



VALTIONEUVOSTON KANSLIA

# Strategic Policymaking – new working methods of the Finnish Government

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# Concerns behind the reform: the world has changed!

- Policy coherence and consistency is society's success factor
- Efficient vertical administration fulfilled its task in the world where problems were "simple" ,there was less knowledge and it was easier to access.
- In the present world problems are complex, knowledge is "everywhere" and media requires quick reactions from politics

Challenge of today is to master and live in "**the whole**", not the siloes

# Governance challenges in Finland- international cooperation and comparisons as a mirror

- **Being strategic**
  - Ability to prioritize: cannot do everything at the same time
  - Foresight capacity: what is behind the corner – longer perspective
- **Coordination and horizontal policymaking**
  - Complex and interconnected questions: wicked problems - solving one problem causes another problem elsewhere
  - Overcoming gaps: the Centre of Government and sectoral ministries; the state and the people; politicians and civil servants, the past, present and future....
- **Evidence-based policymaking**
  - Knowledge is the connecting key between civil servants and politicians
  - Civil servants have lost their monopoly in knowledge production

# OHRA 2013-2015 – from decisions to changes

- Project started as managerial > turned into reform of policymaking
- "Everything starts with the Government Programme" > from over 900 policy objectives to 3-5 prioritized policy goals
- Have one shared strategy, avoid separate "growth packs" etc.
- Clear objectives → processes to support them → the change takes place
- Strategic Gnt Programme = vision, strategic goals for the Gnt term AND ten years, key projects

*Government programme and activities strategic implementation plan*

**Common agenda:  
WHAT?**

**Common knowledge base: WHY?**

**Common implementation: HOW?**

- *Foresight activities*
- *Programme review*
- *Impact assessments*
- *Research, policy briefs, evaluation studies, etc.*

*Budget resourcing  
Performance management, etc.*

# Government negotiations – new way, new venue

- Chairpersons of the negotiating parties had a real lead position
- Two phases: *PM's process map* : 😊
  1. Chairs agreed on main policy objectives (priority areas)
  2. Shared work: definition of key projects in each priority area and their financial assets (1 billion euros)
- Less influence by civil servants and lobbies
- Budget cuts were decided on already in the Gnt negotiations at detailed level > less pressure in the first budget frame negotiations
- Number of Ministers and political advisors cut

# Vision: Finland 2025 - built up together

Skills and education

Employment and competitiveness

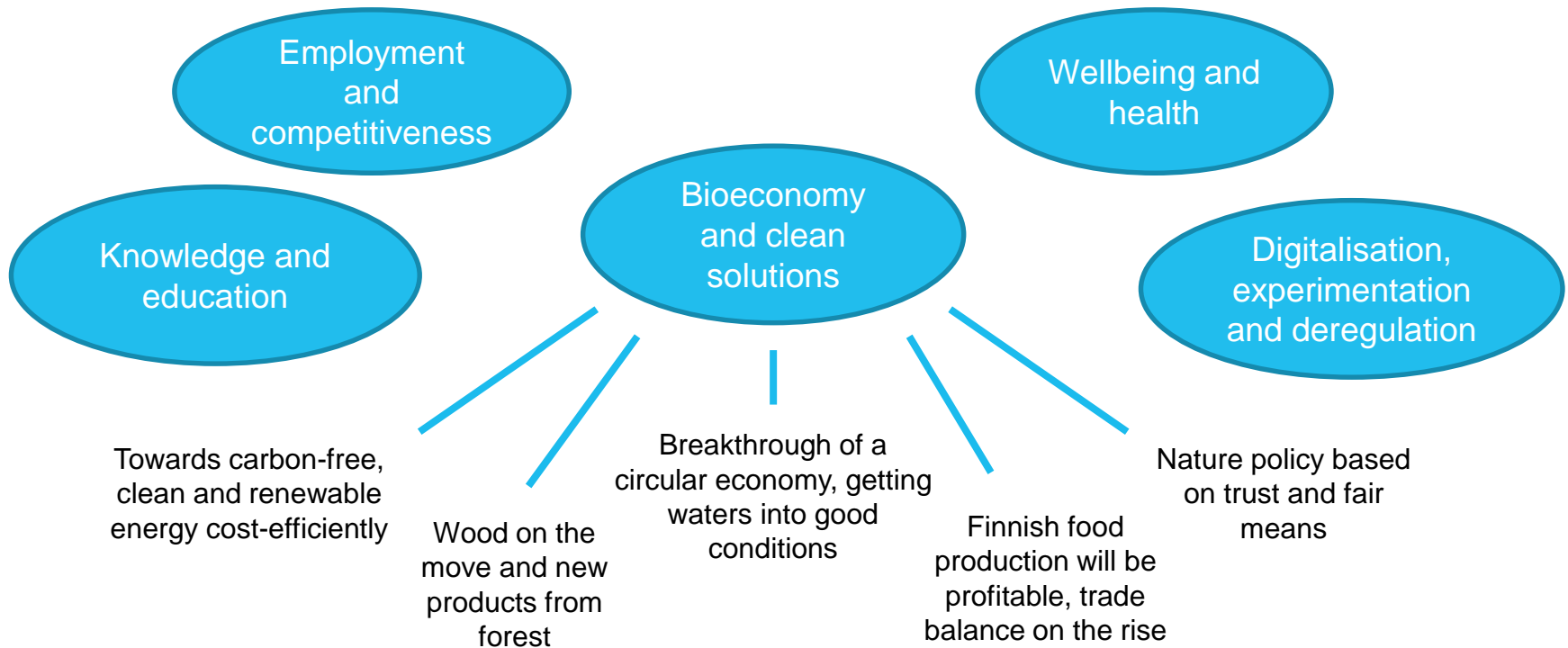
Wellbeing and health

REFORMS

Bioeconomy and clean solutions

Digitisation, experimentation, regulation

# Five key areas with 26 key projects and several big reforms



- Reform of social welfare and health care; cutting local government costs; regional administration reform; central administration reform



# The Government strategy process 2015-19

Spring  
2015

- Government programme 2015-19

Autumn  
2015

- Government Action Plan
- Government Fiscal Plan for the Gnt term

Annual  
check  
points

- Gnt retreat to evaluate strategy (early spring)
- Action Plan and Fiscal Plan (spring) reviewed

# The fora for the government



Fora to  
share and  
use  
foresight  
information!

## Political level

- Government Strategy sessions biweekly
- Ministerial working groups for each of the strategic priority area, one for reforms

## Civil servant level

- Meetings of the permanent secretaries
- Coordination groups (communities of interest)
- Ad hoc constellations

# Government Strategy Secretariat

- "Owner" of the Gnt strategy process, managing the process as a whole
- Support to Government Strategy work
- Follow-up and assessment of the GP
- Coordination of Key Projects and other horizontal policymaking
- Support to reforming the Government's working methods

# Close friends

- **Cutting the Strategy jungle**
  - More than 300 steering documents, of which over 100 at the level of Government > the first effort resulted in halving the number
  - Have a main strategy, avoid new separate "growth packs" etc.
  - Strengthen horizontality in main strategies
- **RIA**, Regulatory impact assessment system
- **Integrating foresight work** with the Gnt strategy process
- **Performance management linked to the Government Strategy**: Support implementation of the strategy (achieve the goals with the intended impacts, not just the projects)

# Change in the course of action as Gnt's priority policy

- “In Finland, ***personal obligations and society's responsibilities*** are in an ethically sustainable balance. We share a strong feeling of community. Help and care are given to everyone in our society of many generations.
- People have freedom and responsibility for their own and their families' lives. We trust each other. We respect each other. We find common solutions. We regulate less.”
- Digitalisation, deregulation and experimental culture
- Change in the paradigm?
- *From system driven heavily regulated society towards flexible people-centered way of serving, co-design and co-creation of services*

# Recent survey on the new Strategy model

- **The Government's new Strategic Policymaking model is still considered as a significant change and is received positively**
  - Somewhat more critical views than in 2015
  - The model is considered as worth developing further but the highest expectations on the reform were not fulfilled
- **Criticism against political ability to implement policies**
  - Bottlenecks are: busy schedules in law drafting, weak coordination, and deficiencies in impact assessment
  - BUT the "model has potential"
  - Being strategic and the flexibility in the policy process are seen as inspiring novelties
  - There is still lot of expectations on improved horizontality
- The coalition parties are more positive than the opposition parties on the model
  - The model is very much labelled by PM Sipilä and the present Government
  - Small parties are more critical than bigger parties

# Main concerns now

- How to keep the Gnt Strategy Process as a whole
  - Risk of separation of political (strategic) and budget processes and new policy processes being established to live their own life
  - Risk of Key projects becoming siloed
- How to extend the political interest to the implementation of policies and their results
  - "Prioritizing the priorities" – must win policies
  - The role and resources of the Government Strategy secretariat
  - Innovating new ways for the horizontal policy making and coordination

# Dreaming of the Future

- "The most important thing is to keep the most important things as the most important things."
- All the time in mind:
  - Big Picture
  - Interconnectedness of issues
  - Simplifying, visualizing
  - Coming back to things – follow up