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Governing for Tomorrow: Global Insights into Institutionalizing Intergenerational Equity

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Introduction: Institutionalizing Intergenerational Equity

“Today’s social problems are the problems of generations (White, 2013, p. 216). Now, more than twenty years into the 21st century, the idea of “generations” permeates almost every major issue—from labor market challenges and housing affordability to pension schemes and climate change. These debates increasingly rely on a generational frame (White, 2013). Sociologists and historians dating back to Mannheim (1928) have long debated what exactly a generation is—whether it’s merely a birth cohort or a shared historical consciousness—but the term remains slippery in theory (Kertzer, 1983; Goldgehn, 2004).

Despite that conceptual ambiguity, the notion has cemented itself in policymaking. Generational accounting, pioneered in the early 1990s by Auerbach, Gokhale and Kotlikoff (1994), calculates the fiscal burdens that current and future cohorts will bear. This technique is increasingly utilized by governments to evaluate the sustainability of social spending and debt. Meanwhile, climate policy dialogues have extensively adopted the concept of intergenerational equity, asking not just how resources are allocated among living generations, but how our decisions affect people yet to be born.

This framing came sharply into focus after the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing wave of austerity. Suddenly, media narratives and public discourse began portraying different age groups—students burdened by debt, pensioners living longer, younger workers struggling for jobs—as competing cohorts in a zero-sum struggle over limited state resources. For instance, Pickard (2019) notes how British media increasingly framed intergenerational divides in the wake of austerity politics, often pitting "baby boomers" against "millennials" in coverage of housing, pensions, and employment. This gave rise to a dominant discourse of “generational conflict“ concerning the allocation of public goods such as welfare, healthcare, education, and pensions.

The COVID-19 pandemic further entrenched generational framings, as public health measures frequently invoked an implicit or explicit calculus between protecting older

populations and preserving the social and economic freedoms of younger cohorts. As Gersons et al. (2020, p.4) argue, the crisis exposed "intergenerational fault lines" by positioning youth as bearing the economic brunt—through disrupted education, delayed labor market entry, and mounting public debt—while older generations were often framed as the primary beneficiaries of restrictive health policies. Empirical studies highlighted that mental health impacts, job losses, and educational inequalities disproportionately affected younger people (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Generational discourse became a dominant lens in evaluating lockdown decisions and fiscal stimulus, mirroring earlier austerity debates, but with a sharper intertemporal tension between immediate life preservation and long-term societal costs.

As generational discourse gained traction in the political arena, it also paved the way for future generations—those not yet born but already implicated by present decisions—to enter policy debates. This discursive evolution owes much to the rising salience of climate change, which, by its very nature, foregrounds long-term risks and ethical obligations across temporal divides (Caney, 2014; Gibbons, 2014). The climate crisis continues to challenge the logic of short-termism in governance, highlighting the limits of existing institutions in addressing harms that accrue over decades or centuries (Thompson, 2010). Consequently, the term "future generation" has moved from the abstract periphery to the normative centre of sustainability and climate governance frameworks. For instance, intergenerational equity has become a core principle of international climate regimes, enshrined in documents such as the Paris Agreement (UN, 2015). Scholars have noted that the temporal reach of climate policy has forced a rethinking of political representation and institutional design (Beckman, 2009; Gonzalez-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016).

But the influence of thinking about future generations has also extended to other policy arenas such as fiscal planning, constitutional law, and pension reform. In public finance, intergenerational equity has become a central justification for balanced budget rules, debt brakes, and long-term spending reviews, particularly in welfare states facing demographic decline (Berry & Sinclair, 2010; Catrina, 2013). Similarly, pension systems are increasingly evaluated through an intergenerational lens, with concerns about the sustainability and fairness of pay-as-you-go schemes prompting structural reforms in countries across Europe and Asia (Kashiwase & Rizza, 2014; Clements & Gupta, 2015). Legal scholars have further proposed constitutional safeguards—such as "intergenerational justice clauses"—to embed long-term obligations into foundational legal texts (Tremmel, 2006; González-Ricoy &

Gosseries, 2016). These developments reflect a broader institutional shift: future generations are no longer a metaphorical concern confined to climate discourse, but a legally and economically constructed subject of governance in multiple domains.

In tandem, future generations began to be institutionalised not just as moral subjects but as political stakeholders, albeit ones lacking agency or voice in current systems. Thus, the trajectory from generational conflict to future-oriented governance reflects not a shift away from generational framings, but their radical extension into the domain of the unborn, catalysed by the urgency of planetary-scale challenges.

Public institutions have embraced this generational lens, embedding it in laws, fiscal projections, and policy frameworks. However, the proliferation of generational framings and the growing importance of the concept of intergenerational equity have only sparsely translated into institutional governance mechanisms for future generations.

The political will to change that gained momentum in September 2024, when the Declaration for Future Generations was unanimously adopted at the United Nations *Summit of the Future (United Nations*, 2024). This landmark document calls on member states to adopt a "whole-of-government approach" to safeguarding the interests of future generations, ensuring that long-term impacts are considered across all policy domains. As the declaration affirms, 193 countries committed to:

"Undertaking a whole-of-government approach to coordination, including at the national and local levels, on the assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of policies that safeguard the needs and interests of future generations."
(*United Nations*, 2024, sec. 28)

This moment represents a normative breakthrough: the global community has formally acknowledged that intergenerational equity is not only an ethical imperative but a practical governance challenge. However, while the call to action is clear, the means of implementation remain strikingly underdeveloped. Despite decades of scholarship and sporadic experiments in long-term governance, there is still no robust, empirically grounded consensus on *how* to institutionalize the rights and needs of future generations across different political systems and cultural contexts.

This paper addresses that gap. It aims to:

1. Critically review the conceptual foundations of intergenerational equity and assess which definitions are most conducive for political decision-making spaces
2. Evaluate empirical cases of how countries and institutions have attempted to operationalize and institutionalize intergenerational equity, drawing on case studies informed by expert interviews
3. Assess which institutional mechanisms—among those discussed—are most suitable for adoption within the German political and constitutional context

By interrogating both theory and practice, the paper hopes to contribute to the evolving field of intergenerational governance. The goal is not to propose a universal blueprint, but to illuminate the design choices, trade-offs, and institutional logics that underpin real-world efforts to give future generations a voice today.

Defining Intergenerational Equity

While classical theories of intergenerational equity offer valuable normative insights, they often fall short of being actionable in real-world governance. A gap remains between the aspirations of ethical intergenerational thought and the constraints faced by policymakers who must negotiate the trade-offs between present and future welfare. This chapter aims to contribute to bridging that gap. It proposes a conceptual framework for intergenerational equity that is not only normatively robust but also institutionally actionable and attentive to the distinct treatment of both natural and human-made resources.

In doing so, the chapter acknowledges an urgent need: to move beyond abstract theorizing and toward a framework that can guide actual political and administrative practice.

The first step in this endeavor is a critical examination of existing theories of intergenerational equity. Although these theories vary in philosophical origin—from stewardship and reciprocity to capabilities and contractarianism—they almost always remain disconnected from institutional design and policy-making realities. Therefore, we begin by reviewing the major normative theories that have shaped the discourse on intergenerational justice.

From this foundation, the following chapter will then undertake a conceptual shift: defining the term "intergenerational equity" through the lens of policymaking. The resulting framework is intended to inform the design of governance mechanisms that can make obligations to future generations politically feasible and administratively operational.

John Rawls

John Rawls' theory of justice provides one of the most influential attempts to ground intergenerational equity within a broader framework of moral and political philosophy. Central to his argument is the thought experiment of the "original position," in which free and rational individuals, conceived as equals, choose the principles of justice that will govern the basic structure of society. Crucially, these individuals are placed behind a "veil of ignorance" that deprives them of knowledge about their particular circumstances—including their class position, natural talents, and conception of the good (Rawls, 1971, p. 12). Importantly for questions of intergenerational justice, Rawls extends this veil to cover temporal location: agents do not know to which generation they belong (p. 137; see also pp. 251–252).

This device compels what Rawls calls "rational representatives of free and equal citizens" to adopt principles that are just not only for themselves, but also for future persons. In the absence of self-interest defined by generational identity, Rawls argues that individuals would endorse what he calls the just savings principle. This principle is designed to regulate how much each generation ought to set aside for the benefit of those yet to come. "Each generation," Rawls writes, "must not only preserve the gains of culture and civilization, and maintain intact those just institutions that have been established, but it must also put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation" (p. 251). These savings are not limited to material wealth. They encompass knowledge, institutions, and other "means of production" necessary for sustaining a just society over time.

The just savings principle rests on two key assumptions. First, that the rate of savings should be uniform across generations—a consistent standard by which each cohort sacrifices for the next. Second, that the arrangement should not impose undue hardship on any one generation, particularly the first. While early generations may be asked to save without a reciprocal benefit, Rawls argues that rational agents would accept this risk, since the alternative is "to fail to establish just institutions at all" (p. 255). Thus, "those in the original position are to ask

themselves how much they would be willing to save at each stage of advance on the assumption that all other generations are to save at the same rate" (p. 255).

Rawls thereby embeds intergenerational equity within the broader logic of fairness. The veil of ignorance functions as a leveling mechanism—not only across present-day social divisions, but across time—ensuring that each generation is regarded as morally equivalent and deserving of fair treatment.

Most centrally, Rawls frames the question of justice between generations as a hypothetical agreement reached behind a veil of ignorance, where parties are assumed to be mutually disinterested but rational. This model presumes a kind of moral symmetry between generations—each imagined as equally situated, each committed to the same principle of reciprocity. However, in reality, generations are embedded in a deeply asymmetrical structure: earlier generations can dramatically constrain or enhance the options of later ones, but not vice versa. Rawls acknowledges this asymmetry but maintains that the veil of ignorance neutralizes it by removing knowledge of one's temporal position.

While Rawls' formulation marked a milestone in placing intergenerational concerns within a theory of justice, his treatment of future generations remains philosophically constrained in at least two respects.

According to Rawls, "saving is demanded as a condition of bringing about the full realization of just institutions and the fair value of liberty" (Rawls, 1971, p. 290). Or more clearly: "Real saving is required only for reasons of justice: that is, to make possible the conditions needed to establish and preserve a just basic structure over time" (Rawls, 2001, 159).
Though Rawls does not directly employ the language of capabilities, the underlying goal of his *just savings principle* is to ensure that future generations have the institutional and material conditions necessary to exercise their moral powers and have equality of opportunity.

However, Rawls specifies only one mechanism—his just savings principle—to realize this goal (Rawls, 1971, p. 251), treating it as the necessary vehicle for intergenerational fairness.

This creates a tension in his framework. If what matters is the preservation of just institutions and equality of opportunity, then a morally adequate theory should remain agnostic about

how those conditions are realized. Rawls' assumption that justice requires each generation to save at a steady rate (p. 255) overlooks the possibility that future societies may achieve the same ends through radically different means: through technological innovation, post-scarcity economics, or shifts in value systems. In this way, the *just savings principle* risks being overly prescriptive about the path to justice, even while its goal theoretically admits a diversity of institutional arrangements.

Second, Rawls' veil of ignorance is ultimately static: it assumes a hypothetical generation positioned neutrally across time, rather than acknowledging the dynamic and cumulative nature of intergenerational impacts. Justice, in this view, becomes a matter of establishing symmetry across time slices, rather than managing an unfolding temporal relationship in which later generations bear the irreversible consequences of earlier actions. Moreover, it assumes that the needs and values of each generation are roughly equivalent—that what is just for one generation will be just for the next. But different generations may face fundamentally different challenges: resource scarcity, ecological collapse, technological upheaval, or even altered conceptions of the good. By abstracting from temporal specificity, the original position cannot account for the evolving nature of justice across historical circumstances. In this way, Rawls' framework risks imposing a false uniformity on temporally diverse societies, obligating them to uphold a standard of savings and institutional continuity that may neither reflect their particular needs nor be the most effective means of promoting justice in their context.

Edith Brown Weiss

While Weiss builds on Rawls' device of the veil of ignorance, her framework departs significantly by shifting from abstract reciprocity to a more grounded, stewardship-based model that accounts for the long-term care of shared ecological and cultural systems.

Her approach draws inspiration from Rawls' veil of ignorance: She imagines "a condition of veiled ignorance in which every generation exists somewhere in the spectrum of time, but does not know in advance where it will be located" (Weiss, 1992, p. 24). Yet, her framework departs meaningfully from Rawls' emphasis on distributive justice and institutional preservation. Instead, Weiss develops a normative account rooted in ecological responsibility, moral equality across generations, and the ethical obligations of stewardship.

At the core of her theory lies a reconceptualization of the relationship between generations. “As members of the present generation,” Weiss writes, “we are both trustees, responsible for the robustness and integrity of our planet, and beneficiaries, with the right to use and benefit from it for ourselves” (p. 20). This dual role captures the central tension her theory seeks to resolve: how to balance the rightful use of planetary resources with the responsibility to maintain their quality and diversity for those who come after. Intergenerational equity, in her view, requires that we “leave the planet in no worse condition than we received it, and provide succeeding generations equitable access to its resources and benefits” (p. 21).

Weiss formalizes this vision through three core principles. First, the principle of conservation of options requires each generation to preserve the diversity of the natural and cultural resource base, “so that each generation does not unduly restrict the options available to future generations in solving their problems and satisfying their own values” (p. 22). Second, the principle of conservation of quality holds that “each generation should be required to maintain the quality of the planet so that it is passed on in a condition no worse than that in which it was received” (p. 22). And third, the principle of conservation of access affirms that “each generation should provide its members with equitable rights of access to the legacy of past generations and conserve this access for future generations” (p. 23). These principles are not merely aspirational but derive from a broader ethical claim: that “all generations have an equal place in relation to the natural system, and that there is no basis for preferring past, present or future generations” (p. 23).

Unlike Rawls, who emphasizes the just savings principle as the sole mechanism for securing the conditions of justice across time, Weiss avoids prescribing a singular pathway for future generations to achieve having options. Rather, she insists that intergenerational equity must be adaptable to different circumstances: “The principles proposed here recognize the right of each generation to use the Earth’s resources for its own benefit. They also constrain the present generation’s use of the Earth’s resources” (p. 23). Her approach refrains from requiring prediction of future preferences, emphasizing instead the need to provide “sufficient flexibility to achieve their own goals according to their own values” (p. 23).

While intergenerational and intragenerational equity are often framed as competing priorities, Weiss argues, this dichotomy is overstated. She makes a case that these two forms of justice are not only compatible but frequently mutually reinforcing. In practice, “the actions needed to achieve intragenerational equity are consistent with those advancing intergenerational

equity" because "meeting the basic needs of the poor (is necessary) so that they will have both the desire and the ability to fulfill intergenerational obligations to conserve the planet's resources." (p. 22). Reducing emissions is one example which shows the interconnectedness of intra- and intergenerational equity: While often justified as a way to protect future generations, such measures also bring immediate benefits to those alive today, especially the poorest, who suffer most from climate-related disasters. Rising temperatures, extreme weather, and sea-level rise disproportionately affect low-income communities, threatening their access to food, water, shelter, and health.

What Weiss highlights—and what is often missed in policy debates—is that present generations themselves have intergenerational rights. Even if concern for the future were motivated purely by self-interest—say, a society acting solely to secure the welfare of its own descendants—it would still require sustained attention to the integrity of shared global systems. As Weiss puts it succinctly, "extending that concern further and further into time increasingly requires care for the whole natural system." In other words, the line between the present and the future is not as sharp as often presumed: the justice we secure for today may be the very condition for justice tomorrow.

At its core, Weiss's account of intergenerational equity is a theory of trusteeship over planetary resources, grounded in the obligation to preserve them for future generations. From a theoretical perspective, natural resources might seem like the "easy" case: we inherit them rather than create them. It is reasonable, then, to assert that no generation holds a superior claim to the Earth's resources; instead, each generation stands "as both trustee for the planet with obligations to care for it and a beneficiary with rights to use it." However, this remains limited to natural resources alone.

Locke & Lincoln

The world we inhabit comprises interconnected systems—both natural and social—and we are also stewards of valuable human-made resources: culture, knowledge, infrastructure, and social institutions. Unlike ecosystems, these are products of human labor and may carry moral claims of ownership. As Locke famously states: "The labour of his body, and the work of his hands…." makes something "properly his … thereby mak[ing] it his Property" (Locke, 1690, Chapter 5, §26). This introduces a complication: can we apply the same

trustee/beneficiary model when creators may justifiably claim proprietorship over their own inventions?

Abraham Lincoln addressed this broader inheritance in his *Lyceum Address*, stating that we "found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings"—not only land, but a system of civic institutions, brought about by our ancestors. He insisted that “it is ours only … to transmit these … to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know“ (Lincoln, 1838). The moral imperative Lincoln outlines—gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity—is not based on equal natural entitlement, but on rejecting unjust behaviour by those who accept collective inheritance without renewal.

In effect, the logic of equity here insists that benefiting from past generations obligates us to preserve and pass on cultural, institutional, and political heritage in at least as good a condition. This transcends the simpler idea that we solely have to preserve natural resources, grounding future obligations instead in a moral “duty to posterity” to honor the labor, risk, and sacrifice of earlier generations (Lincoln, 1838).

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum

Having explored these foundational theories, it becomes evident that defining intergenerational equity merely in terms of a natural or economic resource transfer provides a partial and potentially inadequate normative basis. One approach that moves beyond resource-centered perspectives and offers a more holistic account of human well-being across time is the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. In the following, I will explore the capabilities approach and argue why it offers a normatively convincing framework that is simultaneously workable for policymakers.

The Capability Approach

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s *capability approach* departs from Rawls’ and Weiss’ view by focusing less on goods (either economic or natural) and more on – so-called – capabilities. Sen argues that for many purposes of justice, *“the appropriate ‘space’ is neither that of utilities (as claimed by welfarists), nor that of primary goods (as demanded by Rawls), but that of the substantive freedoms – the capabilities – to choose a life one has reason to value”* (Sen 1999, p. 74). In other words, what ultimately matters is what individuals are

actually able to be and to do, given the resources and social conditions available to them. By proposing *"a fundamental shift in the focus of attention from the means of living to the actual opportunities a person has"*, the capability approach *"aims at a fairly radical change in the standard evaluative approaches"* of social justice (Sen 2009, pp. 253–254). This focus on *"the individual's real opportunity to pursue her objectives"* requires looking beyond institutional rules or material goods, and examining the actual freedoms people enjoy in practice. Such freedoms (or capabilities) include basic opportunities like being educated, living a healthy life, participating in one's community, and making meaningful choices. They represent the *"substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)"* that people have reason to value (Sen 1999, p. 75).

While Weiss's principle of conserving options highlights the importance of preserving the diversity of resources and choices available to future generations, it does not ask whether those options can be meaningfully exercised. The capability approach, by contrast, shifts focus from the formal availability of options to the substantive freedoms individuals possess to pursue valuable lives. What ultimately matters is not just whether future generations inherit a wide menu of possibilities, but whether they possess the health, education, and institutional conditions to convert those possibilities into real agency.

From "Primary Goods" to Real Freedoms

Both Sen and Nussbaum developed the capability approach as a response to perceived limitations in earlier theories of justice. Rawls's theory (1999, p. 54), for instance, uses an "index" of primary goods to judge fairness – a basket of resources and rights that every rational agent is presumed to want. But as Sen observes, primary goods are only *means* to what people value, and an equal share of means may translate into very unequal actual lives. What individuals can achieve with a given set of goods will vary depending on personal and social factors (health, talent, social context, etc.). *"A person with severe disability cannot be judged to be more advantaged merely because she has a larger income or wealth than her able-bodied neighbour,"* Sen notes. An infirm or elderly person might need far more resources to attain the same level of well-being as someone young and healthy. Thus, if our concern is a fair chance at a good life for each person (including the most vulnerable), *"we have to look at the overall capabilities they manage to enjoy"* – not simply at their resource

holdings (Sen 2009, p. 253). This insight is *"one important argument for using the capability approach over the resource-centred concentration on income and wealth as the basis of evaluation"* in a theory of justice (Sen 2009, p. 253). In Sen's words, justice should be evaluated in terms of "substantive freedoms", the real opportunities people have to pursue lives they value, rather than in terms of primary goods or utility alone.

Martha Nussbaum builds on a similar critique. She argues that theories focusing only on material resources or subjective satisfaction overlook fundamental aspects of human flourishing, especially for those (like women, the disabled, or the very poor) who lack the basic *capabilities* to pursue their well-being. In her account, justice requires ensuring a threshold level of crucial capabilities for all individuals. Nussbaum explicitly defines her approach as focusing on "what people are actually able to do and to be", in accordance with an intuitive idea of human dignity (Nussbaum 2000, p. 5). She identifies a set of "central human capabilities" (such as life, bodily health, education, political participation, and others), arguing that each of these corresponds to an essential requirement of a life worthy of human dignity (Nussbaum 2000, pp. 70-75).

Policy Relevance and Intergenerational Reach

The emphasis on capabilities is particularly fruitful when addressing intergenerational challenges. Issues like environmental sustainability, climate change, and long-term public debt are difficult to evaluate using traditional theories that focus on distributing resources at one time. The capability approach, by contrast, considers how actions today affect the real freedoms of people tomorrow. Sen explicitly connects capabilities with the concept of sustainability, arguing that our obligation to future generations is best understood in terms of preserving and expanding their substantive opportunities. He criticizes definitions of sustainable development that speak only of maintaining needs or living standards, since *"sustaining living standards is not the same thing as sustaining people's freedom and capability to have – and safeguard – what they value"* (Sen 2009, p. 250). In *The Idea of Justice*, Sen proposes reframing sustainability as *"the preservation, and when possible expansion, of the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people today without compromising the capability of future generations to have similar – or more – freedom"* (Sen 2009, pp. 251–252). This formulation moves beyond merely transferring a stock of resources to one's descendants; it demands that each generation pass on a world that *enlarges* (or at

least secures) the freedom of the next to live a worthy life. By focusing on freedoms, this approach highlights, for instance, that protecting the environment is not only about conserving resources *per se*, but about safeguarding the health, safety, and agency of future persons (their capability to avoid hunger, to live in a stable climate, to maintain their livelihoods, etc.). As Sen notes, if human lives are valued *"not merely in [terms of] need-fulfilment, but also in the freedom that we enjoy,"* then our responsibility extends to *"sustaining – or extending – our freedom"* into the future (Sen 2009, p. 251).

Nussbaum's version of the capability approach similarly reinforces long-term responsibility by insisting on the universal and durable importance of each central capability. For example, one of her ten central capabilities is control over one's material and political environment, which implicitly requires that future generations inherit institutions and a planet that allow them meaningful control over their lives. She also includes the capability of living in relation to other species and other environmental goods that future humans will depend on (*Nussbaum*, 2006, pp. 326–327). More generally, by casting fundamental opportunities (life, health, knowledge, etc.) as *basic entitlements*, Nussbaum's approach demands that we do not sacrifice the core capabilities of future people in pursuit of present goals. In her words, *"we should acknowledge our duties to future generations by endorsing durable basic constitutional principles"* that secure human capabilities over time (Nussbaum 2006, p. 83).

Equally important, the capability approach moves the intergenerational debate beyond a narrow contest over resources toward a richer concern for human lives. Edith Brown Weiss's principle of giving future generations an *"equal heritage"* of resources is certainly valuable, but as Sen and Nussbaum would point out, *what matters is that future people have the genuine freedom to live well*, not merely an equal share of assets on paper. A singular focus on material inheritance can miss the fact that different resources translate into well-being differently depending on context, and that some losses (like a species extinction or a lost language) harm future human capabilities in ways not captured by standard metrics. It recognizes, for example, that pollution or climate change can dramatically reduce the *effective freedom* of future generations to live healthy lives, even if some aggregate "wealth" is maintained. By foregrounding these concrete impacts on human capabilities, the approach offers a normative framework that is both forward-looking and action-guiding. Policymakers are encouraged to ask not just "Are we handing over enough resources?" but "Are we expanding (or at least securing) the basic capabilities of the next generation?".

As Nussbaum succinctly puts it, the capability approach asks whether people – now or in the future – *"have real opportunities to do what they rationally each have reason to value"* (Nussbaum 2011, p. 25). By reframing justice as a commitment to building human capabilities, this approach equips us with a normative and practical framework to tackle intergenerational challenges in a principled yet concrete way. It directs our attention to the *quality* of freedoms we pass on, not just the quantity of goods, thereby ensuring that our concern for future generations is ultimately a concern for future people, understood as agents who deserve the genuine freedom to shape their own lives. In the following paragraphs, I aim to show that the benefits of the capability approach of Sen and Nussbaum lie in its simplicity for operationalizing it in political spaces.

Importantly, Nussbaum frames the capability approach as a partial but critical political doctrine: it outlines basic *entitlements* that every society should secure for its members, without claiming to be a full, comprehensive moral theory. As she writes, *"the capabilities approach is a political doctrine about basic entitlements, not a comprehensive moral doctrine"* (Nussbaum 2006, p. 155). It provides *"a list of fundamental entitlements of all citizens"* – minimum conditions of justice that every person should be guaranteed by right (such as the capability to live to old age, to engage in economic and social activities, to enjoy legal and political equality, etc.). The approach demands that we attend to the real opportunities of *each* individual, including those traditionally marginalized or left out of social contracts (Nussbaum 2000, p. 5). In Nussbaum's words, we ask of each person not just *what* they have, or *how* satisfied they feel, but "Is the person capable of this, or not?" – *"not only about the person's satisfaction with what she does, but also about what she is actually able to do"* (Nussbaum 2000, p. 71).

In the context of policymaking for future generations, it is not necessary to have a fully fleshed-out and unified theory of justice. What Nussbaum and Sen offer is sufficient: a minimal, non-comprehensive political doctrine grounded in human dignity that identifies urgent entitlements all societies should guarantee. One of the strengths of defining intergenerational equity through the capabilities lens is that it does not demand a new ethical consensus. Its normative foundations are already codified in globally recognized documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations,1948). Articles on education (Art. 26), health (Art. 25), freedom of expression (Art. 19), and participation in cultural life (Art. 27) mirror many of Nussbaum's central capabilities. These principles are equally reflected in national legal frameworks—for instance, Germany's Basic Law upholds

human dignity in Article 1, guarantees personal freedom (including a right to education) in Article 2 in conjunction with Article 7, and protects freedom of expression under Article 5 (Germany, 1949). As such, this approach builds on existing commitments rather than inventing new ones, making it politically feasible.

The capabilities framework guides policymakers to ask how laws and institutions can expand people's substantive opportunities over time. It tells us, for instance, that ensuring intergenerational equity is not an abstract ideal but a matter of policy design: education systems must be funded to equip the young with capabilities; environmental regulations must be strong enough to protect the health and livelihoods of future communities; fiscal policies must be prudent so as not to erode the economic capabilities of our descendants.

Sen emphasizes that focusing on capabilities leads to a richer analysis of welfare and development, revealing "advantages in using the capability perspective for evaluation and assessment" of social progress. For example, a country's development can be tracked not only by growth in GDP (which is a means), but more meaningfully by improvements in life expectancy, education and political freedom – all of which reflect enhanced capabilities. In fact, Sen's capabilities approach inspired the United Nations' Human Development Index, which supplements income metrics with health and education indicators to capture a population's capabilities (Kuhumba, 2017). Nussbaum likewise notes that the capabilities approach offers a *"measure of quality of life"* far more aligned with human well-being than GDP or aggregate utility, and she urges that governments use this richer informational space to set targets and assess policies (Nussbaum 2000, pp. 6–7). Crucially, by delineating basic capabilities as goals of justice, policymakers can more easily identify where injustices lie (e.g., high infant mortality or gender gaps in education) and design interventions to secure those central capabilities for future citizens.

The capability approach thus gives us a clear value framework to guide the design of future generations' governance. It tells us *what* to aim for (the preserved and improved freedoms of future people) and helps us justify *why* new mechanisms (like future generations commissions or rights for future citizens) are needed: because without them, we risk violating the entitlements of the future by neglect or shortsightedness. The next chapter will delve deeper into these practical designs and experiments, asking the pressing question that now arises: how can these capability-grounded commitments be effectively institutionalized?

Institutionalizing Intergenerational Equity

Efforts to address the structural bias of democracies toward the short term (Jacobs, 2016; MacKenzie, 2016) have led to a range of institutional proposals, many of which target core features of liberal democratic systems (Boston, 2017; González-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2017). Constitutional amendments have sought to enshrine the rights of future generations, environmental sustainability, or the intrinsic value of nature, thereby providing normative guardrails against short-term political incentives. Legislative reforms, in turn, have aimed to mitigate specific drivers of temporal myopia—for instance, by extending electoral terms, granting future generations indirect legislative representation, or recalibrating voting rights to better reflect the interests of younger cohorts (Gersbach et al., 2020; Gosseries, 2023; Poama & Volacu, 2023; Rose, 2024).

Within this broader reform landscape, a newer institutional development has emerged: Institutions for Future Generations (IFGs). These bodies—already established in a small but growing number of jurisdictions, such as Wales, Malta, Finland and Singapore —are marked by their independence and diversity in institutional setups. While some are situated within legislative branches and others in executive or ombuds-type roles, all share a mandate to scrutinize public decisions through a long-term lens. Unlike proposals for extra-democratic guardianship bodies, IFGs are designed to operate within democratic frameworks, acting not as veto players above politics but as procedural correctives within it.

To empirically ground the theoretical discussion, the next four chapters present case studies of Wales, Malta, Singapore and Finland. Each study evaluates how IFGs institutionalise intergenerational equity, examining their legal foundations, political leverage, operational tools, and broader policy impact within their respective governance contexts.

Given the limited academic analysis of existing IFGs, the following case studies were selected primarily based on the availability of interview partners who were key actors in the development of their respective IFGs:

- Sophie Howe, First Future Generations Commissioner of Wales
- Jacob Ellis, Director of External Affairs & Culture, Future Generations Commission Wales
- Rachael Scicluna, Chairperson of Malta’s Guardian of Future Generations

- Aaron Maniam, Founding Director of Singapore's Center for Strategic Futures
- Timo Harakka, MP & Vice-Chair of Finland's Committee for the Future

Wales' Future Generations Commissioner

Introduction and Relevance

Wales' establishment of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (Wales, 2015) (WFG Act) and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner stand as a pioneering effort to embed intergenerational equity into governance. Enacted in 2015, the WFG Act made Wales the first legislature in the world to impose a legal duty on current generations to safeguard the well-being of future generations. The Act arose from a confluence of factors – growing evidence of long-term challenges like climate change, determined policy entrepreneurs, and cross-party political support – that converged to push forward this ground-breaking legislation despite a broader UK context of austerity and short-term policymaking (Messham & Sheard, 2020, p.5). Nikhil Seth of the UN lauded Wales' leadership, proclaiming "What Wales is doing today, we hope the world will do tomorrow", underlining the global relevance of this small nation's experiment (Seth, 2016, as cited in Bory, 2024).

The WFG Act established seven broad well-being goals – including a prosperous Wales, resilient Wales, healthier Wales, more equal Wales, Wales of cohesive communities, vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and globally responsible Wales – thereby framing sustainable development in an integrated way encompassing social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions (Future Generations Commissioner, n.d.). It also defined five required ways of working (long-term thinking, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement) that public bodies must adopt in pursuing these goals. Crucially, the Act created the independent post of a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales – a "guardian" of people not yet born – to monitor and advocate for long-term interests across the public sector (Wales, 2015, sec.17–18).[1] This institutional innovation attempts to hard-wire future-oriented thinking into current decision-making through legal duties and a dedicated oversight body. "Commissioner" refers both to the institution itself and the individual serving as its head. Nearly a decade on, Wales' approach has garnered

[1] Wales has a well-established history of commissioner-led oversight, evidenced by the creation of multiple Commissioners, including early roles for the Welsh language, older people, and children (Future Generations Commissioner, n.d.).

international attention as a potential model for others, while also offering cautionary lessons about the challenges of turning ambitious law into practical change.

Institutional Design and Powers

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales was established by Part 3 of the WFG Act 2015 as the key institutional mechanism to implement the Act's aims (Wales, 2015). The Commissioner is appointed by a cross-party panel of the Welsh legislature for a single term (seven years), underscoring a design intended to ensure political neutrality and continuity beyond electoral cycles (Messham & Sheard, 2020, p.7). Sophie Howe, appointed as the inaugural Commissioner in 2016, served a full seven-year term, and in 2023, Derek Walker became the second Commissioner. Structurally, the Commissioner's office is independent of government but funded by it, and staffed by a team of 20-30, reflecting an intermediary status: outside direct ministerial control yet reliant on public funds (Messham & Sheard, 2020, p.7). Audit Wales (formerly the Wales Audit Office) provides an external audit of the Commissioner's finances and activities, reinforcing accountability without compromising independence.

Under the WFG Act, the Commissioner's core mandate is to promote the sustainable development principle across public bodies, essentially "to act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs" and to encourage public bodies to consider the long-term impact of their actions (Wales, 2015, sec.18). This broad duty is further elaborated in statute by a set of powers and functions (Wales, 2015, sec.19), which outline what the Commissioner can do in pursuit of this mandate. Key functions include:

- Advisory Powers: The Commissioner may advise and assist public bodies – ranging from local councils and health boards to the Welsh Government itself – on how to meet well-being goals and implement long-term thinking (Wales, 2015, sec.19(1)(a)).
- Review and Monitoring Powers: One of the Commissioner's strongest statutory powers is the ability to conduct independent reviews ("Section 20 reviews") of how public bodies are safeguarding future generations' interests. Through these reviews, the Commissioner can assess whether a body is taking proper account of long-term impacts in its decisions and then issue recommendations for improvement. Public bodies are legally obliged to respond to such recommendations in writing and "take

all reasonable steps" to follow them or explain why they will not, creating a soft enforcement mechanism (Wales, 2015, sec.22; Davies, 2016, p.54).

- Support, Convening and Awareness-Raising: The Commissioner is empowered to share best practices, encourage collaboration, and promote awareness of sustainable development within and beyond government (Wales, 2015, sec.19(1)(e)–(g)). This includes convening networks or forums, such as bringing public bodies together to learn from each other, and engaging in public outreach to build support for intergenerational fairness (Ellis, 2025). The Act even anticipates the Commissioner acting as a bridge to civil society and private actors by allowing advice or assistance to "any other person" taking steps towards the well-being goals (Wales, 2015, sec.19(1)(d)).
- Research and Policy Development: The Commissioner may undertake research on sustainable development and future trends (Wales, 2015, sec.19(2)). This has given the office an analytical capacity – for example, studying whether national well-being indicators adequately capture long-term outcomes. The Commissioner can leverage this research function to propose improvements to policy frameworks, such as suggesting new indicators or highlighting emerging issues that require government action (Howe, 2025).

Importantly, the Commissioner's remit is catalytic and oversight-oriented rather than executive. The WFG Act stops short of granting powers to veto policies or directly enforce compliance. For instance, the Commissioner cannot overturn specific decisions already made by public bodies and has no authority to impose sanctions. This was a deliberate design choice to make the office a collaborator rather than a regulator with hard powers. As one legal analysis noted, the Welsh approach relies on "political accountability… built into the Act" via oversight and transparency, with formal legal enforcement largely limited to the "back-stop of judicial review" (Davies, 2016, p.54). In practice, this means the Commissioner's influence depends significantly on persuasion, publicity, and the moral authority of future generations' interests, as well as the backing of other institutions like the Senedd and Auditor General for Wales to hold bodies to account. Early commentators questioned whether the well-being duty would prove "enforceable legal duty as opposed to an aspirational political duty," concluding that the Act's success would hinge "heavily on the political will and the personalities" of those implementing it (Davies, 2016, p.41). This blend of soft power and statutory mandate defines the Commissioner's unique institutional design:

armed with a broad legal platform to advocate and review, but reliant on influence and cooperative mechanisms to drive change.

Another structural feature is the creation of an Advisory Panel to support the Commissioner (Wales, 2015, sec.26). The panel, comprising representatives from sectors like business, academia, youth, and public service, can be consulted for expertise and to ensure the Commissioner hears a diversity of perspectives. This multiplies the office's reach and legitimacy, grounding its work in a wider societal context (Ellis, 2025). Moreover, the Act established Public Services Boards (PSBs) in each local authority area – multi-stakeholder bodies charged with preparing local well-being plans, which, while not under the Commissioner's direct authority, operate in the ecosystem the Commissioner oversees. The Commissioner engages with PSBs by reviewing and advising on their well-being assessments and plans, effectively cascading the Act's implementation to the local level (Messham & Sheard, 2020, p.8).

In summary, Wales' Future Generations Commissioner is an ombudsperson-type institution with a clear statutory remit to inject long-termism into governance. Its design emphasizes collaboration over coercion: it has the power to investigate and recommend, but must rely on transparency and advocacy to ensure recommendations are heeded. The office's independence, cross-cutting jurisdiction (covering all public bodies from community councils to central government), and formal links to other oversight bodies form an architecture aimed at embedding intergenerational accountability within the political system. Whether these design choices yield genuine influence is explored in the following sections.

Operational Tools and Methodologies

Translating the WFG Act's goals into practice has required the Commissioner's office to develop a suite of operational tools and methodologies. From 2016 onwards, the inaugural Commissioner Sophie Howe pioneered approaches to fulfill the dual role of supporting public bodies to improve while scrutinizing their performance. The following are key tools and methods the office has employed:

1. Future Generations Reports

Under the Act, the Commissioner must publish a major assessment report once per Senedd term (every five years), evaluating overall progress and advising on future improvements.

The Future Generations Report 2020 was the first of these landmark publications, providing a baseline on how public bodies were implementing the Act and dozens of recommendations for action. For example, the 2020 report drew on three years of monitoring to identify gaps such as insufficient focus on climate change and cultural well-being in public objectives. The Future Generations Report 2025 builds on this by assessing progress over the Act's first decade and issuing "Calls to Action" on urgent issues like food security, cultural rights, and investing in preventative services (Future Generations Commissioner, 2025). These reports are a critical tool for transparency and agenda-setting: laid before the Senedd and the public, they synthesize evidence and amplify future-oriented policy proposals. By design, they coincide with electoral cycles – informing newly elected officials of long-term priorities at the start of their term, effectively institutionalizing a "future check" in the political timeline (Howe, 2025).

2. Section 20 Reviews and Thematic Studies:

The Commissioner has leveraged the Section 20 review power to conduct in-depth examinations of specific areas of policy implementation. Notably, in 2019–2020, the office undertook a review of public procurement practices (Future Generations Commissioner, 2021). This study evaluated whether procurement decisions across public bodies were aligned with well-being goals, ultimately recommending changes that led to a new Procurement Centre of Excellence in Wales. Another high-profile Section 20 review (2022) scrutinized how the Welsh Government itself was embedding the Act in its internal machinery. The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner interviewed ministers and civil servants and analyzed decision processes, finding pride in the Act's vision but a gap between enthusiasm and practical application in government operations. The review's recommendations, co-developed with the First Minister's office, highlighted needs for clearer leadership and better cross-department communication. In response, the Welsh Government adopted a Continuous Learning and Improvement Plan to address these shortcomings. These examples illustrate the methodology of collaborative auditing: the Commissioner's reviews are rigorous (involving evidence gathering and research), but they also engage the reviewed body in a problem-solving spirit rather than a punitive one. By agreement, the 2022 government review was conducted with Welsh ministers' cooperation, reflecting the Commissioner's preference to work with institutions to drive change (Ellis, 2025). Through such thematic reviews, the office not only holds agencies to account but also produces detailed guidance on how to

improve, effectively acting as a future-proofing consultant within the public sector (Howe, 2025).

3. Advisory, Support and Capacity-Building Initiatives:
A significant portion of the Commissioner's day-to-day work involves advising and assisting public bodies on request. This has been operationalized through various channels:

- The Commissioner issues formal advice letters and recommendations to public bodies when approving or reviewing their well-being objectives. For instance, in 2017–18, as public bodies set their first objectives under the Act, the Commissioner's team analyzed all 345 objectives and provided tailored feedback on how to increase ambition and coherence. This proactive guidance helped institutions understand what "good" looks like under the Act, and a summary report (Future Generations Commissioner, 2018) captured common shortcomings (e.g., many initial objectives did not fully meet the Act's aspirations).
- The office also developed a self-reflection toolkit for public bodies. In 2018–19, each organization completed a self-assessment on how it was applying the five ways of working, followed by peer learning sessions facilitated by the Commissioner's staff (Ellis, 2025). The Commissioner then issued individualized advice to each body. This method built capacity internally and encouraged organizational learning, rather than relying only on external evaluation. The exercise revealed system-wide insights, e.g., many bodies struggled with integrating their efforts for a coherent contribution to the seven goals.

In providing support, the Commissioner often convenes multi-actor forums – for example, bringing together all 14 Public Services Boards to review their draft well-being assessments in 2017 and again in 2022. By issuing aggregate reports on these (e.g., "Well-being in Wales: Planning today for a better tomorrow," summarizing PSBs' 2017 assessments), the office identified common challenges and opportunities across regions (Future Generations Commissioner, 2017). This peer-comparison approach creates a gentle competitive pressure and shared learning environment for local bodies implementing the Act (Howe, 2025).

4. Public Engagement and Innovative Communications:
In line with the Act's emphasis on involving citizens, the Commissioner's office has employed creative methods to engage the public and key stakeholders in the conversation

about the future. Early on, Sophie Howe launched a "National Conversation" asking "What are the things that, if we got right, would make the biggest contribution to each of the seven well-being goals?" (Howe, 2025). Thousands of responses from the public fed into setting priorities. The office also uses storytelling and the arts to make future challenges tangible. The Future Generations Report 2025 notably includes commissioned artworks – from visual art to spoken word pieces – that interpret issues like climate change and mental health through creative lenses. Additionally, digital media is leveraged; for example, short "Impact of the Act" videos highlight success stories such as shifts in education and transport policy (Future Generations Commissioner, n.d.). These engagement tools serve a dual purpose: they raise awareness among the public (building support for sustaining the Act) and they send a signal to public bodies that people care about and are watching progress on future well-being.

In essence, the Commissioner's operational toolbox is designed to mainstream long-term, integrated thinking across the Welsh public sector – using persuasion, evidence, and support as the primary instruments.

Political Pressures and Adaptive Capacity

No institution tasked with promoting long-term policy can escape political pressures, and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has faced its share while also demonstrating adaptive capacity in response. The political context in Wales has been comparatively favorable to future generations legislation – a point often noted in explaining the WFG Act's birth. A supportive Labour-led government (with cross-party contributions) and strong ministerial champions like Jane Davidson and Peter Davies created an initial "protective bubble" for the idea (Davies, 2016, p.42; Messham & Sheard, 2020). However, sustaining that commitment over time and through government changes requires constant political navigation by the Commissioner.

One early challenge was establishing the office's credibility amid skepticism. Sophie Howe's appointment in 2015 drew some controversy (Howe, 2025), particularly from environmental groups and opposition politicians, due to her background (she had been a deputy police commissioner with a politics and social policy profile rather than an environmental expert). Howe (2025) has acknowledged that initially she faced pressure to prove the role's worth and overcome perceptions that it might be a political sinecure or "toothless" oversight body. She responded by adopting a proactive, media-visible stance – for instance, intervening in high-

profile decisions (like the Newport M4 motorway proposal, discussed below) – to demonstrate the Office could not be easily ignored. Over time, her leadership helped normalize the Commissioner as an authoritative voice on policy, and her style of frank advocacy combined with pragmatism earned cross-party respect (Ellis, 2025). This underlines a lesson noted by Davies (2016): the "personalities of those tasked with holding public bodies to account" significantly influence an institution's resilience. Howe's assertive approach effectively set a precedent that the Commissioner would speak uncomfortable truths if needed, thereby carving out political space for the Office.

Nonetheless, the Commissioner must tread carefully to avoid overt partisanship. The Welsh political landscape has remained under Labour-led governments since the Act, which has generally meant a continued high-level commitment to the WFG agenda. However, political pressure can manifest as government impatience or sensitivity to criticism. On a few occasions, the Commissioner's candid assessments have strained relations – for example, pointing out that the Welsh Government "has not sufficiently resourced the implementation of the Act" (Future Generations Commissioner, 2019, p.8) or publicly criticizing slow progress on decarbonization. According to Ellis (2025), the Commissioner's office learned to balance "challenge and support," often coordinating critical messages privately with ministers before making them public. This adaptive strategy ensures that recommendations are constructive and seen as helping the government meet its long-term commitments, rather than as external attacks.

Another dimension of political pressure is the risk of policy fatigue or complacency over time. As the Act approached its tenth year, there were concerns that some public bodies treated it as a tick-box exercise. Internally, Commissioner Howe often contended with "pockets of resistance" in the bureaucracy – individuals or departments reverting to old, siloed, short-term habits (Howe, 2025). The Office adapted by continually refreshing the narrative and focusing on implementation gaps. For instance, when annual reports revealed certain well-being goals (like "A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language") were consistently under-addressed by agencies, the Commissioner increased engagement with the cultural sector and now pushes the government to make culture a statutory priority (Future Generations Report, 2025, p. 5). This led to a recommendation for a dedicated Culture Bill to strengthen cultural well-being duties in the next legislative term. By seeking legislative reinforcement, the Commissioner is effectively asking politicians to update the Act

in light of its first decade of lessons – an adaptive response to ensure the innovation remains dynamic and doesn't stagnate. Indeed, one of the 2025 Calls to Action is for a comprehensive post-legislative review of the WFG Act to enhance its impact by 2030. This indicates a political maturity: rather than defending the status quo, the institution recognizes the need to evolve and is willing to subject itself to scrutiny and possible reform (Ellis, 2025).

Finally, the Commissioner has adeptly used international platforms and recognition as a shield and sword in domestic politics. Wales' model has been studied by the UN and other countries, and in 2023, the United Nations adopted a Declaration on Future Generations, echoing language similar to Wales' approach. Sophie Howe and now her successor, Derek Walker, have been invited to advise other governments, elevating the profile of the Welsh institution. This global acknowledgement creates a virtuous political effect at home: Welsh leaders, regardless of party, are proud of being world-leading in this area and thus have an incentive to support the Commissioner's success (Howe, 2025).

Outcomes and Perceived Impact

Assessing the outcomes and impact of Wales' future generations apparatus involves looking at both policy changes attributable to the WFG Act and the Commissioner's influence, and perceptual shifts in governance culture. After nearly a decade, evidence suggests that the WFG Act has prompted "changes big and small" in Welsh public policy (Howe, 2025).

Several concrete policy decisions and innovations in Wales can be directly linked to the influence of the WFG Act and the Commissioner:

The clearest single outcome was the cancellation of the M4 Newport bypass in 2019. This £1.4 billion highway project, long planned to ease congestion, was seen by many as contradicting Wales' climate and environmental goals. In 2019, as pressures built to approve the road, the Commissioner joined forces with environmental NGOs and citizens in opposition, using the WFG Act as leverage. Howe issued formal advice warning that the project failed the Act's sustainability tests and would lock in high-carbon infrastructure. This was a politically charged intervention, as business lobbyists and some politicians favored the road. Ultimately, the Welsh Government scrapped the M4 extension, explicitly citing the requirements of the WFG Act and the need to find a more sustainable solution. Howe (2025) described the decision as a "landmark moment and testament to the change that the Act is

bringing about". It showed that the office could withstand and even shape political pressure by mobilizing public values. Instead, the Welsh Government opted for a package of sustainable transport investments including new rail stations, bus rapid transit, and active travel corridors. Subsequently, Wales (2021) issued a new national transport strategy prioritizing "car-free travel" and set targets to significantly increase public transport and cycling by 2045. It also launched a groundbreaking review of all road-building schemes, cancelling or re-scoping the majority to align with climate goals. The Commissioner's persistent advocacy was central in these areas, providing evidence and moral backing for decisions that might otherwise have been politically difficult.

Wales also declared a climate emergency in 2019, a move that the administration linked to the spirit of the WFG Act, demanding urgent long-term action. This symbolic step has been followed by strengthened climate policies, such as more ambitious carbon budgets and investments in renewable energy (BBC News, 2019).

One of the most significant but hard-to-measure impacts is the cultural shift in how Welsh public servants and leaders approach policy. Interviews with officials indicate that the Act has gradually instilled a habit of asking "but what about the long-term implications?" in policy discussions (Ellis, 2025). Many decisions now routinely require an impact assessment under the WFG Act, which fosters consideration of all seven goals. For example, a housing policy proposal will need to articulate not just short-term outputs (homes built) but also contributions to community cohesion, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, etc.. This does not automatically guarantee better outcomes, but it has broadened the lens of decision-making. A 2019 academic study found that national public bodies in Wales were increasingly working beyond their usual remits and collaborating with others, citing the Act as the impetus (Ahmed et al., 2019).

These outcomes illustrate that the WFG Act, realized by the Commissioner's interventions, has a tangible policy impact across sectors. However, it is equally important to note where the impact has been limited or is still unfolding:

- Not all public bodies have excelled in meeting their well-being objectives. The Commissioner's 2020 report found a wide variation in application – some agencies embraced innovation under the Act, while others took a minimalist approach (e.g., repackaging existing activities under new headings without real change). Progress has

often been slowest in the internal "corporate change" areas – like reforming procurement, budgeting, and staff training – which are less visible to the public but critical for long-term reorientation. The need for speed and scale in change is a recurring theme; as one finding in the 2025 report states, many bodies must "deepen impact by building on bold policies" of the past decade to truly transform governance (Future Generations Report, 2025, Finding 1).

- No major legal challenges (judicial reviews) have yet been taken under the WFG Act, which some observers interpret as a sign that the Act's duties are not easily justiciable (Stokes & Smyth, 2024). The lack of litigation could mean that conflicts are being resolved in the political/administrative arena (which is arguably a success of the Act's design), but it also means the ultimate boundaries of the law remain untested. Davies (2016) pointed out early on that "in terms of legal accountability, there appears to be very little" beyond judicial review, and indeed no public body has been taken to court for failing to comply. The Commissioner's preference for collaboration over confrontation likely contributes to this – issues are addressed via recommendations rather than legal battles.

The emerging consensus among preliminary studies is that the WFG Act and the Commissioner have been effective at shifting processes and mindsets, which is a necessary precondition for better long-term outcomes, but that measuring ultimate impact on future generations' actual well-being will take more time and better data (Williams & Smith, 2021).

Transferable Lessons and Design Implications

High-Level Legal Commitment creates momentum but must be matched with enforcement mechanisms: Enshrining long-term duties in law, as Wales did, sends a powerful signal of intent. It gives reformers a lever to pull and a basis to hold governments accountable beyond electoral cycles. The WFG Act's broad scope (covering social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being) shows the value of a holistic legal foundation, preventing the effort from being siloed as "just an environmental law" or similar. This breadth ensured buy-in from multiple sectors (health, education, economy, etc.) and mirrored the integrated nature of sustainable development. However, the Welsh experience also highlights that legal duties alone are insufficient if not followed up by clear enforcement. Davies (2016) characterized the Act as "over-leavened with expectation rather than assurance," noting the lack of sanctions when bodies fall short. The implication for design is that future initiatives might

consider slightly stronger compliance triggers – for example, empowering the Commissioner (or courts) to require remedial action plans if a public body consistently fails to heed recommendations. In Wales, the soft enforcement via required responses and public audit works in a consensual political culture, but in other contexts, a more stringent mechanism might be needed to avoid the duty being ignored.

The institutional setup should be independent but integrated: The Future Generations Commissioner's independence from day-to-day politics has been crucial for credibility. Appointment by a cross-party process insulated the role from being seen as a governing party's tool. Yet, the Welsh model also tightly integrates the Commissioner within the governance framework – for instance, the Commissioner advises the Auditor General and works with local PSBs rather than standing apart. This integration has benefits: it avoided duplication and fostered a united front on long-term issues. A transferable insight is the importance of embedding the future mandate across existing institutions and processes (audit offices, budget processes, etc.) rather than creating a new oversight body working in isolation. Wales did this through cooperative approaches, which other countries could emulate by formally linking future guardians with supreme audit institutions or planning departments. However, integration must not compromise independence. The Commissioner's ability to publicly critique government (e.g., on insufficient funding for implementation) was preserved, which was vital. In design terms, giving the Commissioner a secure tenure and protected budget (to the extent possible) helps maintain that independence.

Wales chose a broad mandate (sustainable development in all facets). The Welsh approach ensured that the future generations' agenda is not siloed: It permeates health policy, education, finance, etc., making it truly cross-cutting. This broad scope is a lesson in ambition – it galvanizes more systemic change and avoids the pitfall of, for example, focusing only on climate change while neglecting social equity (which could undermine intergenerational equity in other ways). On the other hand, a broad remit can dilute focus and, work programmes must be prioritised as not to overwhelm a small office (Ellis, 2025). The Commissioner has to cover everything from climate adaptation to cultural preservation. Other countries might take a staged approach: establishing a future generations framework law with multiple goals, but each Commissioner's term could emphasize a few pressing themes – as Wales is now doing (Future Generations Commissioner, 2025) – to drive tangible progress. This balances breadth with focus.

A striking aspect of Wales' case is how much the effectiveness depended on the Commissioner's leadership style and ability to engage the public. Sophie Howe's advocacy raised the profile of future generations to an extent probably not achievable by a quiet, ombudsman-style approach. She was described as a "trailblazer" who was not afraid to press ministers or use the media (Lynn, 2023). The lesson here is that for such an office to succeed, it needs a champion who can build coalitions and communicate a vision. This is not a traditional bureaucratic role: It blends technical oversight with political savvy and moral persuasion. Countries replicating the model should consider the appointment criteria carefully – it's as much about communication and motivation as about technical expertise. Indeed, early Welsh skepticism about Howe's lack of environmental background was overcome by her political acumen and ability to learn and incorporate expert advice. The design implication is to ensure the selection process values these leadership qualities, perhaps involving public hearings or input in the appointment to choose a figure who can unite stakeholders. Furthermore, public engagement is a critical function that shouldn't be overlooked. The Act succeeded in part because it grew from a public conversation ("The Wales We Want" in 2014) and continued to involve citizens in shaping priorities. Other nations should similarly invest in participatory foresight exercises and ongoing dialogue with citizens about their future aspirations. This builds a constituency for the institution that can defend it politically and provide it with legitimacy. As seen in Wales, civil society support can act as a buffer against political changes and help sustain the institution's mandate.

Wales' approach has not been static. It has evolved in response to experience. For example, recognising the need for more clarity and capacity, Wales in 2021–22 amended the original WFG Act via the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act to strengthen social partnership duties and explicitly link them to well-being goals (Future Generations Commissioner, n.d.). It also refined the role of community councils and other players via statutory guidance over time. The Commissioner's office itself shifted strategy between the first and second incumbents (with Derek Walker focusing on a narrower set of missions). The lesson is that such institutions should be designed with the ability to learn and adapt. A formal review after a set period (as recommended for Wales by 2025) is a good practice to recalibrate powers and resources. It might be wise for any country implementing a future generations law to include a clause for a 5- or 10-year post-implementation review by an independent body.

Lastly, Wales teaches that the political sustainability of a future generations institution hinges on cultivating broad support. Cross-party backing at inception is ideal, but maintaining it requires demonstrating value to all sides. The Commissioner in Wales worked to align the Act's goals with diverse political priorities (e.g., emphasizing community well-being). Additionally, visible wins (like the M4 decision) helped shape the narrative that the Act delivers results. A future generations body elsewhere should similarly publicize its successes and relevance to current quality of life, not just limit itself to future scenarios. This manages the risk that long-termism could be painted as at odds with immediate needs. Wales handled this by insisting that meeting today's needs and tomorrow's needs go "hand-in-hand," not in opposition (Howe & Nutbeam, 2023). The communications lesson is to frame intergenerational policies as win-win where possible, and where sacrifices are needed, to justify them with clear moral and economic arguments. In Wales, the Commissioner often used stories and data to show that preventative action (though perhaps costing more upfront) saved money and lives in the long run, gradually bringing skeptics on board (Future Generations Commissioner, n.d.).

In conclusion, the Wales Future Generations Commissioner case offers a prototype for institutionalizing intergenerational responsibility, demonstrating that it is possible to legislate for long-term well-being and to create an office that gives future citizens a voice in today's policy. Civil society coalitions and media stories showcasing Wales' innovation have created a sense of national pride around the Act (Howe, 2025). This external support buffers political pressure: any government would face public outcry if it tried to abolish the Commissioner now. The Welsh case thus provides insight into how to design not just the formal powers but the political strategy of an intergenerational institution, to ensure it can survive and be effective amidst the inevitable drivers of short-term politics. The design implications for others are to ensure a strong legal basis combined with practical powers, to embed the role in the fabric of governance while maintaining independence, to select dynamic leadership and foster public engagement, and to remain flexible to learn and improve. Institutions can be designed to bridge present and future, but their success will rest on building a lasting consensus that thinking of the long term is a fundamental part of good governance.

Malta's Guardian of Future Generations

Introduction and Relevance

Malta has been a pioneer in advocating for the interests of future generations, both internationally and domestically. At the 1992 Earth Summit, Malta's government proposed the creation of a "guardian for future generations," a concept aimed at embedding intergenerational equity into global decision-making (Cassar, 2024). Although this UN proposal did not immediately materialize, Malta eventually enshrined the idea domestically through its Sustainable Development Act (2012), which established a national *Guardian of Future Generations* (Government of Malta, 2012, p.5). This made Malta one of the few countries that developed an official mechanism devoted to the welfare of future generations (Scicluna, 2025). By institutionalizing a Guardian of Future Generations, Malta signalled its commitment to balancing present needs with those of tomorrow, aligning with the Brundtland Commission's vision of sustainable development and responding to growing calls for intergenerational justice (Brundtland Commission, 1987; Pearce, 2019, p.52). The Guardian of Future Generations is therefore both a product of Malta's early leadership in this arena and a key element of its national strategy and vision to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into policy.

Institutional Design and Powers

Malta's Guardian of Future Generations was formally established by the Sustainable Development Act, 2012 (Government of Malta, ACT. 521). As per Article 8 of the Sustainable Development Act, the Guardian is a commission composed of a Chairperson appointed by the Prime Minister and five other board members nominated by the responsible Minister. Each member represents different domains (voluntary sector, economic development, social affairs, and environment). Members are appointed for three-year terms (with potential for renewal), ensuring continuity across political cycles (Government of Malta, 2012, p.4). The Competent and Contracting Authority under the Act is the Ministry responsible for sustainable development (currently the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness), which houses a Sustainable Development Directorate. According to Article 8, the Guardian has the mandate "to request any government entity to provide data or information or to collect data or information about any topic that could have a bearing on sustainable development."

Additionally, Article 14 of the Act also mandates an annual Sustainable Development Report to Parliament, which is prepared by the Directorate following consultation with all Government Ministries (Government of Malta, 2012, p.6). These reports provide an overview of the policies, measures and initiatives that incorporate the principles of sustainable development and address the SDGs, which were carried out by the various government ministries, bodies, departments and entities, whilst highlighting those areas that require further effort, commitment and improvements.[2]

The Guardian's statutory remit is broad but primarily advisory and advocacy-oriented. By law, the Guardian "has the role of safeguarding inter-generational and intra-generational sustainable development in Malta" (Government of Malta, 2012, p.5). The Act assigns the following key functions and powers to the Guardian:

- Advocacy and Advice: Promote sustainable development principles across national policymaking, legislation and practices, ensuring that the needs of future citizens are considered in today's decisions. The Guardian can propose goals and actions to any government ministry or agency to further sustainable development objectives.
- Information Access: Request any government entity to provide data or even collect new information on topics that could affect sustainable development.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Encourage and facilitate the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and civil society in sustainable development advocacy. It is also tasked with developing a scientific research network that could positively contribute towards the sustainability of society.
- Public Outreach: Consider proposals from the public on policy matters that could benefit sustainable development, thereby acting as a conduit for citizens' long-term concerns to reach decision-makers (Government of Malta, 2012, p.5).

In theory, the Guardian of Future Generations serves as a high-level institutional champion for long-term thinking in Malta's governance framework, with a mandate spanning environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

[2] All reports are available here: Annual Reports – Sustainable Development

Operational Tools and Methodologies

During the Guardian's latest term (2022 – 2025), chaired by Dr. Rachael Scicluna, there has been a conscious effort to invigorate the Guardian's operations with new tools, partnerships and methodologies. A key operational philosophy has been to leverage data and research as the basis for advocacy to safeguard the wellbeing and future of current and future generations, including those yet to be born (Scicluna, 2025). In practice, this means the Guardian is initiating its own studies and engaging experts to address long-term challenges through tangible community projects and data-driven recommendations. One such initiative, *Our Communities, Our Spaces – Playful, Healthy and Secure Together*, applies an intergenerational lens to urban development by co-creating healthy, secure, and inclusive public spaces in the semi-urban towns of Żurrieq, Safi, and Kirkop. By researching how communities perceive and use their urban and natural environments, the project involves residents in shaping sustainable neighbourhoods that promote health equity, social cohesion, and access to nature, which are all essential conditions for long-term wellbeing for all generations. The final outcome was the co-production of an evidence-based policy document which included a multi-layered social map - a visual tool based on wellbeing and health, security, play, and the physical integration of the 3 localities through internal pathways and the enhancement of the surrounding environment. The policy document also included tangible recommendations addressed to the relevant public bodies.

In doing so, the project addresses intergenerational fairness by ensuring that today's infrastructure and planning decisions do not entrench health inequalities or environmental deficits that would otherwise be inherited by future generations. Through a systems-based approach and cross-sectoral collaboration with public bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Local Councils, and the public, the Guardian embeds strategic foresight within its vision, influencing policy and supporting the implementation of SDG11 amongst others through culturally grounded, user-centred approaches to sustainable development (Scicluna, 2025).

In what appears to be a strategic effort to strengthen its legitimacy and public presence, the Guardian has begun expanding its outreach to a wider array of societal actors. Plans are underway to co-organize events with civil society, youth organizations and the private sector (Scicluna, 2025). For this, offline and online visibility through awareness raising and research-

based recommendations have become important operational and strategic tools. Scicluna observes that "if you don't have virtual visibility, then you don't exist" in today's world. Thus, the Guardian is maximising the use of social media and online platforms, as well as public communications to raise awareness. This includes the dissemination of its work through social media platforms, about future generations and the current issues faced by current generations. By sharing its research findings, highlighting youth voices, and celebrating best practices in sustainability, the Guardian is working to build a broader constituency for long-term thinking. This represents a methodological shift making the Guardian an active platform for intergenerational dialogue. Although still in early stages, these efforts aim to turn the abstract concept of "future generations" into relatable public narratives to raise critical thinking and important questions of what kind of environment, economy, and society Maltese citizens want to pass on to their children and grandchildren.

Political Pressures and Adaptive Capacity

The experience of Malta's Guardian of Future Generations vividly demonstrates how political context can shape such institutions, and how a proactive and adaptive leadership is ideal to navigate such pressures. Perhaps a fundamental challenge is the 3-year duration of its term. The issue being that this timeline can only address short- and medium-term goals. Over the past few years, the political climate for the Guardian has improved, illustrating the importance of top-level support and political will. This proactive political support is important as it intrinsically empowers the Guardian, while fully embracing its vision and advocacy for a more community and collaborative approach (Scicluna, 2025). The alignment of the Guardian's goals with the government's stated commitment to sustainable development is ideal for goals to be achieved (e.g., Malta's "Vision 2050" strategy [3] and Malta's Sustainable Goals [4]): Rather than being seen as an external critic, the Guardian is positioned as a partner to help achieve long-term national objectives through its data-driven recommendations. Additionally, the inclusion of young voices is at the core of the Guardian's strategic vision, ensuring that policies are inclusive of children's and young people's needs (Scicluna, 2025).

[3] For more information, see Envision 2050
[4] For more information, see Vision 2050 – Sustainable Development & Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 – Sustainable Development

Despite funding limitations due to the budget allocated, Scicluna adopted a new strategy by developing cost-effective research projects, cross-sectoral collaborations with public bodies, and by focusing on boosting the Guardian's social media platforms.

Transferable Lessons and Design Implications

Malta's experience with the Guardian of Future Generations offers several transferable lessons to other countries in how intergenerational fairness can be institutionalised in governance. A key lesson concerns the importance of the Guardian's independent statutory status, which enables it to influence government policy across different areas of legislation. Through its advocacy role, the development of research projects, and the dissemination of data-driven recommendations, the Guardian helps raise awareness of long-term issues, providing real-time evidence that can be utilised by both public and non-governmental actors. Moreover, the Guardian has the potential to challenge and shape policy direction, helping to ensure that sustainable development remains a central pillar in the formulation of strategies and plans.

A potential limitation which other countries could reflect upon is the duration of term of office. A longer term from 3-years to, for example, 4- or 5-years, will enable more effective implementation of a long-term vision. Having a longer term of office would provide a more stable platform to achieve and pursue short-, medium- and long-term objectives. Other countries may therefore consider longer mandates that allow the governing body to oversee the full implementation of its strategy. Alternatively other countries may consider appointing a Commissioner for Future Generations which could help address such or similar challenges.

Another second promising element in Malta's framework is the fact that Parliament annually holds a discussion on the Sustainable Development Annual Report (referred to above), which creates a recurring institutional space to elevate concerns related to future generations. However, governments could further strengthen this by integrating the Guardian more directly into legislative scrutiny processes.

A third lesson relates to institutional capacity. Although Malta's Guardian does not possess veto power, its effectiveness as a soft-power actor depends heavily on its ability to act. A Guardian mandated to promote long-term sustainability must be adequately resourced to conduct research, undertake engagement initiatives, and follow up on its findings. Equally

important is access to information: the Guardian's legal right to obtain data from public entities is a critical enabler of oversight. Replicating this provision elsewhere would strengthen Guardians' capacity to assess and audit the long-term implications of public policy. In short, soft power is only effective when supported by credible tools and resources. Policymakers must therefore ensure that Guardians are equipped with sufficient technical expertise, data access, and communication platforms to fulfil their mandate.

A fourth lesson concerns public engagement. The public is at the core of the Guardian's ethos, and its aim is to serve the public. Hence, public engagement through community activities is an essential tool to gain trust and legitimacy with various groups of society, and also NGOs and public bodies. Building bridges and networks is also key in gaining credibility, and in turn achieve effective change for the greater good of the country.

Scicluna (2025) emphasised that international Guardians should hold a public education mandate and invest in outreach through accessible sustainability reports, stakeholder forums, and social media engagement. For instance, the Guardian initiated a series of online posts to educate the public about the role of the Guardian, its vision and what it stands for. Important educational aspects were related to SDG 11 and thus, the importance of codeveloping an infrastructure of care as the glue of a health society. This was achieved through educational posts that discussed the relationship between infrastructure, health equity, safe access to public amenities, free play, the inclusion of youth voice and older people in policy development, and the safeguarding of physical and mental health of various vulnerable groups such as the LGBTIQ community, people with disabilities, and women and girls, amongst others. Such national efforts demonstrate that Guardians can mobilise public opinion as a strategic lever to influence political decision-making.

Finland's Committee for the Future

Introduction and Relevance

Finland's Committee for the Future (CF) stands out globally as a pioneering institutional mechanism to embed long-term, intergenerational considerations into parliamentary governance. Established in 1993 amid an economic recession, the CF was conceived as an

antidote to political short-termism – a means for Parliament to "observe the changing world, analyse it, and take a view in good time on how [society] should respond in the future" (Eduskunta, 1998; Arter, 2000, p.150).

In Finland's context, the CF has gradually become an accepted part of the parliamentary landscape – an "odd bird" turned mainstream, tasked with pushing policymakers to see beyond the next elections (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.3). This underscores why the CF is often highlighted in comparative discussions of institutionalizing intergenerational equity: it combines normative ambition with institutional innovation, aiming to bridge present and future in the heart of democratic decision-making.

Institutional Design and Powers

Initially set up as an ad hoc body to scrutinize the government's new *Report on the Future* (more on this below), the Committee proved its worth in raising awareness of future challenges and was made a permanent standing committee in 2000. To this day, Finland's Eduskunta remains the only parliament in the world with a dedicated, permanent futures committee, reflecting a commitment to anticipatory governance that transcends electoral cycles.

Unlike sectoral committees, which normally process bills or oversee budgets, the Committee focuses exclusively on bringing a long-term perspective to parliamentary decision-making (Groombridge, 2006, p. 274). By convention, each government submits a Government Report on the Future once per electoral term, outlining long-term developments and challenges for Finland. Comprising 17 Members of Parliament from across all parties, the CF serves as Parliament's response mechanism to this report: it reviews the report and issues its own report with recommendations and resolutions that Parliament may adopt. Notably, these parliamentary resolutions are binding on the government throughout its term, meaning the government is obliged to "follow up on them" and report progress (Maria Höyssä, as cited in Rathenau Instituut, 2022). This gives the CF a powerful, if indirect, leverage over long-term policy continuity.

Beyond the futures report process, the CF's formal duties are codified in Parliament's standing orders. These include: (1) deliberating on broad future trends and issuing statements on long-term issues to other committees; (2) conducting technology assessments of emerging

innovations; and (3) acting as a forum for strategic foresight and value discussions that cut across sectoral policy areas (Eduskunta, 1998). The committee thus functions as a parliamentary "think tank" on the future. It has an allocated budget to commission research and even a permanent futurist advisor seconded from the Finland Futures Research Centre, ensuring access to the latest scientific insights. Importantly, the CF works closely with the Prime Minister's Office as its counterpart in government, reflecting the broad, interdepartmental scope of futures issues.

The composition and mode of work of the CF are designed to encourage cross-party collaboration. Harakka noted that inside the CF, "we leave our party lines at the door and think together about Finland's long-term trajectory" (Harakka, 2025). Over time, this relatively non-adversarial setting has fostered an internal culture distinct from other committees. The CF's institutional design thus equips it with consultative power (through authoritative reports and resolutions) rather than legislative power – a conscious choice to enable forward-looking deliberation that is not tied to the government-opposition dynamic. Its influence relies on persuasion, expertise and the backing of Parliament's formal decisions, rather than on the power to veto or enact laws directly. As the next sections will show, this design presents both advantages and dilemmas in practice.

Operational Tools and Methodologies

In practice, the Committee for the Future employs a variety of tools and working methods to inject long-term thinking into policymaking. A cornerstone of its operation is conducting extensive expert consultations and hearings. The CF regularly invites scientists, futurists, industry leaders and other stakeholders to closed meetings. Through these (often open) expert hearings and roundtables, committee members are exposed to diverse perspectives on emerging issues – from climate scenarios to AI ethics – that inform their deliberations. The committee also actively commissions studies: it can use its budget to hire researchers or form working groups on specific future challenges. For example, in 2021–22, the CF initiated a comprehensive study on the future of artificial intelligence, inviting 15 experts to each contribute papers on AI's impacts across sectors (from healthcare to deepfakes), which were compiled into a parliamentary report (Höyssä, 2022). Such self-initiated projects allow the committee to delve into topics it deems crucial for Finland's long-term development, even if they are not yet on the government's immediate agenda.

A defining operational role of the CF is managing the “futures dialogue” with the Government. When the Government releases its Futures Report (for instance, on the transformation of work in 2017–2018), the CF embarks on a wide consultative process: it typically solicits input from other sectoral committees of Parliament on the report’s themes, ensures broad debate, and then formulates Parliament’s collective response (Eduskunta, 2018). The committee’s response report often includes both recommendations and formal resolutions. Recommendations may outline policy directions or further studies needed, while resolutions (once approved by the full Parliament) carry binding force as noted. This mechanism is a key methodology by the CF to lock in long-term policy commitments beyond the usual electoral time horizon (Harakka, 2025).

In recent years, it has pushed for more systematic foresight in government: for example, it successfully recommended that future government reports draw upon the foresight exercises of all ministries to build an integrated long-term vision, rather than a narrow view from the Prime Minister’s Office alone (Höyssä, 2022).

Overall, the CF operates at the intersection of knowledge and politics: it introduces new knowledge into Parliament (through research and experts) and translates it into political inputs (recommendations, statements, resolutions). It also serves as a bridge to other parliamentary committees. Frequently, committees on Education, Environment, or Economic Affairs will request the CF’s statement on bills or EU proposals that have long-term implications (e.g., AI regulation, climate strategies). By responding to such requests, the CF injects future perspectives into legislation indirectly: "We proactively supply our colleagues with insight on emerging challenges – effectively future-proofing the policy debate wherever we can” (Harakka, 2025). Through these tools and methods, the Committee for the Future has become an institutional catalyst for long-term, future-conscious policymaking within the Finnish Parliament.

Political Pressures and Adaptive Capacity

Despite its innovative role, the Committee for the Future operates under various political pressures and has had to adapt continually to maintain its relevance. One fundamental pressure is the need to justify its existence and utility to the rest of Parliament. In its early years, skeptics questioned whether the CF had any real influence or if it was merely a talking shop for visionaries (Arter, 2000, p.158). Over time, however, the CF navigated this by

demonstrating value – for instance, by contributing ideas that entered government programs. Nowadays, Harakka noted, “its existence is not questioned any longer". Formally, the CF sits somewhat “detached from [the] ordinary work of the Eduskunta”, since it does not handle core legislative business (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.18). This lower hierarchy status can translate into limited attention from MPs preoccupied with immediate legislative battles. As MP Harakka observes, “we must continually prove our relevance to colleagues focused on day-to-day issues” (Harakka, 2025). This pressure incentivizes the committee to choose topics and produce outputs that resonate with current political priorities, without losing its long-term orientation.

A key strategic challenge is balancing political salience with non-partisanship. The CF faces a built-in tension: if it tackles highly salient and divisive issues (e.g., immigration or contentious reforms), it risks MPs reverting to partisan lines, undermining the committee’s deliberative, cross-party ethos. On the other hand, if it sticks only to “safe” or abstract future topics, it could become dispensable. This trade-off has required adaptive capacity. In practice, the CF has at times deliberately focused on emerging but not-yet-polarized issues (such as nanotechnology, futures of work, or AI governance) where a broad consensus can be forged ahead of the curve. However, when pressing controversies arise (climate policy, for example), the CF has shown flexibility to engage them in a forward-looking frame, attempting to elevate the discussion above immediate partisan politics. Political support from top leadership is crucial: it helped that several Prime Ministers (e.g., Jyrki Katainen, Juha Sipilä) were formerly committee members in the CF (Harakka, 2025). Such alumni in high office provided the CF a measure of protection and legitimacy, even as governments changed.

The CF’s adaptive capacity is also evident in how it has expanded its scope when opportunities arose. In 2017, the committee’s remit was formally widened to include being the parliamentary monitor for Agenda 2030 (the Sustainable Development Goals), meaning it now scrutinizes the government’s sustainable development report as well (Parliament of Finland, 2018). This adaptation came as a response to growing global emphasis on long-term sustainable development – a natural fit with intergenerational equity. The CF integrated this new task, seeing it as a way to anchor sustainability more firmly in parliamentary oversight. Another adaptation has been increasing its coordination with other committees. In the late 2010s, the CF began proactively giving more statements on bills and budgets, aiming to inject

futures thinking into regular lawmaking. While this has slightly increased its influence on legislation, it also stirred concern about "jeopardizing its unique role" if it became too absorbed in day-to-day legislative grind (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.19). So far, the committee appears to be managing this balance by selectively intervening on issues where it truly adds value (for example, offering foresight on the long-term fiscal impacts of demographic change in budget debates), while avoiding duplicating the work of sectoral committees.

Political winds can shift, and the CF has shown resilience in weathering them. At times when immediate crises dominate (economic downturns, the COVID-19 pandemic), there is a risk that futures-oriented work gets sidelined. A CF member noted that long-term parliamentary thinking was "in danger of being undermined somewhat because so much attention [was] on combating the pandemic" (Höyssä, 2022). In response, the CF adapted by reframing future discussions around post-crisis recovery and resilience, ensuring its agenda remained relevant to pressing concerns while still looking beyond the crisis. The fact that the CF continues into its third decade, across multiple governments of varying ideologies, suggests a significant adaptive capacity. It has embedded itself in Finland's political system by continuously negotiating its role, neither overstepping into partisan fights nor retreating into irrelevance. As Harakka (2025) reflected, "the Committee's success has depended on staying useful yet true to our core mission".

Outcomes and Perceived Impact

Assessing the Committee for the Future's impact requires looking at both tangible outcomes and more diffuse, long-term influences. By design, the CF does not pass laws or make binding decisions on its own, so its direct legislative impact is limited. Indeed, members acknowledge that the CF's outputs – reports, statements, resolutions – "do not produce any binding decisions or laws" by themselves (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.23). Early evaluations in the 1990s found few believed the CF had much influence on day-to-day parliamentary decisions (Arter, 2000). However, focusing only on direct impact would miss the broader contributions this institution has made. In practice, the CF's influence has been largely indirect and long-term. Many of its effects manifest through idea diffusion, learning, and agenda-setting.

One clear outcome has been the integration of foresight into governance processes. The regular cycle of Government Future Reports and the CF's responses has, over nearly three decades, normalized the expectation that each government must articulate and confront long-range challenges beyond its 4-year term. This in itself is a cultural shift in governance. Moreover, specific CF recommendations have foreshadowed policy changes. Interviewees in a recent study could point to several CF report themes that later appeared in official government programmes, such as proposals on social welfare reform, the digitalization of education, and demographic preparedness (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.22). For example, the CF's work on aging populations in the 2000s arguably laid the groundwork for subsequent pension reforms, and its early exploration of the "sharing economy" and platform work informed aspects of Finland's social security debate in the 2020s (Harakka, 2025). Additionally, the CF's resolutions have concrete follow-ups: when Parliament decides that the government should take certain long-term actions, ministries do respond (at least procedurally) by reporting back on those items. A recent resolution (2023) on integrating futures literacy in schools, for instance, prompted the Ministry of Education to set up a task force on futures education (Harakka, 2025).

Perhaps the most significant impact is on the mindset and capacity of policymakers. Members often describe their stint on the Committee as a "learning process" that changed how they approach policy (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.21). Former CF members who advanced to key positions bring with them a longer-term outlook. It is telling that four out of six Finnish Prime Ministers appointed since 2000 had served on the Committee for the Future earlier in their careers. Jyrki Katainen, who chaired the CF before becoming PM, explicitly credited the committee with shaping his perspective and "significantly affecting [his] political priorities". This cultivation of future-oriented leadership is an intangible outcome, but one that may pay dividends in policy continuity and willingness to invest in measures benefiting the future. Even for MPs who don't reach such heights, the CF equips them with knowledge and networks that they carry into other parliamentary committees and party discussions. In this way, the CF diffuses ideas horizontally within Parliament – an MP enlightened about climate risks in the CF might champion stronger climate policy in the Agriculture Committee, for example. One MP quipped that the CF is like a "greenhouse for ideas" – they cultivate seedlings that are later transplanted into mainstream politics (Harakka, 2025).

It was observed that CF reports and futures dialogues enjoy a "larger readership in the ministries than in the Eduskunta", which in some ways is more crucial since ministries draft laws (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.22).

Critics, however, occasionally caution that the CF's influence is heavily dependent on the broader political environment – for instance, a government that is unreceptive to long-term ideas can simply choose to ignore the committee's advice beyond the required formalities. Indeed, as scholars note, the CF "cannot really curb the root cause of political myopia – sectional interest representation under short horizons" by itself (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020, p.24). Its impact will always need complementary forces (e.g., public demand for future-oriented policies, or visionary leaders in government). Nonetheless, the Finnish Committee for the Future is widely regarded as having had a meaningful positive impact on integrating intergenerational concerns into governance, making future generations a constituency, at least informally, within parliamentary deliberations. The next section distills lessons from this experience for institutional design elsewhere.

Transferable Lessons and Design Implications

Finland's experience with the Committee for the Future offers several transferable lessons for designing institutions to safeguard intergenerational equity in governance. First, it underscores the importance of formalizing a futures mandate in governance structures. By establishing an (informal but convention-driven) parliamentary procedure that the government must produce a futures report each term and that a committee will scrutinize it, Finland created a recurring democratic ritual of long-term thinking. This can nudge even short-sighted governments to engage with long-range issues (Caney, 2016, as discussed in Koskimaa & Raunio, 2020). Countries looking to emulate this should consider legal provisions for futures reporting and parliamentary follow-up, rather than ad-hoc or one-off exercises. The Finnish case shows that institutionalization leads to continuity: what began as an experimental committee gained legitimacy through repeated practice and is now a stable part of Finnish decision-making. Any design aimed at representing future generations needs staying power beyond the enthusiasm of a single administration; embedding it in the legislature's standing arrangements is one way to achieve that.

Second, the CF illustrates the value of a cross-partisan, deliberative forum dedicated to the long term. One reason the Committee has survived changes of government is that it is not

owned by any single party or faction – all parties participate and have a stake in its work. This inclusive design fosters a sense of collective ownership of future-oriented policymaking. The lesson is that intergenerational institutions should strive for broad political buy-in and resist becoming tools of either the government or the opposition exclusively. In Finland, MPs have treated the CF as something of a neutral space for exploration, which has been crucial. “Politicians are often inclined to look no further than the next election,” one committee member noted, so it is vital to create structures that “pay sufficient attention to long-term developments” irrespective of partisan shifts (Höyssä, 2022). As Harakka (2025) said: "The Committee’s very existence obliges each government to engage in futures thinking on a regular schedule – and that's a structural advantage over purely executive-led foresight bodies."

Third, the operational practices of the CF offer a playbook for other countries on how to make a futures body effective. As evidenced in earlier cases, the prevailing mechanism within IFGs is the mobilisation of soft power through persuasion. Investing in expertise and research capacity is essential. Finland’s CF had support staff and could draw on external research networks, which greatly enhanced the quality of its outputs. Any similar institution should be well-resourced with access to futures studies, modeling, and multidisciplinary advice. Moreover, the CF’s practice of engaging stakeholders (academia, civil society, ...) in its work has increased its credibility and the richness of its perspectives. This suggests that futures committees or commissions should serve as interfaces between science, society, and policy, convening conversations that might not happen in regular political forums. Another methodological lesson is the use of formal resolutions and follow-up mechanisms. The CF’s ability to bind the government to report on the implementation of its long-term recommendations is a clever accountability tool. Other parliaments could emulate this by empowering a futures committee to issue reports that require government response – it creates a gentle but persistent pressure on the executive to address long-term issues.

Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures

Introduction and Relevance

"As a small country, Singapore has always felt a keen sense of vulnerability, which is why we've consistently looked to the future to ensure our relevance in the world." (Maniam, 2025). Singapore's government has long viewed strategic planning as essential for its survival and success. As former Head of Civil Service Peter Ong remarked, "Singapore has never enjoyed the luxury of not planning for the future" (Ong, as cited in CSF, 2017, p. 7). Early on, Singapore adopted scenario planning in the Ministry of Defence in the 1980s and produced its first set of national scenarios in 1997 (Ho, as cited in CSF, 2023, p. 1). These foresight efforts were born from an acute sense of vulnerability as a small city-state and the recognition that long-term thinking is vital in an uncertain world (Ong, as cited in CSF, 2017, p. 7). Over time, the foresight practice evolved beyond defense, becoming a whole-of-government endeavor by the mid-1990s (Ho, as cited in CSF 2023, p. 1).

In 2009, the Singapore government established the Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) to further institutionalize foresight in policymaking. Housed initially in the Public Service Division of the Prime Minister's Office, CSF's mission has been to "position the Singapore government to navigate emerging strategic challenges and harness opportunities in an evolving world" (CSF, 2021, p. 4). The Centre was conceived as a futures think tank to conduct longer-term, open-ended research into emerging issues and "blind spots," relatively insulated from day-to-day policymaking pressures (CSF, 2017, p. 8). Its role – and that of the broader foresight ecosystem around it – is highly relevant to furthering intergenerational equity, i.e., ensuring today's decisions account for the future and future generations. By cultivating anticipatory governance, Singapore aims to avoid short-termism and build resilience against future shocks (Habegger, 2009, p. 54). Aaron Maniam – the CSF's first Head – emphasized that effective foresight provides decision-makers with "more ideas to work with" and helps uncover present assumptions, since "futures isn't about prediction, but [about] gaining a better understanding of our current mental models and assumptions" (Maniam, 2025). This approach reflects Singapore's pragmatic view that while the future cannot be predicted, exploring a range of possibilities and questioning current mindsets can better prepare the nation for whatever lies ahead (Habegger, 2009, p. 50; Maniam, 2025). The

CSF and related foresight efforts thus play a crucial role in helping Singapore "continually remake" itself by anticipating change (Wong, as cited in CSF, 2024, p. 6).

Institutional Design and Powers

The Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) was purpose-built to embed long-term thinking within government, yet deliberately structured to retain a degree of independence. Initially set up in 2009 under the Public Service Division (within the Prime Minister's Office), the CSF was meant to develop government-wide futures capabilities (CSF, 2017, p. 7). Its mandate has remained unchanged: "As a futures think tank, [CSF] focuses on open-ended, longer-term futures research…and experiments with new foresight methodologies" (CSF, 2017, p. 7). Crucially, the CSF was shielded from direct involvement in ministries' immediate policy agendas. This institutional design ensures the team can challenge conventional wisdom and "nudge" policy units to think beyond their usual assumptions (CSF, 2017, p. 7). As Maniam explained, foresight work often questions prevailing views; thus, the CSF needed freedom to raise uncomfortable questions without being beholden to any single ministry's priorities. The trade-off is that the unit's recommendations are advisory rather than directive: The CSF has no formal regulatory powers over ministries. Its influence derives from the quality of its insights and the convening authority conferred by its placement at the center of government. Indeed, the CSF has been described as an entity that must, by design and out of necessity, be "tolerated but not embraced" by the rest of the government (CSF, 2017, p. 7) – a recognition that a certain arm's-length relationship is necessary to maintain independent long-term perspectives, even if it sometimes sits uneasily with short-term bureaucratic priorities.

Importantly, the CSF's influence is derived not from formal authority but from its soft power within the bureaucracy. It relies on high-level patronage (the Head of Civil Service chairs its advisory board, and the Prime Minister has publicly endorsed its work) and on demonstrating value through its studies and engagements. Singapore's political context – long-ruling incumbents and a technocratic civil service – provides a stable environment for such a foresight unit to take root without being swept away by electoral turnover. Still, the CSF must continuously justify its existence by proving that thinking about the future translates into better outcomes today. As discussed below, it does so through various tools, tangible products, and capacity-building efforts that embed foresight into the fabric of governance.

Operational Tools and Methodologies

Singapore's foresight ecosystem employs a suite of tools and methodologies that have expanded over time, evolving from a focus on scenario planning to a diverse toolkit today (CSF, 2017, p. 3). The foundational method has been scenario planning, introduced in the late 1980s to help policymakers grapple with uncertainty by constructing and analyzing plausible future worlds (CSF, 2017, p. 9). Scenario planning remains a core practice; the government periodically undertakes National Scenario exercises (e.g., looking ahead to 2035) that engage agencies in stress-testing assumptions against a set of divergent future scenarios (CSF, 2024, p. 11). These scenario exercises ensure that medium-term plans (such as five-year strategic plans or major policy roadmaps) are informed by a long-term context and that strategies are robust under a range of future conditions (CSF, 2024, p. 11).

Additionally, participatory foresight approaches have grown in prominence. In the public sector, there is "growing recognition that the practice of foresight can be more inclusive and that citizens can play a bigger role in re-imagining the future." (CSF, 2017, p. 54). Singapore has followed this trend by involving citizens and stakeholders in envisioning the future. Major initiatives like Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) engaged over 46,000 citizens in dialogues about the country's future priorities (CSF, 2017, p. 4). These participatory tools serve a dual purpose: generating diverse insights that professional foresight practitioners might miss, and lending democratic legitimacy to foresight outputs. Aaron Maniam has been a strong proponent of participatory methods, having been involved in OSC and several subsequent projects. He argues that such approaches yield "more ideas to work with" and are a "powerful way to alleviate biases" in futures thinking by incorporating varied perspectives (Maniam, 2025; see also CSF, 2017, p. 55). By opening up foresight to non-government voices, Singapore's ecosystem leverages collective intelligence while also educating the public about future challenges.

Political Pressures and Adaptive Capacity

Operating at the intersection of long-range strategy and day-to-day governance, the CSF and Singapore's foresight ecosystem face a distinct set of political pressures. One perennial challenge is overcoming short-termism in a political environment that, while not as election-driven as many democracies, still must deliver immediate results. Even in Singapore's relatively stable one-party-dominant system, policymakers can be skeptical of dedicating

resources to exploratory futures research that does not produce instant policy fixes. As Peter Ho observes, many officials "continue to equate foresight with prediction," expecting that the only value of futures work is if it forecasts accurately. In his eyes, a "fallacy" that can lead to disillusionment and budget cuts if "predictions" do not come true (Ho, as cited in CSF, 2023, p. 1). This pressure means CSF must constantly communicate the true purpose of foresight (learning and stress-testing, not fortune-telling) and demonstrate its relevance to current policy concerns.

Another source of pressure can be shifting political leadership and priorities. In Singapore, changes at the top (e.g., a new Prime Minister in 2023) could theoretically alter support for foresight endeavors. However, to date, Singapore's top leaders have remained supportive; for example, current Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, in a foreword for CSF's anniversary publication, affirmed the importance of being "forward-looking" and congratulated CSF on its contributions (Wong, as cited in CSF, 2024, p.6). That said, CSF must continually earn and maintain the trust of senior officials. One strategy has been to show tangible policy impact (discussed in the next section) to justify its recommendations. Another has been fostering a network of foresight champions within ministries. Over the years, many CSF alumni or trainees have rotated into other agencies, creating informal champions of futures thinking across the bureaucracy. This internal network helps inoculate against potential political pressure by normalizing foresight and building bottom-up demand for it. In fact, more than a dozen agencies now have active futures units or officers, a growth that adds resilience to the overall ecosystem (CSF, 2017, p.12). If one part of the system faces skepticism, the community of practitioners can support each other and demonstrate cross-agency value.

Or as Aaron Maniam (2025) put it: "Resistance is natural in any system. Some people found foresight work difficult and rationalized it as unimportant, citing urgent priorities, limited manpower, or lack of bandwidth. What we call the 'tyranny of today' often takes over. But to be fair, the resistance in Singapore was low compared to elsewhere, partly because we built on the strong foundation of past scenario-planning exercises. It's always key to involve people from all over the government and create a sense of shared ownership."

Outcomes and Perceived Impact

Over 15 years, Singapore's foresight ecosystem centered on the CSF has produced a range of

outcomes and impacts, both concrete and intangible. One measurable outcome is the series of strategic foresight products and initiatives that have directly informed policy. For example, each cycle of the National Scenarios exercise (e.g., Scenarios 2030 and 2035) yielded scenario reports and briefing sessions for Cabinet and ministries, which in turn shaped the government's medium-term strategy documents (Maniam, 2025). As another example, the foresight study "Singapore 2077" (a far-future visioning exercise) spurred discussions on existential long-term matters like climate adaptation and geopolitical shifts, which seeded inter-agency task forces on those topics (CSF, 2021, p. 33). In line with Habegger's observation, these tangible outputs (reports, workshops, etc.) help legitimize foresight by providing "evidence of the work that was done" and capturing insights for future reference (Habegger, 2010, p. 56). They also make it easier to justify resources by showing policymakers and the public "concrete informational products" (Habegger, 2010, p. 52).

Beyond specific products, policy processes in Singapore have been visibly influenced by foresight. Regular horizon scanning through CSF meant that Singapore had early warning of global trends like aging demographics, the rise of Asia, and supply chain vulnerabilities. This translated into timely policy responses – for instance, Singapore started adjusting its immigration and workforce policies in the 2000s partly because futures units highlighted the implications of an aging population well before it became a crisis (Maniam, 2025).

The perceived impact of CSF and foresight on governance has been positive, according to both internal assessments and external observers. Internally, top leaders have publicly acknowledged the contribution of foresight to Singapore's strategic agility. In 2023, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong lauded CSF for developing insights on emerging trends and "translat[ing] these insights into actions to better prepare Singapore and Singaporeans for the future" (Wong as cited in CSF, 2024, p.6). He noted that CSF's work with ministries has strengthened agencies' own forward planning processes (Wong, 2024, p. 6). The Head of Civil Service, Leo Yip, similarly credited decades of foresight practice with inculcating a "culture of re-examining and re-considering the context we operate in," thereby improving policy robustness (Yip as cited in CSF, 2024, p.7).

Transferable Lessons and Design Implications

Singapore's experience with the Centre for Strategic Futures and its broader foresight

ecosystem offers several transferable lessons for institutionalizing intergenerational foresight in governance. The first lesson is the importance of high-level support combined with cross-cutting authority. Singapore showed that locating a foresight unit at the center of government (in the PM's Office) and securing explicit support from top civil service and political leadership gives foresight activities the necessary clout and access to be effective. Foresight recommendations are more likely to be heeded when the unit has the Prime Minister's backing and is tied into central strategy processes, rather than siloed in a line ministry. At the same time, foresight must be a whole-of-government enterprise rather than the domain of a single department. Habegger (2010) concludes that to pursue a truly holistic perspective, it is "imperative to create an interoperable working environment under the responsibility of more than one department," balancing centralized methodological support with decentralized topical expertise (p. 57). Singapore achieved this by networking the CSF with autonomous foresight efforts in various ministries.

This requires smart organizational design. According to Maniam (2025), it was of paramount importance for the CSF to set up the Strategic Futures Network, where "every ministry had to mandate one of their Deputy Permanent Secretaries" to meet regularly and discuss long-term issues. Maniam noted that the success of the model stemmed from the appointment of deputy secretaries, as these individuals possessed both the institutional authority to unlock resources and the operational capacity to participate actively. Since many deputy officials needed support for those meetings, this structure led to many ministries setting up their own futures units, or incorporating the futures function into existing teams like policy or strategy units (Maniam, 2025).

A second lesson is the value of multi-stakeholder engagement for enriching foresight and enhancing its legitimacy. Singapore's foresight practice gradually expanded to involve not just civil servants but also academics, businesses, and citizens (through consultations and collaborative projects). Habegger (2010) finds that "an inclusive cross-governmental process may not be sufficient anymore" – foresight should extend to the private sector and academia to draw on diverse knowledge (p. 57). Citizen engagements like Our Singapore Conversation highlight that even a top-down government saw merit in soliciting public input for future scenarios, especially on social issues. For other jurisdictions, a key takeaway is that foresight units should cultivate external networks – tapping experts, futurists, and the public – to

broaden the horizon scanning net and to foster societal support for long-range policy directions.

Third, Singapore's case highlights that foresight units must find the right balance between independence and integration. The CSF's experience of being "tolerated but not embraced" (CSF, 2017, p.7) proved useful in preserving its independent voice to challenge assumptions. Had it been fully "embraced" (i.e., subsumed into mainstream operations), it might have lost the contrarian edge needed to surface uncomfortable truths. However, too much isolation can render a foresight unit ineffective. Singapore addressed this by integrating CSF with the Strategy Group, thereby tying it into decision processes while still expecting it to provoke and expand thinking. The lesson for design is to institutionalize foresight with a clear mandate to challenge: give it proximity to power but protect its space to be imaginative and critical. This might involve formal charters that encourage red-teaming and "what-if" questioning, or reporting arrangements where foresight findings are reviewed at the highest levels (e.g., by a civil service head or strategy committee) to ensure they are heard even if they are inconvenient.

Singapore's foresight ecosystem has continually reinvented itself (CSF, 2024, p. 14), illustrating that staying static is not an option in a changing world. Their mandate is to think beyond electoral cycles and short-term public opinion, focusing on the long-range national interest. The institutional trade-off ultimately revolves around securing the future in a manner that is responsive to the present. Singapore's case shows that with the right institutional design, it is possible to incorporate future-oriented planning into government in a way that can enhance the democratic state's capacity to deliver on citizens' long-term welfare.

Conclusion

This paper has explored different theoretical approaches to conceptualizing intergenerational equity and their implications for institutional design. By reviewing key normative frameworks, it arrived at a capabilities-based approach as particularly conducive to policymaking due to its flexibility, evaluative depth, and resonance with sustainability and well-being discourses.

The paper then asked how Institutions for Future Generations attempt to institutionalise long-term governance within democratic systems. Through analyses of Wales' Future Generations Commissioner, Malta's Guardian of Future Generations, Finland's Committee for the Future, and Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures, it examined how different democratic contexts have approached the structural bias toward short-termism, and what institutional design features may help mitigate it.

The analysis suggests that while IFGs offer a promising institutional innovation, they are not a silver bullet. Their mandate to articulate the interests of future generations —or more broadly, anticipate future risks — confronts both institutional and practical challenges. Democracies, by design, prioritise electoral accountability and responsiveness to present voters; IFGs must therefore operate within systems that structurally favour the short-term. Despite their noble objectives, IFGs often struggle to gain political traction, secure sufficient resources, or exert lasting influence.
Since each case study has already outlined its specific lessons, this conclusion focuses instead on synthesizing shared insights across all four cases, offering reflections that may inform policymakers and civil society actors seeking to promote or establish IFGs elsewhere.

Across the four case studies, several shared design principles emerge. Most notably, all cases demonstrate that participatory mechanisms are vital, not only for enriching the substance of long-term thinking but for cultivating legitimacy. In contexts where institutional mandates are vulnerable to political shifts or underfunding, public-facing engagement can serve as a form of democratic insurance, making it politically more costly to dismantle or ignore IFGs. This is evident in Wales, where broad-based consultations and civic engagement strategies helped transform a legal mandate into a cultural commitment, in Malta, where recent efforts to reconnect with youth, media, and civil society show promising results, in Finland where open hearings with diverse stakeholders inform the Committee's reports and in Singapore where large-scale public dialogues like Our Singapore Conversation integrated citizen perspectives into futures thinking. Taken together, the case studies affirm that embedding participatory practices enhances institutional resilience, transforming IFGs from technocratic bodies into democratically anchored actors.

Another key insight across all four case studies is that IFGs exert influence not through binding authority, but through soft power—persuasion, credibility, and the strategic use of

their expertise. In Finland, the Committee for the Future's research base and stakeholder networks have helped position it as a respected voice in parliamentary deliberations. Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures has gained influence by producing high-quality scenarios and cultivating futures literacy across the bureaucracy. Wales' Commissioner has similarly used evidence, public storytelling, and well-crafted recommendations to shape policy discourse. Even Malta's more constrained Guardian has begun rebuilding credibility by investing in research and outreach. In all cases, IFGs' ability to inform and shift political priorities depends on their capacity to produce timely, relevant, and credible knowledge. Several IFGs examined in this paper have explicitly criticized insufficient resourcing as a barrier to fulfilling their mandate. This makes adequate resourcing—both human and financial—a design imperative. Without staff, research partnerships, and communication tools, the power to persuade remains aspirational. The lesson is clear: soft power can be effective, but only if it is institutionally supported.

Finally, the cases reveal that institutional success hinges on adaptive leadership of the "champion" (e.g., the Commissioner) and the capacity for the IFGs to evolve over time. Wales exemplifies how a dynamic, politically astute Commissioner can expand the office's visibility and impact, translating a broad legal mandate into public and policy relevance. By contrast, Malta's early stagnation points to the dangers of static design and weak leadership selection processes. Together, the cases highlight that IFGs depend both on the appointment of politically skilled, credible champions and on institutional designs that enable continuous learning and adaptation to long-term governance challenges.

This paper has shown that while IFGs alone cannot overcome the structural short-termism of contemporary politics, they can serve as important institutional correctives—sites where the future is made visible, thinkable, and politically contestable.

Ultimately, the emergence of IFGs reflects a deeper democratic dilemma: how to represent those who cannot represent themselves. While no single institution can resolve the intergenerational tensions inherent in modern democracies, IFGs constitute an important step in embedding future-oriented thinking into political systems shaped by present interests. Their evolution remains an open experiment—one that requires sustained scholarly attention, adaptive learning, and democratic creativity.

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