitten joskus ovat ristiriidassa ja joskus eivät ole ristiriidassa vallitsevien viranomaissäädösten tai hallitusohjelman tai muiden kanssa. -- Ja siinä tulee ehkä tää järjestöjen kaksinainen luonne. Suomessa meillä on paljon rakenteita, joilla järjestöjä tuetaan tuetaan valtionhallinnonavustuksin tai valtionavustuksin tai kunta-avustuksin esimerkiksi, mutta samalla oletetaan, että järjestöt toimii myöskin edunvalvojina tietyille kohderyhmille, jolloin joutuu toimimaan niinku rakkikoirina oman kohderyhmänsä etujen ajamiseksi. (E8V30)</p>
<p>“No strategy is created out of thin air. -- It affects where we are far ahead, and where we have already been good. -- If our universities are strong, or our industry is oriented in a certain way, then, of course, we must develop those sectors.” (E6) p. 57</p>	<p>Eihän mitään strategiaa tehdä tyhjän päälle -- Tietysti meillä vaikuttaa se, että missä me ollaan pitkällä, missä me ollaan hyviä jo oltu -- Jos meidän yliopisto on vahva, missä meidän ammattikorkeakoulu on vahva, miten esim. meidän teollisuus on täällä suuntautunut -- tietysti siinä meillä pitää olla tällainen kehittämisnäkökulma. (E6V9)</p>
<p>“Big undercurrents flow their way, regardless of what individual funders do. Polarisation will not be significantly stopped or reduced with this</p>	<p>Isot pohjavirrat kulkee ihan omaa latuaan siitä riippumatta, mitä yksittäiset rahoittajat tekee. Että polarisaatiota ei vielä näillä rahoilla merkittävästi lopeteta</p>

<p>money, nor will it solve the actions required for the ageing of the population or the transition to a carbon-neutral lifestyle. We can fund research to a significant extent, but our role in the big sustainability transition is limited." (E7) p. 58</p>	<p>tai ainakaan vähennetä tässä maassa eikä väestön ikääntymisen edellyttämiä toimia näillä ratkota tai hiilineutraaliin elämäntapaan siirtymisessä. Me voidaan kyllä rahoittaa tutkimusta merkittävältä osin mutta isossa kestävyysmuutoksessa rooli on rajattu. (E7V27)</p>
<p>"For us [impact] is by no means a priority -- there are differences, of course, between environmental science and some theoretical, humanistic or social science research. -- more theoretical research takes science forward, but it does not have a rapid social impact." (E2) p. 58</p>	<p>Meillä se ei ole mitenkään ensisijainen. Tässä on eroja toki, vaikka ympäristötieteen ja jonkun teoreettisen, humanistisen tai yhteiskuntatieteellisen tutkimuksen välillä. -- jos puhutaan teoreettisemmasta tutkimuksesta, se vie tiedettä eteenpäin mutta sillä ei ole nopeeta yhteiskunnallista vaikuttavuutta, sillä on vaan tieteellistä vaikuttavuutta. (E2V23)</p>
<p>"New applicants are shocked at how carefully they have to think about everything and how precisely [FO] wants the applicant to describe things in the project plan." (E4) p. 61</p>	<p>Kyllä se näille uusille hakijoille on järkytys, kuinka tarkkaan joudutaan miettimään kaikki. Tai kuinka tarkkaan me halutaan, että ne hankesuunnitelmassa pystyy asioita kuvaamaan. (E4V12)</p>
<p>"Unfortunately, a large part of the funding is about thinking whether it is possible to do something. This is a highly regulated activity. The regulation stems from the EU and the national legislative frame. -- The difficulty is how to write [plan] and fund a project that would be cost-effective impactful and legal at the same time [laughs]. (E4) p. 62</p>	<p>Valitettavan iso osa on semmosten asioiden miettimistä, voiko näin tehdä, koska tää on hyvin säänneltyä toimintaa. Niin ne tulee EY-asetuksista, jotka velvottaa meitä suoraan, ja sit ne tulee vaikka lainsäädännöllisestä kehyksestä-- homman vaikeus on melkeen siinä, että miten sais kirjoitettua ja meidän puolesta rahotettua sellasen hankkeen joka olis yhtä aikaa kustannustehokas ja vaikuttava ja laillinen [nauraa]. (E4V11-V12)</p>
<p>"-- [funding projects] is always strategy-oriented, impact-oriented and aimed at a common mission and common vision." (E10) p. 63</p>	<p>[hankkeiden rahoitus] on aina strategialähtöistä, vaikuttavuuslähtöistä ja yhteiseen missioon ja yhteiseen visioon tähtäävää. (E10V7)</p>
<p>"We make a precise analysis of the impact chain. -- [We build] a story about change and impact analysis on how to build strategic goals, objectives, vision, and mission. It provides a big framework for what to do so that [actions] are focused from a [funding organisation] point of view." (E10) p. 63</p>	<p>Meillä on tosi tarkka vaikuttavuusketjun analysointi, -- [me teemme] muutostarinan ja vaikuttavuusanalyysin siitä, että miten strategisia päämääriä, tavoitteita, miten visiota ja missiota lähdetään rakentamaan. Se antaa ison kehyksen tekemiselle, että se on fokuoitua [rahoitusorganisaatio]:n näkökulmasta (E10V9)</p>
<p>"We don't have a real vision; we can't go that far. Perhaps we rather have visions of the themes and topics that may be realised -- We try to see 10 to 15 years ahead and increase our understanding of those issues -- e.g. in the future we will need more low-carbon or carbon-binding materials and technologies and such. Then we should invest in it since we have such expertise". (E6) p. 63</p>	<p>Eihän meillä aitoa visiota ole, eikä niin pitkälle pystytä tekemään, mutta meillä on ehkä visioita, että mitkä teemat, mitkä aihepiirit voi toteutua ja miltä se näyttää, että kyllä ne on sinne johonkin 10 - 15 vuoden päähän, mitä me niillä yritetään katsoa. Että siellä olevia semmoisia ilmiöitä, mihin meidän on pakko lisätä ymmärrystä. -- vaikka tulevaisuudessa me tarvitaan entistä vähähiilisempiä tai hiiliä sitovampia materiaaleja, teknologioita ja muuta. Sillon</p>

	meidän kannattaa panostaa, koska meillä on sen alan osaamista täällä. (E6V14-V15)
“When [the evaluators] are recruited, we strongly highlight the [funder’s] view -- and how we want to have an impact in the world. We attach the group [to the funder] -- so that the experts adhere as a part of [us] -- so that they become familiar with the values and discuss before evaluating what we are looking for --”. (E3) p. 63	Sillon kun jo rekrytoidaan näitä asiantuntijoita, tosi vahvasti tuodaan sitä et mikä [organisaation] näkemys -- on ja millä tavalla me halutaan vaikuttaa tähän maailmaan. Ennen kuin asiantuntijat alottaa työn, mehän kiinnitetään tää porukka meidän [rahoitusorganisaatioon] --et kukin asiantuntijoista leimautuu [”organisaatiolaiseksi”]. Et ne tulis arvomaailman kanssa tutuksi ja keskustellaan vielä ennen kuin lähdetään arvioimaan, et mitä me haetaan -- (E3V10)
“--people do not necessarily go to NGOs as active participants but rather expect services. One goes to an NGO saying "Please measure my blood pressure" instead of asking what one could do as a volunteer. -- [Professionalisation] is, of course, not necessarily the most favourable development for free NGO activity.” (E8) 0. 64	-- ihmiset ei enää niin osallistu tai tavallaan mee aktiivisiksi toimijoiksi järjestöihin, vaan enemmänkin odottavat palveluita. Elikkä mä meen [yhdistykseen], että “Mittaa nyt mun verenpaine kiitos” -tyyppisesti. Eikä niin että “Hei, nyt mä oon tässä vapaaehtoinen että mitä mä voisin tehdä?” [Ammatillistuminen] ei tietenkään vapaan kansalaisjärjestötoiminnan ole välttämättä se suotuisa kehityskulku. E8V26
4.4. Plot	
“-- encounters or empowerment are at the core of non-profit organisations’ activities. That's what they [non-profits] are for. They act informally in informal relations. They do not have a role of authority but in a good case, they contribute to social capital and act as friends and buffers and promote communication. -- there is mutual trust among Finns, I think that is a core issue, which I would like to see promoted by NGOs” (E8) p. 66	--kohtaaminen tai voimaantuminen ovat järjestötoiminnan ytimessä. Sitähän varten kansalaisjärjestöt ovat, et ne toimii ihmisen lähellä epämuodollisesti epämuodollisissa suhteissa. Niillä ei oo viranomaisroolia vaan ne hyvässä tapauksessa lisäävät sosiaalista pääomaa ja toimivat ystävinä ja puskureina ja eri ihmisten välisen kommunikaation edistäjinä. -- suomalaisissa on keskinäistä luottamusta, musta se on ihan ydinasia, jota minä haluaisin että järjestötoiminnalla myöskin edesautettaisiin. (E8V26-27)
“--we are probably funding projects with conflicting objectives, reflecting the fact that the experts have really got the power and can fund pluralistically. This is precisely the idea that we do not control the choice of content on behalf of the experts.” -- It would be impossible to imagine that we would want to steer science and art in a particular direction from a single funder's position. In a pluralistic society, this is the way to do good art and science and take them and society forward.” (E7) p. 67	--me rahoitetaan varmaan tavoitteiltaan vastakkaisiakin hankkeita, mikä kuvastaa sitä, että asiantuntijat todella ovat saaneet vallan ja voivat moniarvoisesti rahoittaa. Tää on nimenomaan tää ideakin että me emme ohjaa sisällön valintaa asiantuntijoiden puolesta. -- Olisi mahdotonta kuvitella, että me haluttaisiin ohjata tiedettä ja taidetta tiettyyn suuntaan yhden rahottajan positiosta käsin. Moniarvoisessa yhteiskunnassa tää on se tie tehdä hyvää taidetta, tehdä hyvää taidetta ja tiedettä ja viedä näitä ja yhteiskuntaa eteenpäin. (E7V11-V13)
“A typical impact in universities is that you research things now and they are gradually transmitted into teaching over a few years. From there, they are gradually transmitted to the people who are studying and then	Ykshän vaikuttavuus tyyppillisesti yliopistoissa on se, että tutkitaan asioita nyt ja sit ne vähitellen välittyy opetukseen muutaman vuoden skaalalla, ja ne välittyy vähitellen sieltä niihin ihmisiin, jotka opiskelee, sitä kautta yhteiskuntaan. Se ei

<p>to society. It doesn't happen suddenly. Sometimes it can happen faster, sometimes slower.” (E2) p. 68</p>	<p>mene yhtäkkiä, tapahdu. Joskus se voi tapahtua nopeemmin, joskus hitaammin. (E2V18)</p>
<p>”Seeing directions is not about single solutions but about what is considered valuable next. Some may have the motive to get more labour force or healthy families, and another may pursue reducing morbidity or crimes -- While these are worked on, statements of direction are created -- This is what change management is when the funding and obtaining instruments are small. It is more about sitting together and agreeing.” (E1) p. 68</p>	<p>Suuntien näkeminen - ei niinkään yksittäisten ratkaisujen - että mitä pidetään arvokkaana seuraavana. Kellä sit on motiivi, että on mahdollisimman paljon työvoimaa, kellä on motiivi että on mahdollisimman vähän sairautta, kellä on motiivina että on ehjät perheet, kellä on motiivi että on vähemmän rikollisuutta jne. -- Kun näitä jumpataan, syntyy suuntalauseita, joissa on kuvattu, minkä tyyppisiä asioita haetaan, -- tää on se muutosten hallinta, jossa tuki-instrumentit tai ostoinstrumentit ovat aika pieniä. Että enemmän se on yhdessä istumista ja sopimista. (E1V23)</p>
<p>”If funded previously, the effectiveness is monitored. What kinds of results the actor has achieved previously, or supervisory information on how it has fulfilled its administrative obligations, i.e. how it has reported on the use of the grant in the past.” (E8) p. 69</p>	<p>Jos on kyseessä semmoinen toimija, jolla on jo aiempaa avustusta, sitten tietysti tulee tarkasteluun tuloksellisuus, että minkälaisia tuloksia se on saanut aikaisemmin aikaiseksi joko siinä toiminnassa tai onko meillä tietoa järjestön toiminnasta, tai sitten valvonnallinen tieto, että miten se on täyttänyt hallintovelvoitteensa, miten se on raportoinut avustuksen käytöstä aikaisemmin. (E8V9)</p>
<p>“-- the development is still strongly business-oriented and technology-driven -- there is a desire to improve competitiveness and competence -- I think RDI will be increasingly on focus, and -- open innovation and partnerships and internationalisation are the buzzwords of the day-- I find it hard to imagine that the big picture will change [in the context ERDF funding].” (E4) p . 71</p>	<p>--luulen, että suunta on edelleen vahvasti yrityslähtöinen ja teknologiavetonen, koska -- kilpailukykyä halutaan parantaa ja osaamista ja -- kyllä nää tutkimuskehitysinnovaatio-painotukseen menevät minusta entistä enemmän, ja sitten niissä kuitenkin avoimet innovaatiot ja kumppanuudet ja kansainvälistyminen on niitä päivän sanoja, joita varmaan nyt sitte jatkossakin haetaan -- Että kyllä mun on vaikea kuvitella että tää iso kuva muuttuisi-- . (E4V36)</p>
<p>”We also want to transfer to companies the know-how that universities and others have. In practice, we fund mostly development processes. There, innovation is important. We've funded things like [making] insects into food and all sorts of even odd things, to see if they'll turn into something, -- some of them will turn into good stories.” (E6) p. 71</p>	<p>Me halutaan myös siirtää sitä osaamista, mikä korkeakoulussa ja muilla on, sitten niille yrityksille. Kyllä ne on semmoisia kehitysprosesseja käytännössä suurin osa mitä me rahoitetaan. Kyllä se innovaatio siellä on tärkeä. Ollaan me rahoitettu vaikka [sitä että] hyönteisistä tehdään ruokaa ja kaikkea tämmösiä ihan pöljiäkin juttuja, katsotaan että tuleeko niistä mitään vaan vai ei--, mutta sitten joistakin niistä tulee hyviä tarinoita. (E6V21)</p>
<p>”It is the experts of beneficiaries and project professionals who know what to do in the operating environment. They are to offer projects and measures, and we evaluate as best as we can if they are reasonable and have novelty value and if they meet the costs. I cannot know the concrete level and I do not want to steer or hamper too much. There are</p>	<p>Ne on ne tuensaajakentän ja hanketoimijoiden asiantuntijat ovat niitä, jotka tietävät mitä pitää tehdä siinä toimintaympäristössä. Ja he tarjokoot niitä hakemuksia sitten ja hankkeita ja niitä toimenpiteitä. Sitten me parhaamme mukaan arvioimme sen hankesuunnitelman perusteella sitä, että onko se järkevä ja onko siinä uutuusarvoa ja vastaako sisältö kustannuksia ja siis tän</p>

<p>experts and researchers in the field who know what development should be like.” (E5) p. 72</p>	<p>tyyppisiä asioita. Mutta että en mä en mä pysty niinku itse tietämään sitä konkreettista tasoa, enkä halua sitä liiaksi ohjata tai kahlitakaan. Että siellä kentällä ne asiantuntijat, tutkijat esimerkiksi tietävät itse kyllä, mitä se kehittäminen pitää olla. (E5V45)</p>
<p>“We can follow how much e.g. an individual researcher does other than just scientific publications. We measure how much they've been, say, making appearances, giving public talks or writing on the subject in large forums, media visibility, or speaking to the parliament -- or collaborating with stakeholders --. What [are] the various interactions of a single researcher that radiate something forward -- our task is to support the researcher to do more than just write articles and do research. The role is to be active in society.” (E3) p. 74</p>	<p>Me pystytään sitä kattamaan, kuinka paljon vaikka yksittäinen tutkija, paljonko sillä on muuta kuin pelkkää tieteellistä julkaisua. Mitataan sitä et kuinka paljon se on käyny vaikka esiintymässä jossain, antamassa julkisia puheenvuoroja tai kirjottanut aiheesta jonnekin isoille foorumeille tai ollu mediassa, medianäkyvyyttä, tai käyny eduskunnassa puhumassa -- tai tehny yhteistyötä sidosryhmien kanssa. -- mitä [ovat] yksittäinen tutkijan erilaiset interaktiot, jotka jokainen säteilee jotain eteenpäin. -- meidän tehtävä on tukea, että tutkija tekisi muutakin kuin vaan kirjoittaisi artikkeleita ja tekisi sitä tutkimusta. Sen tehtävä on olla aktiivinen yhteiskunnassa. (E3V21)</p>
<p>“--they are not top-down type solutions, but [about] how to obtain a systemically conceived whole. -- We need to support the activities of the actors in a more interdisciplinary way to increase our understanding. That's why we have a strong educational intervention. Just bringing in the money does not help, but we need to support people's ability, desire and opportunity to make the change, to develop the ability, motivation, desire and know-how to do it in everyday life--.” (E10) p. 75</p>	<p>--ne ei ole semmoisia top down -tyyppisiä ratkaisuja vaan nimenomaan että miten saadaan systeemisesti hahmotettua kokonaisuutta. --meidän pitää entistä poikkitieteellisemmin lähteä tukemaan myöskin toimijoiden tekemistä niin että me oikeasti saadaan ymmärrystä lisättyä. Sen takia meillä on vahva koulutuksellinen interventio. Se ei auta että vaan tuutataan sitä rahaa vaan meidän täytyy myös tukea ihmisten kykyä halua ja mahdollisuutta tehdä muutosta, sitä kyvykkyyttä kehittää, motivaatiota, ja halua ja osaamista tehdä siellä arjessa--”. (E10V20)</p>
<p>“If people with good ideas but without an organisation, certain kind of free operators in a 4th sector, come from the street and talk about an idea, but they have neither money nor an organisation, [an actor] could acquire an event from them, e.g., and make together small videos or events around a topic. We have diversified the funding instrument [ESF] for such sectors and activities, which it would otherwise not adapt to. -- We have tried to find ways to the grassroots level.” (E9) p. 75</p>	<p>Jos ihmisillä on hyviä ideoita, mutta niillä ei ole mitään järjestöä takana, ei organisaatioita, puhutaan tällaisesta -- neljännen sektorin tällaiset vapaat taiteilijat suurin piirtein, jotka kadulta tulee ja sanoo, että heillä olis idea mutta ei oo rahaa eikä järjestöä, niin heiltä on voitu ostaa semmoinen tapahtuma. Vaikka tehneet yhdessä pieniä videoita tai tapahtumia jonkun asian ympärille. Ja tavallaan monipuolistettu rahoitusvälinettä semmoisille sektoreille ja toimintoihin, joihin se ei muutoin taivu -- Me on tavallaan yritetty löytää niitä keinoja, joilla päästään sinne ruohonjuuritasolle. (E9V4)</p>
<p>“--that's where the best innovations come from, rather than us defining behind the program texts and not being ready to discuss what it could mean in practice in everyday life. -- so that things would be more concrete, allowing ordinary people to have an influence on everyday matters, which is where for example, the mental health and substance</p>	<p>--sieltä syntyy parhaita innovaatioita, eikä niin, että me määritellään ja jäädään ohjelmatekstien ja muitten taakse, eikä olla valmiita keskustelemaan niistä, että mitä se voisi tarkoittaa käytännön elämässä, käytännön työssä. --että meillä konkretisoituisi paremmin asiat, päästäisiin tavallisille ihmisille arkiasioihin vaikuttamaan, josta esimerkiksi mielenterveys-päihdetyön ongelmat kumpuaa.</p>

<p>abuse problems stem from. Otherwise, we build castles in the air developing high-level stuff, where the actual target groups are not involved, and their voices are not heard." (E9) p. 75</p>	<p>Muuten me ollaan aina siellä pilvilinnoissa kehittämässä ylätasoa juttua, jossa ei ole varsinaiset kohderyhmät oikeasti mukana eikä saa ääntään kuuluviin. (E9V26)</p>
<p>"Our call for applications stated there must be significant changes in the next 10 years. We want researchers to understand the urgency. Whatever they study [would] have an impact on decisions, business decisions and public opinion about that -- we simply must consume less-." (E3) p. 76</p>	<p>"Meidän hakukuulutuksissa oli että meillä pitää tapahtua merkittäviä muutoksia yhteiskunnassa 10 seuraavan vuoden aikana. Me halutaan että tutkijat ymmärtää tän kiireellisyuden. Ja mitä ikinä ne tutkiikaan, et ne haluaa olla äänessä omalla tiedollaan tässä yhteiskunnassa et sillois vaikutusta päätöksiin, yritysten päätöksiin, ihmisten yleiseen mielipiteeseen, siihen -- et meidän pitää kertakaikkiaan kuluttaa vähemmän--." (E3V26)</p>
<p>"The pandemic showed that we are totally connected to our living environment -- and we considered it attracts more researchers to the topic and to take the initiative and get interested in studying the connections between health and natural systems." (E3) p. 77</p>	<p>Pandemia osoitti sen, että me ollaan täysin kytköksissä siihen mitä meidän elinympäristössä tapahtuu -- ajateltiin et nyt moni tutkija varmaan herää et nyt ois hyvä aika laittaa tämmönen avaus liikenteeseen ja katsoa että innostusko useampi tutkija nyt tutkimaan terveyden ja luonnonsysteemien välistä kytköstä. (E3V12)</p>