

Abstract

Finland's Whole-of-Society Approach to Horizon Scanning **Sirkka Heinonen, Professor of Futures Research, Finland Research Centre, Finland**

The concept of risks merits some closer inspection within the futures thinking paradigm. Can we create risk intelligence (RI) via developing a soft multidimensional theory of risks? The current foreseeable major risks emerge from social, environmental and energy-related issues, and not from technology as such. Finland can be characterized as an inherently futures-oriented nation. A systematic launching of efforts to foresee societal development, emerging risks and opportunities took place in late 1970s.

The strong futures approach may partly be explained by the will to survive and the national quality of perseverance "sisu". For historical reasons, Finland has been obliged to develop survival intelligence for overcoming obstacles. The Finnish Society for Futures Studies (FSFR), founded in 1980, aims to influence the long-term development of society by advancing futures research, and by fostering contacts among futurists in public and private sectors as well as in NGOs. The FSFR recently identified risks that are latent in social structures, processes, as well as in global issues by using the method of weak signals.

The Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC) was founded in 1992, as an academic unit for futures research and education. The Government started in early 1990s to produce futures reports to the Parliament. Each elected Government submits a futures report to the Parliament on Finland's long-term development options. The parliamentary Committee for the Future, established in 1993, then prepares responses to the policies outlined in those reports. In 2006 the Finnish Innovation Fund (Sitra), an independent public fund under the supervision of the Finnish Parliament, launched another national foresight network.

A recent national foresight process Finnsight2015 was carried out by Tekes (The Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation) and the Academy of Finland, claiming that global risk management will assume ever greater importance in the future. In particular, better control and anticipation is needed in order to dampen risks related to the economy, environment, energy, infrastructure and health. Steps are needed to strengthen the application of global knowledge and cultural know-how in research and innovation activities.

The relevance of foresight processes to strategic planning should also be strengthened. In today's fast changing and "flattening" world, anticipating tomorrow gives strategic benefits to nations and a competitive edge to companies. The relevance of futures research is to highlight the vast variety of possible futures in our world of great uncertainties. In a systematic foresight process it is important to monitor – not only

foresight practitioners' – but also citizen's views of the future. This provides a basis for on-going futures dialogue between public authorities, academia, companies, civic associations and citizens. A case in point is the government's new futures report to the Parliament. Climate change is the challenge number one for our era, perhaps representing a greater danger to our future than terrorism. The newest futures report will accordingly focus on climate and energy, and on necessary measures. Four backcasting scenarios of Finland as a Low Carbon Society 2050 will be constructed in an open dialogue between the government, various organizations, and citizens.