

1 Article

2 Government Programme as A Strategy – Finnish 3 Experience

4 Jan-Erik Johanson ^{1,*}, Elias Pekkola ¹, Päivi Husman ²

5 ¹ School of Management; University of Tampere, 33140 Tampere, Finland; elias.pekkola@uta.fi

6 ² Finnish Institute of Occupational Health; PB 40, 00251 Helsinki, Finland; paivi.husman@ttl.fi

7 * Correspondence: jan-erik.johanson@uta.fi; Tel.: +358 50 318 5960

8 **Abstract:** This article uses strategy metaphors consisting of a plan, a home and a game to study the
9 government programme formation in Finland. The strategy approach both contradicts and
10 complements the traditional political science approach to government formation. The government
11 programme formation has been strategic in the sense of separating the formulation and
12 implementation parts of the strategy formation according to the principles of planning ideas. The
13 adopted austerity policy provides a meagre contribution to the expansion of services or the increase
14 in government spending. Consequently, the home metaphor in the government programme
15 appears in the distant future and in combating external threats. The game metaphor is apparent in
16 the goal of making contracts with social partners. The vocabulary change from politics to strategy
17 alters the government programme's position in terms of catering to the needs of civil servants,
18 citizens and stakeholders. The strategy perspective might be instrumental in shifting from an open
19 democratic debate to a closed and secretive policy formation.

20 **Keywords:** strategy; government; policy; government programme

21

22 1. Introduction

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

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

43 In Section 2, the analysis begins with the discussion of the strategic and the political framing of
44 the government programme. In Section 3, the empirical analysis deals with the application of strategic
45 management and political thought in the formation of the Finnish government programme. Section

46 4 draws together the different perspectives from strategic management and political science as
47 applied to the changing nature of the government programme.

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

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

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

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

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

- 86 1) Contextual. The organisational and resource environment is fundamentally different (e.g.,
87 legally, ontologically or financially) in the public and the private sectors. This would mean
88 that in the public sector, there are no strategies (in the same sense as in the private sector)
89 but policies, called strategies. If we take this as a starting point, we end up with the
90 discussion on the differences in public and private realms and management (see [22]).
- 91 2) Teleological. We can distinguish the strategy from the policy process based on the aimed
92 outcome. Consequently, all future-oriented processes aiming for (regardless of the wording
93 and the techniques) the public good are policies, and future-oriented processes aiming for
94 profit are strategies. This would mean that the public sector might have strategies but only
95 in publicly owned companies and other public agencies with a profit motive. (This can be
96 connected to the discussions on public value [23] and values [24].

- 97 3) Processual. We can distinguish the strategy from policy process by assuming that the
98 process itself is somehow different (see [25] pp. 1–28). Here, we might have two different
99 positions:
- 100 a. Rhetoric. We can assume that if the strategy language is used, we can find that
101 strategies (i.e., what are called strategies) should be approached as such regardless
102 of the sector.
 - 103 b. Realistic. We can assume that if the future-oriented process is operated with
104 techniques, tools and steps peculiar to the public (regulatory) process, it is a
105 strategy.

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

111
112 Politics is thus the special province of the statesman, administration of the technical
113 official. "Policy does nothing without the aid of administration"; but administration is
114 not therefore politics. [...] [T]his discrimination between administration and politics is
115 now, happily, too obvious to need further discussion [26, 210-211].

116
117 However, if we take a more continental approach, which regards public administration as part
118 of the public entity or the state, we are doomed to this discussion (see [27]). As Pierre expresses it
119 ([28], cited in [29, 143]):

120
121 [O]n the other hand we see policy-makers using administrative reform to displace
122 accountability from public policy; on the other hand we see the very same policy-makers
123 trying to increase their control over bureaucracy. Whilst this appears to be two
124 inconsistent developments, they may in fact reflect a general desire among elected
125 politicians to increase their influence over bureaucracy while at the same time avoiding
126 responsibility for the actions of the bureaucrats.

127
128 This leads us to another interesting discussion on the differences between policy and polity.
129 Polity is loosely defined in political science. For instance, according to the definition in Andrew
130 Heywood's prominent textbook *Politics* [30], "polity is a system of social organisation centred on the
131 machinery of government" (p. 5), while the policy concept is narrowly defined as an "output of
132 politics" (p. 400). However, the connection between policy and polity is crucial for the discussion on
133 public strategy because strategy incorporates aspects of both these concepts. Especially when the
134 government programme is taken as an example, which is in the core of polity, it is as political as a
135 document can be and still provides a direction for the administration, is partly prepared by the
136 administration, is used to limit the administration's power and is called strategic.

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

143 Polity is actively shaped and reformulated by politicising issues to be operational and debatable
144 in political arena. The active process of politicking and politicising during the government
145 programme negotiations is often neglected, and the programme is studied as a neutral steering
146 document. Policy has a teleological connotation, an orientation as a route map of activities towards a
147 selected, admirable possible future [32]. Paradoxically, the government programme as a policy is the

148 mechanism to enable change, but then again, it is also a way of creating continuity in relation to prior
149 government programmes and to parliamentarian decision making.
150

151 **3. Government programme in strategic and political contexts**

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

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

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

178 The programmes of the early post-independence governments were published in newspapers,
179 and they were only a few pages long, consisting of political declarations with varying levels of
180 political visions or details of action. In the late 1980s, the government programme for a four-year term
181 (1983 –1987) was still only a few pages long, a document indicating the main political aims in the
182 major political sectors. From the 1990s onwards, the programmes gained length, term by term, with
183 the previous government's programme being 79 pages, containing a detailed action plan for the
184 ministries. In the multiparty setting, the government programme is inherently a compromise among
185 the parties representing different constituencies and political ideologies. The government document
186 has become more binding in the sense that new policies cannot be taken up in the government agenda
187 if they are not already included in it. In this regard, the government programme serves as an
188 instrument to restrict the tendency to overspend common resources in multiparty governments [34].
189 In the multiparty setting, ministers from different parties have an incentive to increase their own
190 budgets to gain political credit for their own party although this easily leads to an excessive spending
191 pattern, which is not desired by the government coalition as a whole [35]. Needless to say, the binding
192 nature of the programme makes it very difficult to tackle any sudden political change.

193 The development of the government programme from the cabinet's declaration to the
194 administrative–political agenda can be called “organic”. The document and the process are regulated
195 only with a few general guiding principles. According to the Finnish constitution, “the groups
196 represented in the Parliament negotiate on the political program and composition of the Government
197 before the Prime Minister is elected” (Section 61). When the government has been formed, “[t]he

198 Government shall without delay submit its program to the Parliament in the form of a statement”
199 (Section 62).

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

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

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

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

232 3.1 Strategy as a plan

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

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

245 The current government programme aims to balance the € 10-billion long-term deficit of public
246 finances by the 2030s. The measures to attain these goals include employment and economic growth
247 (€ 1.5 billion), cutbacks and structural changes (€ 4.5 billion), social and health reform and efficiency
248 increase (€ 3 billion) and reduction of local government responsibilities (€1 billion). The stated 10-

249 year targets, such as the beneficial characteristic of paid labour in contrast to social benefits, the
250 motivation for continuous learning and balancing of public expenditures are brave and worthwhile
251 targets, but the measurement problems are obvious. Long-term targets are problematic since no one
252 can guarantee that these will remain on the agenda of subsequent governments.

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

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

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

285 3.2 Strategy as a home

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

289
290 The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent a
291 reconnaissance unit into the icy wilderness. It began to snow immediately, snowed for
292 two days and the unit did not return. The lieutenant suffered, fearing that he [had] sent
293 his own people to death, but on the third day the unit came back. Where had they been?
294 How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited
295 for the end. Then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched
296 camp, lasted the snowstorm, and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And
297 here we are. The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. He
298 discovered to his astonishment that it was not a map of the Alps, but a map of the
299 Pyrenees [38] (p. 54).

300

301 The lesson of the above-mentioned excerpt is that in many cases, the power of strategy cannot be
302 found in its accuracy or level of detail but in its ability to give guidance and comfort in ambiguous
303 situations. Moreover, the genuine belief in the strategy enables the concentration of effort even if the
304 belief eventually proves to be faulty.

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

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

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

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

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

351 3.3 Strategy as a game

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

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

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

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

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

401 3. Discussion

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

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

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

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

449

450 **Table 1.** Strategy and policy in the government programme.

| | Strategy | Policy |
|--|----------|--------|
|--|----------|--------|

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Definition | Possibly clandestine organising and catering to the needs of multiple stakeholders | Mostly open organising and catering to the needs of multiple constituencies |
| Formulation/implementation | Strategic/operational | Political/administrative |
| Plan | 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. | |
| Home | 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. | |
| Game | 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. | |
| Government programme as a strategic policy (context, telos and process) | 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. | |

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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.

471

4. Materials and Methods

472 This paper is based on publicly available and accessible policy documents. The documents are
 473 analysed in the tradition of a qualitative content analysis. However, the paper's main emphasis is on
 474 illustrating the use of the concept of "strategy" and its usage through metaphors in the highly
 475 politicised policy formulation process of the Finnish government.

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