1. Introduction

Strategic management deals with the most important issues in society, which makes it a highly relevant perspective when defining and implementing goals within a government. Previous research has left a legacy of war and competition, which has impeded the application of strategic thinking in the public sector context. First, the origin of strategy in warfare lies in orienting the troops to defeat the enemy [1]. Second, the legacy of competition is connected with the management of large American companies in their attempt to adapt to the changing circumstances in the post-World War II era [2]. Both of these legacies are inherently alien to the management of a government. Most often, there are neither external enemies to be defeated nor internal competitive markets for rivalry between public agencies. However, strategy is about purpose, direction and goals; these are as important in public sector organisations as in private ones. The question is which purpose, what direction and whose goals are addressed? The answer, as always, depends on observer’s view of strategy.

There is a growing body of literature on public sector strategies [3–10]. More often than not, they tend to concentrate on the lower levels of government, policy issues, agencies and the local government in particular. The nexus of political decision making in government formation has not been in the agenda of strategic management thought. In our article, we ask a simple question—“What is the role of the Finnish government programme as a strategy in its policy process, and how have its strategies been implemented so far?” We are interested in the development of the Finnish government programme from the strategy and the policy process perspectives. We use strategy metaphors consisting of a plan, a home and a game and contrast them to the basic political science concepts of policy and polity.

In Section 2, the analysis begins with the discussion of the strategic and the political framing of the government programme. In Section 3, the empirical analysis deals with the application of strategic management and political thought in the formation of the Finnish government programme. Section
4 draws together the different perspectives from strategic management and political science as applied to the changing nature of the government programme.

2. Strategy and policy as an approach to the study of the government programme

The strategy language has been used for two decades or so in Finnish public administration. However, the strategies have not been analysed from the perspective of either strategic management (forgetting the policy aspect) or policy (assuming that the strategy is only a trendy name for a policy). Empirically, the Finnish government and ministries have started to refer to their policies in terms of strategy concepts. For this reason, we analyse strategy as a metaphor and ask how strategy can be understood in language of politics. Metaphors are not only linguistic expressions that equate concepts with other and often more ambiguous concepts. Metaphors are powerful tools to map existing ideas in a novel fashion [11]. Metaphors have been used in previous strategy research to map the strategy process [12–13]. Here, the plan, home and game metaphors aim to gather the theoretical perspectives of the research tradition into a limited number of concepts. First, the metaphor of planning covers the most prominent aspect of strategic thought in trying to prepare for the future that is yet to come, often with projections and measurements [14]. Second, strategy as a home deals with the literature on the human side of the strategy, which appears, for instance, in strategic human resource management [15] or leadership ideas promoting the charismatic aspect of strategy [16]. Third, the game metaphor refers to managers’ talent and cunning in manoeuvring to fulfil the goals of their organisations. The game theory is a formal expression of such an idea [17].

Strategy has numerous interlinks with the term policy. Similar to strategy, policy has multiple meanings. It is a label of a field of activity, an expression of a desired state of affairs, a proposal, a government decision, a formal authorisation, a programme, an output, an outcome or a process (see, e.g., [18]). According to the Oxford dictionary [19], synonyms for government policy are “plan, strategy, proposed action, blueprint, approach, scheme, stratagem, program, schedule, code, system, guideline, intention, notion, theory, line, position, stance and attitude”. An online thesaurus [20] proposes “disorganisation” as an antonym, and Parsons [21] suggests “aimlessness”. If we adopt a positive way of defining policy concept, it is something that organises and provides an aim for action.

The interlinkages between the terminology of policy analysis and strategy research are evident in everyday discussions. Policies are formed similarly to strategies, using the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis and other techniques; policy documents are called strategies, and they are put into action. Thus, is there any difference between these two processes and practices?

Answering this question seems easy at first sight. It is evident that policy and strategy are two distinct concepts and have quite different meanings. However, when a government starts to call its political programme and implementation plan a strategy, it makes a person ask several fundamental questions. As always, fundamental questions have no fundamental answers. However, we can draw some dimensions to address the challenge of responding to the question. The difference between the policy and the strategy processes can be approached at least from three perspectives, namely, contextual, teleological and processual, explained as follows:

1) Contextual. The organisational and resource environment is fundamentally different (e.g., legally, ontologically or financially) in the public and the private sectors. This would mean that in the public sector, there are no strategies (in the same sense as in the private sector) but policies, called strategies. If we take this as a starting point, we end up with the discussion on the differences in public and private realms and management (see [22]).

2) Teleological. We can distinguish the strategy from the policy process based on the aimed outcome. Consequently, all future-oriented processes aiming for (regardless of the wording and the techniques) the public good are policies, and future-oriented processes aiming for profit are strategies. This would mean that the public sector might have strategies but only in publicly owned companies and other public agencies with a profit motive. (This can be connected to the discussions on public value [23] and values [24].)
3) Processual. We can distinguish the strategy from policy process by assuming that the process itself is somehow different (see [25] pp. 1–28). Here, we might have two different positions:

a. Rhetoric. We can assume that if the strategy language is used, we can find that strategies (i.e., what are called strategies) should be approached as such regardless of the sector.

b. Realistic. We can assume that if the future-oriented process is operated with techniques, tools and steps peculiar to the public (regulatory) process, it is a strategy.

The discussion on the differences between policy and strategy can also be connected to the discussion on the distinction between politics and administration. If we make a clear distinction between politics and administration, the strategy can be thought of as a tool, a process or a document provided by the administrative (managerial) public office holders and the policy guidelines for administrators (managers). As a founding father of American administrative science puts it:

Politics is thus the special province of the statesman, administration of the technical official. “Policy does nothing without the aid of administration”; but administration is not therefore politics. [...] This discrimination between administration and politics is now, happily, too obvious to need further discussion [26, 210-211].

However, if we take a more continental approach, which regards public administration as part of the public entity or the state, we are doomed to this discussion (see [27]). As Pierre expresses it ([28], cited in [29, 143]):

[O]n the other hand we see policy-makers using administrative reform to displace accountability from public policy; on the other hand we see the very same policy-makers trying to increase their control over bureaucracy. Whilst this appears to be two inconsistent developments, they may in fact reflect a general desire among elected politicians to increase their influence over bureaucracy while at the same time avoiding responsibility for the actions of the bureaucrats.

This leads us to another interesting discussion on the differences between policy and polity. Polity is loosely defined in political science. For instance, according to the definition in Andrew Heywood’s prominent textbook Politics [30], “polity is a system of social organisation centred on the machinery of government” (p. 5), while the policy concept is narrowly defined as an “output of politics” (p. 400). However, the connection between policy and polity is crucial for the discussion on public strategy because strategy incorporates aspects of both these concepts. Especially when the government programme is taken as an example, which is in the core of polity, it is as political as a document can be and still provides a direction for the administration, is partly prepared by the administration, is used to limit the administration’s power and is called strategic.

A conceptual distinction between policy and polity provides a good framework for analysing the changes in government programme formulation and the implementation process, that is, the duality of political (providing the aim) and administrative (organising) steering in the strategy process. According to this thought, policy refers to the regulating or goal-setting aspects of politics. It is formed by politicking, that is, acting or behaving politically. Polity refers to a political space or arena that is needed for policymaking [31].

Polity is actively shaped and reformulated by politicising issues to be operational and debatable in political arena. The active process of politicking and politicising during the government programme negotiations is often neglected, and the programme is studied as a neutral steering document. Policy has a teleological connotation, an orientation as a route map of activities towards a selected, admirable possible future [32]. Paradoxically, the government programme as a policy is the
mechanism to enable change, but then again, it is also a way of creating continuity in relation to prior government programmes and to parliamentarian decision making.

3. Government programme in strategic and political contexts

The current Finnish government was appointed at the end of May 2015, and the government programme was published at the same time. The government comprises three parties, as follows: the Centre Party (Suomen keskusta, established in 1906), the Conservative Party (Kansallinen Kokoomus, established in 1918) and the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, established in 1995). Traditionally, the Centre Party has enjoyed support from rural areas. The Conservative Party gains support from the major cities, the professionals and the well-off. The Finns Party is a populist party, which typically gathers support from those with middle-income and people with lower educational attainment. The Finnish political system contains a strong corporatist element, which emphasises the need for negotiations with social partners as witnessed in other Nordic countries [33].

The political nexus lies in the cabinet and the ministries as the agencies responsible for administrative implementation. In the 1990s, ministries and central agencies shared responsibilities in the division of labour within the central government, but the administrative changes meant that the ministries and the ministers became the primary operators in the formation of the government agenda. The problem with this development was that it weakened the role of the cabinet as the collegial decision-making body steering the ministries. Strengthening of the cabinet has been sought in a number of reform projects in allocating the workforce, research funds and expert knowledge for the cabinet’s use. Many of these reform projects are related to the preparation of the government programme.

Since its independence in 1917, Finland has been under 73 governments. Until the 1980s, the presidential political system and the political culture produced short-term governments, typically serving only for a year or two. Beginning from the 1980s, the parliamentarian tradition of the Finnish political system gained strength, and the terms of governments were conformed to the terms of parliaments. In the interim, the status of the prime minister and the role of the parliament became stronger in the reform of the Finnish constitution in 1999, at the expense of the president, who was left with handling foreign relations (excluding the European Union [EU]) and mostly ceremonial duties in internal (and EU) politics.

The programmes of the early post-independence governments were published in newspapers, and they were only a few pages long, consisting of political declarations with varying levels of political visions or details of action. In the late 1980s, the government programme for a four-year term (1983 –1987) was still only a few pages long, a document indicating the main political aims in the major political sectors. From the 1990s onwards, the programmes gained length, term by term, with the previous government’s programme being 79 pages, containing a detailed action plan for the ministries. In the multiparty setting, the government programme is inherently a compromise among the parties representing different constituencies and political ideologies. The government document has become more binding in the sense that new policies cannot be taken up in the government agenda if they are not already included in it. In this regard, the government programme serves as an instrument to restrict the tendency to overspend common resources in multiparty governments [34]. In the multiparty setting, ministers from different parties have an incentive to increase their own budgets to gain political credit for their own party although this easily leads to an excessive spending pattern, which is not desired by the government coalition as a whole [35]. Needless to say, the binding nature of the programme makes it very difficult to tackle any sudden political change.

The development of the government programme from the cabinet’s declaration to the administrative–political agenda can be called “organic”. The document and the process are regulated only with a few general guiding principles. According to the Finnish constitution, “[t]he
Government shall without delay submit its program to the Parliament in the form of a statement” (Section 62).

In the Prime Minister’s Office, the development of the government programme has been perceived as a challenge for the strategic management of the Finnish central government. According to the reform proposals, the government programme should comprise a short list of the three to five most important policy goals of the new government. In addition to the main aims, the government should, in close collaboration with the ministries, provide a Government Action Plan with a more detailed description of the policy goals and the resources used to achieve these goals. This new document should combine the current, two distinct processes of setting the political agenda and the budget framework. The timeframe for the new government programme is longer than before. The more detailed action plan was prepared after the government programme by gathering expert knowledge to evaluate changes in the environment and to set targets in a more informed manner.

The current Finnish government reached an agreement on the government programme at the end of May 2015. It was described as strategic by following the structure of a typical strategy document in identifying strengths (e.g., strong and functional democracy, capacity to invent), weaknesses (e.g., rigid structures and bureaucracy), opportunities (e.g., agile country, free trade) and threats (e.g., international security, lack of European competitiveness). It contains long-term (10-year) goals, as well as goals to be attained during the electoral term. The length of the document is 34 pages, and it includes a 36-page appendix.

The current government programme contains five key strategic areas, as follows: 1) strengthening employment and competitiveness, 2) renewing knowledge and education, 3) improving health and well-being, 4) speeding up biotechnology and "cleantech" solutions and 5) reforming procedures through digitalisation, experimentation and deregulation. The government programme also includes social and health reform, the aim to find a solution (with social partners) to increase the Finnish economy’s competitiveness by 5% (social contract, later called competitiveness contract), decreasing the responsibilities of local governments, as well as reorganising regional authorities. Most of these areas have a 10-year target, a target for the electoral term, ideas about the measurement of the targets, as well as the identification of spearhead programmes for the specific strategy areas. The measurement of the targets is very limited; in many cases, it is stated that the indicators for the targets will be developed later.

These goals are operationalised in 27 strategic priority projects, which are further divided into a number of subtasks. Additionally, the government programme includes guidelines for financial and fiscal policies; structural reforms; EU policy; foreign, security and defence policies; and justice, internal and immigration policies.

3.1 Strategy as a plan

The strategy discussion emphasises the foresight acquired through planning. In the public sphere, the analytical policy approach also illustrates the planning tradition of trying to divide government actions into tangible areas and specific programmes, such as industrial, economic and social policies.

In steering the central government, the planning, programming and budgeting ideas developed in the US in the 1960s gained some interest in other developed countries as well [36]. In the Finnish context, the rigidity and slowness of the central planning did not provide a good platform to develop goals for changing circumstances, which included governments serving less than their electoral terms. In a somewhat similar vein, the Finnish government employed policy programmes aimed at reaching broader than ministerial targets, such as employment, entrepreneurship, knowledge society and participation of citizens in the 2000s, but the lack of funding for these programmes and the coordinating problems with the budget cycle hindered their successful implementation [37].

The current government programme aims to balance the € 10-billion long-term deficit of public finances by the 2030s. The measures to attain these goals include employment and economic growth (€ 1.5 billion), cutbacks and structural changes (€ 4.5 billion), social and health reform and efficiency increase (€ 3 billion) and reduction of local government responsibilities (€1 billion). The stated 10-
year targets, such as the beneficial characteristic of paid labour in contrast to social benefits, the 
motivation for continuous learning and balancing of public expenditures are brave and worthwhile 
targets, but the measurement problems are obvious. Long-term targets are problematic since no one 
can guarantee that these will remain on the agenda of subsequent governments.

The social and health reform is a prime example of the appearance and problems of planning. 
The document contains three steps, consisting of, the integration of social and health services, the 
unification of financing these services and the increased options for choice and role for private sector 
in the production of public services. There is a widespread agreement on the need for change, but 
discrepant stakeholder interests cannot easily be combined. The actual reform has been under 
preparation by two previous governments, but they have been unable to solve the political problems 
included in it. The main controversy deals with the local government authority and government 
intervention. Local governments are responsible for social and health services, but the number of 
local governments (317) and their unequal sizes make the system extremely decentralised. Previous 
attempts to amalgamate local governments in a voluntary fashion have been very slow. Direct 
government intervention to force local governments to form larger units or the intervention to 
reorganise social and health services has encountered local government opposition, backed by the 
strong constitutional guarantee of local government autonomy. The current government aims to 
reduce the number of social and health providers to no more than 19 units, which would include 
democratically elected councils for the units.

In terms of planning, the government programme has a sharp discrepancy between the past 
and the future. In its strategy document, the government takes a strong stance towards the distant 
future, many times until the 2030s, but there is very little description of the past efforts of previous 
governments or the history of Finnish society. Of course, this is how standard strategy documents 
are written, but in the political sphere, it gives a clear signal for change and against continuity with 
the past.

From the policy perspective, strategy as a plan neglects the politicking and politicising aspects 
within the government. Planning is a rational process, providing policy as an outcome that can be 
achieved without politicising and politicking. For the last few terms, the ministries have done a lot of 
planning prior to the programme negotiations. During the preparation of the current government 
programme, the ministries faced a new situation in which their plans were not taken as starting 
points, and the negotiations had a new political atmosphere where the politicians were the main 
players in strategy formulation. These create a paradox in a corporatist society such as Finland; when 
planning is made more political (by the government coalition), the other stakeholders of society (such 
as labour market parties) are excluded from the discussion. Thus, in a sense, the politically managed 
planning process is more apolitical (managerial) than the bureaucratic policy formulation and 
planning.

3.2 Strategy as a home

Strategy relates to the goals of the organisations. Strategies offer hope for a better future when 
all hope is abandoned. Therefore, strategies enable survival under the conditions in which the future 
seems bleak. The following extract illustrates this point:

The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent a 
reconnaissance unit into the icy wilderness. It began to snow immediately, snowed for 
two days and the unit did not return. The lieutenant suffered, fearing that he [had] sent 
his own people to death, but on the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? 
How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited 
for the end. Then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched 
camp, lasted the snowstorm, and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And 
here we are. The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. He 
discovered to his astonishment that it was not a map of the Alps, but a map of the 
Pyrenees [38] (p. 54).
The lesson of the above-mentioned excerpt is that in many cases, the power of strategy cannot be found in its accuracy or level of detail but in its ability to give guidance and comfort in ambiguous situations. Moreover, the genuine belief in the strategy enables the concentration of effort even if the belief eventually proves to be faulty.

For the managers, strategies provide clarity in confronting ambiguous environments. In this sense, strategy itself is a human-made artefact created for the psychological security of the managers. Strategy serves as a boundary object for the top management to handle the fundamentally unpredictable nature of the environment. Strategy is a manager’s cuddly toy or teddy bear, but even false security could be better than confronting insecurity in its full force. The same applies to the audiences of the top decision makers. Charismatic leaders are able to convey the message of purpose, security and positive future prospects to their followers [39].

Strategy as a home relates to the limitations of the human information-processing ability [40]. Strategy enables us to identify our basic needs in a simplified form. In this sense, strategy comes close to one of the ideals of theory building as it offers insights into the basic features of our environment without being entangled in the minute details of our existence. In democratic political systems, decision makers working under the mandate of their constituencies and the appointed officials bring about the basic ingredients of the home where we feel comfortable to live.

The government programme gives some hope for a brighter future. The title of the document is “The solutions of Finland”, and the vision of the strategy is “Finland 2025—build together”. In the situational analysis, Finland is described as safe, innovative and economically sustainable and as part of Europe. Commentators have been quick to learn the strategy language in which the lack of appearance means the lack of attention. There has been the critique that equality and solidarity are not espoused by the government because they are not stated as goals in the government programme. It is also noteworthy that “welfare society” appears as an area of strength but not as a subject to be developed. Within the government programme, the aspect of the comfort and security of home comes from different sources other than the advancement of welfare society as such. The sacrifices made by the citizens, through cutbacks and tax increases, guarantee the continuity of the existing well-being and relative prosperity in the future. The security of home itself appears in the aims to anticipate and solve external and internal security threats. The worsening of the international security situation and the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis emphasise the importance of the EU as a provider of security, together with other international organisations. The United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe are perceived as forming the backbone of international cooperation in international security.

From the political perspective, home represents an apolitical polity, a space that is stable, safe and secure. Within its limits, all questions can be solved in an appropriate manner, and political issues are raised in the agenda as part of the system and its decision-making machinery. Thus, the people can trust that their common issues are managed by professional Members of Parliament, ministers and public administration. In the area of policy, the government programme states that Finland is and will be a caring society based on trust and respect, but contrary to this general statement, most of the numerical data of the document indicates a sharp decrease in the most important areas of public spending, such as education or social and health services.

Here, the government programme’s strategic emphasis has created a situation in which the government and especially the prime minister personally hold a position of trust in securing the polity. This is a new situation in Finland, where the public has laid its trust in the law, bureaucracy and the public as an entity. This is paradoxical in the multiparty system in which the majority coalition is the rule, in the sense that the current prime minister emphasises his role as the CEO of Finland, not as the party leader or the board chair. The strategic approach in the government programme formulation has shifted politicising and politicking from the planning and formulation phase to the implementation phase, while the government programme formulation has become a more clandestine process.
3.3 Strategy as a game

It is often the case that strategy is depicted with the game metaphor. In a game, it is possible to anticipate the opponent’s moves, and the basic ingredient of the game is that an opponent exists. The game of chess serves to illustrate this point. The pieces have a limited but considerable number of possibilities of movement on the board, and the full command of the game requires a substantial understanding of the sequence of different moves. The galloping of the horse and the movement of the bishop are fairly uncomplicated, whereas *en passant* and the castling are more complicated procedures. The struggles among political parties in advancing the interests of their respective constituencies and the rivalries among agencies regarding the limited budget appropriations are illustrations of gaming in the public context [41]. In games, there are winners and losers. The advancement of a contender’s own position in the political combat is a zero-sum game in which the strong players conquer and the weak ones surrender. A player’s cunning may take many forms. Sometimes, hiding one’s own goals and the ability to divide the opposing forces can be instrumental in reaching the intended future.

The game metaphor is a relevant part of the intercourse between strategic and political analyses. The language of strategy in the discipline of politics relates to the opportunistic calculating behaviour of the political actors as opposed to the advancement of the ideologies of the political movements. In this sense, strategy is an apolitical aspect of politics. On the other hand, the foundation of strategic thinking in the management of business corporations is in itself a penetration of economic thought into the business of politics.

Politics and administration include a pure contest for power, but the logic of the game contains rules that produce decent behaviour. Following the institutional argument, the rule-bound behaviour created by political institutions simplifies and offers continuity in political decision making [42]. In the globalised world, the boards in the game are undergoing changes, and the alliances do not conform to the traditional lines of geographic spheres. In other words, new and unanticipated alliances might offer joint and mutual gains for the parties involved. Most importantly, alliances and cooperation may well produce overall stability and order even though the environment is more exposed to change.

The game frame is an integral part of the Finnish government programme as it contains conditional austerity measures worth 1.5 billion euros in case the competitiveness contract with the social partners (employer and employee peak organisations) would not have been realised. The contract’s main aim was to improve the country’s competitiveness by reducing the labour cost by 5%. In case of failure, the conditional austerity measures included both cutbacks (in pension and unemployment benefits and child benefits) and tax increases (income tax increase and the reduction of the tax relief on housing loans). In the spirit of the game, the government programme sets the stakes for the process. The complication in terms of the game metaphor is that the cutbacks and the tax increases targeted the population at large, whereas the social partners deal primarily with the issues related to those in the workforce [43]. In such setting, employees faced a certain deterioration of their working conditions in terms of salary or work hours (due to the agreement with the government), but the cost of the conditional austerity measures were spread across the larger population. Consequently, the incentives to reach an agreement with the employers and the government were not particularly strong. Nonetheless, the centralised agreement with labour market partners was reached in the summer of 2016.

From the perspective of politics, the game brings action to the government programme. The game is all about politicking and politicising. The problem with the metaphor is that by using it, the “meta game” might be easily lost. In politics, the rules, teams and arena comprising the polity can be altered. Politicising the game and not just moving but also creating new goalposts are important parts of the programme. The developments in the competitiveness contract have altered the way that the government deals with its social partners. It involves not only negotiation but also the use of the government’s sovereign power in compelling constituencies to comply with the government goals.

3. Discussion
It is evident that the government programme has many simultaneous functions, making it easy to be viewed through the strategy metaphors consisting of a plan, a home and a game. The government programme aims to provide the directions and the predictability about the prosperous future of the nation (plan). Tentatively, the situation of slow economic growth, combined with government cutbacks, is not the most viable occasion for planning, which in essence aims at bringing about some bright future conditions rather than adapting to a seemingly deteriorating environment. The government programme aims to secure the well-being and safety of the citizens (home) by opposing external threats or putting forward domestic improvements, but it is also a device to set the game. By doing so, it aims to provide the rules of the game (i.e., the possible moves and the number of players) and to set the priorities for a successful game.

The theoretical shortcomings of the strategy as a plan are already well documented [14]. Nonetheless, the separation of the design from the implementation of the strategy makes perfect sense in the political–administrative system. It is for the politicians to formulate the overall guidelines for the future, which are then implemented in practice by the civil servants. The problem with the separation of politics from administration is partly temporal and partly relational. First, the four-year government term is very short to incorporate many strategic stages, which means that there is a very limited time frame for experimenting with and assessing the benefits of feasible options. Second, the separation of the design from the implementation builds a barrier between politicians and bureaucrats. The programme can be communicated to civil servants only after its completion, which requires extensive interaction between politicians and bureaucrats. In the case at hand, the evident hurdle for lively social intercourse was the change in the external environment, which turned away the politicians’ attention from the implementation of the programme. In a more speculative tone, the separation of the stages might in itself be a source of hindrance to the successful implementation as those responsible for the concrete actions have been unable to assess the feasibility of the formulated goals.

The basic ingredients of strategy as a home include security and comfort. The political controversies related to the extensive social and health reform have raised concerns about the government’s ability to make decisions. The situation is worsened by the fact that a coalition government is based on the mutual adjustment of parties rather than on the charismatic leadership of any particular person. As the social and health reform has not been implemented yet, the benefits for the citizens’ well-being remain to be seen. The main aspect of strategy as a home has appeared in opposing external threats. The seminal example has been the handling of the refugee crisis confronting European countries due to the unrest in the Middle East. First, the government has been able to find accommodations for the immigrants, without creating too much domestic turmoil. Second, the combined action of European countries has eased the fear of the further influx of immigrants.

The game metaphor suits best the stereotypical image of politics as manoeuvring among different and often mutually conflicting interests. Moreover, an important aspect of the game is that there are winners and losers. The most obvious case of gaming has been the government-induced negotiations with labour market partners on the social or competitiveness contract. The carrot-and-stick strategy adopted by the government, as laid down in the government programme, has proven efficient in reaching an agreement. The resulting labour market contract has been detrimental for employees and has shifted some of the financial burden from employers to employees. The government’s role is to buffer some of the costs shouldered by the employees through tax reliefs and the withdrawal of further cuts in the government budget. The social contract is definitely a victory for the government and a concrete example of the practical implementation of the government programme.

Table 1. Strategy and policy in the government programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Possibly clandestine organising and catering to the needs of multiple stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formulation/implementation</td>
<td>Strategic/operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Provides long-term targets and commitments but neglects prior plans and measurement. In political language, it is tightly connected to administration (bureaucracy) and policy. Main audience: administration. Strategic programme formulation has made the process more government driven and excluded many corporatist stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Provides an impression that by sacrificing our welfare home, we can maintain it. In political language, it is tightly connected to polity, administration and statesmanship. Main audience: citizens. The strategic approach has emphasised the prime minister’s role as a safeguard of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>Provides a proposition to change the rules of the game and gives new rules that are non-negotiable. In political language, it is tightly connected to party politics and the reformulation of polity and policy. Main audience: rivals and stakeholders. The strategic approach has influenced the playground of the game and has made informal negotiations and the implementation phase more important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government programme as a strategic policy (context, telos and process)</td>
<td>Clandestine strategic planning paradoxically increases the role of party politics and thus the elections and the role of (non-corporatist) stakeholders in implementation. Meanwhile, it decreases the careful corporatist planning and legalistic work of civil servants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1, we have compared the strategy and the policy concepts in the context of the government programme through the metaphors. The basic definitions of strategy and policy are surprisingly similar in everyday language. One of the main differences seems the openness of the process. In both strategy and policy literature, formulation and implementation are separated from each other; likewise, this separation is questioned and criticised for being too simplistic ([14],[44]). In both policy and strategy literature, the audiences are many, and the ways that they are conceptualised are different (stakeholders vs. constituencies). If we take the metaphoric approach to the government programme as a strategy, we can perceive that it functions as a plan, a home and a game. These metaphors are also connected to different functions of the state. Strategy is a policy plan for overcoming the challenges and is aimed for the administrators implementing the strategy. It is a home that provides safety and continuity of hope for citizens in the midst of turbulent times. Additionally, it is a playground for parties and corporations to set up games. It seems that the wording of the government programme also has an impact on the process, which can be observed in the perceptions on the context, the telos and the process of the government programme. The end outcome of the strategic efforts with the government programme cannot be estimated at present because the four-year government cycle is currently only halfway through. However, it seems that the strategic government programme is shifting the Finnish legalist–corporatist society to a more parliamentarian–managerial direction, whatever it may mean in the future.

4. Materials and Methods
This paper is based on publicly available and accessible policy documents. The documents are analysed in the tradition of a qualitative content analysis. However, the paper’s main emphasis is on illustrating the use of the concept of “strategy” and its usage through metaphors in the highly politicised policy formulation process of the Finnish government.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

References


